

THE REAL PRESENCE - MIRACLE OF MIRACLES

'And Jesus coming, spoke to them, saying: All power is given to me in heaven and in earth. Going, therefore, teach ye all nations; baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.' (Matthew 28:18-20)

Our Lord, Jesus Christ, is pre-eminently with us, daily, to be received personally, in the Blessed Sacrament; body, blood, soul and divinity under either kind alone - as the Catechism teaches us. From time to time doubts have been cast on the nature of this Great Gift, such as those of Berengarius (999-1089) whose philosophising led him into a controversy about the nature of the Real Presence in the Blessed Eucharist. His views were rejected and condemned repeatedly by different Councils of the Church. There are so many - mostly unspoken - opinions on the subject today that it would be difficult to single out one particular heresy from one particular quarter to dignify it with a high sounding name. However, in God's wonderful Providence, the appearance and authentication of many Eucharistic Miracles down through the centuries has brought people back to a realisation of the Truth of the matter.

'An evil and adulterous generation seeketh a sign...' (Matthew 12:39). In saying this, Jesus seemed to imply that such a generation would not even recognise any such sign, but He continued to heal the sick, raise the dead, and drive out devils; and so has He continued to renew our faith in His teaching, especially when we have been particularly faithless. St. Peter was able to write, *'For we have not by following artificial fables, made known to you the power and presence of our Lord Jesus Christ; but we were eyewitnesses of His greatness.'* (2 Peter 1:16) He was referring to being present at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-7). Jesus did not expect even Peter and his companions to have completely blind faith and made a point of showing Himself to them in His glorified state so that they could then tell us about it from their own personal knowledge. Of course, we are free to disbelieve them if we choose but that would be a denial of Divine Revelation; it would suggest that they are not telling the Truth and so the rest of what they tell us would be suspect. Jesus did not have to show Himself to His disciples after the Resurrection but He did so, and made a point of appearing as normal as possible, not in His glorified state, even though He would pass through walls and appear and disappear at will. In doing so, He showed His complete mastery over nature and yet preferred to identify Himself as closely as possible with our humble state. His Presence in the Holy Eucharist is much humbler yet. To aid our Faith in this Great Gift, there follows a summary of some of the Eucharistic Miracles which have been authenticated by the Church and which have official shrines - most of which are complete with evidence of the original miracle.

Lanciano, Italy: In the 8th century a monk doubted the Real Presence during the Consecration; the bread was transformed into a section of the human heart and the wine into human blood of the same type (AB) as the heart tissue, which has been attested scientifically as recently as 1970.

Santarem, Portugal (near Fatima): In 1225 a woman took a Host for the purpose of sorcery, It bled in her handkerchief on the way home, she hid It but a great light encompassed the hiding place; It was rescued by a priest and placed in a waxed container in the tabernacle but the next day the container was found broken into a thousand pieces and, in its place, a crystal glass containing the Blood from the Host. This Blood has remained liquid to this day.

Daroca, Spain: In 1239 Hosts consecrated during Mass just before a battle against the Moors were buried, to protect them, during the battle; afterwards, when retrieved, They were found to have bled and stained the corporal in which They had been wrapped. The corporal was used as a banner in the renewed fighting and the Moors were routed. A quarrel about where the corporal should be kept was settled by a mule, captured from the Moors, which, after travelling 200 miles in 12 days followed by the interested parties, eventually entered Daroca and fainted in front of the hospital of St. Mark. The corporal is still housed there, in a church specially built for it. (*n.b. A 'corporal' is a square piece of blessed linen on which the Host is placed*)

Bolsena and Orvieto, Italy (about 70 miles north of Rome): In 1263 a pilgrim priest, Peter of Prague, coming to Rome to resolve his doubts about Transubstantiation, was saying Mass in the shrine of Santa Christina, Bolsena; the Host turned into flesh and started to bleed, the drops falling on the corporal. At a loss what to do, he wrapped the Host in the corporal and left it on the altar; blood from the Host spilled onto the floor. Pope Urban IV was in Orvieto, a short distance away, and Peter of Prague went to him. The Pope sent the Bishop to Bolsena to check the story but decided he couldn't wait and went there himself; the entire population of Orvieto went with him and they met the Bishop returning in procession with the Host. The miracle was immediately accepted and proclaimed and the Pope established the feast of Corpus Christi as a result of this one year later. The corporal is housed in Orvieto Cathedral and the blood-stained stones are housed in a special Chapel in Bolsena.

Offida, Italy (near Lanciano): In 1273 another case of a Host taken for the purposes of sorcery; Ricciarella Stasio took the Host home and tried to reduce it to ashes in a pot but the Host turned into flesh and started bleeding. The woman panicked and filled the pot with wax and earth, wrapped it in a large cloth and buried it under a dung-heap in the stable where it stayed for seven years. During that time Ricciarella suffered great torment of conscience which eventually forced her to confess her great sin to a friar in Lanciano. The friar returned home with her and dug up the pot containing the Host and discovered the Bleeding Host to be completely incorrupt. It has remained in that state ever since, in its shrine in Offida.

Cebrero, Northern Spain: In the year 1300 there was a priest who had lost his faith in the Real Presence - and most other things. He was saying a lonely Mass one cold and windy morning and had just reached the Consecration when the door blew open and a faithful peasant, Juan Santin, came in and fell to his knees at the sight of the raised Host; the bread turned into flesh and the wine into Blood. They were preserved on the original paten and in the original chalice for nearly 200 years until Queen Isabella of Aragon had crystal vessels made for them. They remain incorrupt and they are venerated on special feast days to this day.

Cascia, Umbria, Italy (the home of St. Rita): In 1330, yet again, the account of a priest who had lost his respect for the Blessed Sacrament. He was called out to minister to the sick, and he placed the Host between the pages of his breviary. On arriving at the bedside, he opened his breviary and found, instead of the Host, round bloodstains on the pages where it had rested. The priest was suitably moved and went directly to confess to Blessed Simone Fiduti who absolved him and took the blood-stained pages from him. They are preserved and venerated, one in the Church of St. Rita in Cascia, the other in Perugia.

Walldurn, Germany (between Frankfurt and Würzburg): Also in 1330, an elderly priest, Father Heinrich Otto, spilt the consecrated chalice during Mass and the Precious Blood fell on the corporal; it immediately changed in appearance from wine to blood and formed the shape of Christ Crucified surrounded by eleven heads of Christ crowned with thorns. Conscience-stricken, he hid the corporal until, on his death-bed, he confessed the whole matter to a fellow priest who gathered several other priests together to retrieve it and expose it for veneration. A church was built to house this miracle in Walldurn where it is available for veneration, the images dulled somewhat but still clearly visible.

Blanot, France (Cote D'Or): On Easter Morning 1331 during the distribution of Holy Communion by Father Hugo de Baulmes, one of the communicants nearly dropped the Host and bit on it to prevent it from falling. A small piece broke off and fell on the pall which was held by the server, Thomas Caillot. After Communion, Thomas brought the priest's attention to the fragment and he went to consume it; but it turned into a drop of blood, standing up proud on the surface of the cloth. The priest went immediately to the sacristy to wash it off but failed to move it. He returned to the altar and held it up before the congregation, exclaiming: *'Good people, you can believe it. This is truly the Blood of Our Lord, Jesus Christ. Notwithstanding my having given it a good washing and scrubbing, there is no way of separating it from the pall'*. It has been housed in a crystal reliquary and remains in good condition to this day.

Bologna, Italy: In 1333, Blessed Imelda Lambertini, Protectress of First Communicants, yearned to receive her First Communion but had to wait until she was 12 years old. On the feast of the Ascension, after Mass in the convent where she was staying, she remained in prayer after the others had left. Some of the nuns returned to call her to come with them, when they were astonished to see a bright, white Host above her head. They called a priest who brought a paten and held it in front of Imelda; the Host descended onto the paten and the priest, taking the broad hint, administered First Holy Communion to Imelda. She swooned away in ecstasy and died the same day, 12th May 1333, aged 11. Her incorrupt body is venerated in the church of San Sigismondo, near the university.

Amsterdam, Holland: In 1345, a fisherman on his death-bed was given Holy Communion; after the priest had left, he was shaken by a bad fit of coughing and brought up the Host intact. His wife, in a panic, picked It up and threw It into the fire. She slept badly that night and in the morning raked through the dying embers and found the Host unscathed, still gleaming white. She retrieved It, folded It in a cloth and placed It in a chest. She then called the priest, who took It back and placed It in the tabernacle, intending to keep the matter quiet to prevent embarrassment to the wife. The next morning, the wife opened her chest to discover the Host had returned there. When she told the priest, he realised that Our Lord did not agree with him and that the miracle should be made public; the whole congregation went in procession to collect the Host.

A few months later, the Bishop of Utrecht authenticated this miracle and the fisherman's house was converted into a chapel to house the Host. In 1452, Amsterdam was engulfed by fire and the chapel burned to the ground but the monstrance containing the Host, complete with its silk veil, was found unharmed in the ashes and a new chapel was built. Since then, It has passed through all the upheavals of the Reformation and wars and is still venerated by the faithful.

Macerata, Italy (20 miles from Loreto): In 1356 a priest had scruples about the Real Presence in the fragments of the Host; as he said Mass one morning, he broke the Host and Blood poured into the chalice; his hand shook with amazement and the Blood fell on the corporal and alter cloth. He went immediately to the Bishop who investigated and authenticated the miracle; the corporal is preserved in the Cathedral of Macerata and the Bloodstains are still discernable.

Bois Seigneur Isaac, Iltre, Belgium (15 miles south of Brussels): In the year 1405 a young worldly nobleman, John du Bois, had several visions of Our Lord, beaten and wounded, asking for treatment of His wounds - and reparation. At about the same time, the local parish priest, Father Peter Ost, had a locution which instructed him to go to the chapel on the estate of Bois Seigneur Isaac and celebrate the Mass of the Holy Cross. Amongst the congregation John du Bois was virtually a stranger; he had rarely graced their presence before. At the Offertory the priest was embarrassed to find a piece of the large Host folded into the corporal and thought he must have dropped It during the previous Mass. He tried to pick It up but found It was stuck fast to the corporal; as he attempted to prise It off the cloth, It began to ooze Blood from around Its edges. The priest was suitably astonished but even more so when John du Bois rushed up and reassured him saying: *'Father, don't be afraid. This miracle comes from God!'* The entire congregation witnessed the miracle. The Bishop had the whole matter carefully examined and authenticated and the chapel became a Eucharistic shrine, surviving right down to the present.

Bagno di Romagna, Italy (near Arezzo): In the year 1412 a priest who was experiencing a crisis of faith was celebrating Mass and his doubts were plaguing him exceptionally; at the Consecration, the Wine turned into Blood and bubbled as though It was boiling, spattering out of the chalice onto the corporal. It was 'Living Blood', throbbing as if it was activated by a Heart. Although the case was examined and generally accepted as miraculous, the corporal was not exposed for veneration until 500 years later, in 1912, when it was made the object of a Eucharistic Study. It was examined scientifically in 1958 and the stains confirmed as being real Blood with all the attributes of 'Living Blood' instead of just stains nearly 600 years old. It is now exposed for veneration in the Church of Santa Maria Assunta in Bagno.

Erding, Germany (Bavaria): A simple farmer, with more than the usual causes for grumbling about his lot as a farmer, decided to take a Host which he received on Maundy Thursday and keep It in his house to improve his fortunes. On the way home, he became plagued with remorse and decided to return and confess his crime to the priest, but the Host slipped out of the cloth in which he was carrying It and floated high into the air where It stayed for a while and then plunged into the earth, completely disappearing. The farmer, aghast at this turn of affairs, ran to the church where the priest was still talking to people outside the church. They all returned to the scene of the action to discover the Host lying, gleaming, on the ground. It proceeded to rise, once more, into the air and plunge into the ground. The same performance greeted the Bishop when he arrived after which the Host was not seen again. It was generally agreed that a chapel should be built on that spot in honour of the Blessed Sacrament and in reparation for the sacrileges and blasphemies suffered by Our Lord in His most vulnerable Form.

Zaragoza, Spain (The home of Our Lady of Pilar): In 1427 a woman took a Host at Communion and put It in a bag intending to use It for sorcery; she went to the sorcerer, opened the bag and discovered a live baby surrounded by an aura of light. The sorcerer persuaded this poor, besotted woman to continue with the plot, burn the baby and return with the ashes. She placed the baby in the fire but It shone even brighter and was completely untouched by the fire. The woman must have been fairly demented by now; she ran through the streets with the baby to the sorcerer who was completely overwhelmed by it all and joined her in going to the Cathedral to obtain forgiveness. Archbishop Don Alonso Arbuello investigated this improbable story since he witnessed the amazing aura of light around the baby. The baby was taken into the custody of the Archbishop and carried in procession with all the local dignitaries to the Church of San Valero where he was placed on the altar and an all-night vigil held. On the following morning (Sunday) the Archbishop celebrated a Votive Mass of the Blessed Sacrament; during the Offertory, as the bread and wine were offered to God, the baby glowed even brighter, disappeared and in Its place appeared the Consecrated Host. The Archbishop consumed this Host at the Communion. These events were officially attested at the time and are portrayed in paintings all around Zaragoza where devotion to the Blessed Sacrament has remained very strong ever since.

Avignon, France: The Albigensian heresy flourished in this area in the 12th and 13th centuries. King Louis VIII had a church built on the banks of the River Sorgue in 1226, dedicated to the Blessed Sacrament and he ordered Perpetual Adoration to be maintained there in reparation for the heresy. Greyfriars of the Franciscan Order were in charge of this Perpetual Veneration in 1433 when the river rose exceptionally high and flooded the whole countryside; when the friars went to rescue the Blessed Sacrament, the water was halfway up the door of the church but, when they opened the door, they found that there was a completely dry path from the door to the altar where the Blessed Sacrament was exposed, with the water banked up on either side like a miniature Red Sea. The whole community assembled to witness this marvel and the Monstrance was carried in procession from the church to the safety of the friary. An account of these events appears in the records of the Order and a re-enactment of them is carried out every year on 30th November.

Langenwiese, Silesia (on the borders of Poland and the Czech Republic): 1453 was the year when St. John Capistran, a holy Franciscan, came to Breslau (Wroclaw) where he preached vehemently against the anti-Eucharist movements spawned by the Hussite heresy. In retaliation, some Hosts were stolen from the Tabernacle the same night; They were wrapped in a linen cloth but, immediately, started to bleed profusely, the blood seeping through the cloth. The thieves took fright and hid the Hosts in a wood by the road to Langenwiese. A Polish traveller in a carriage came along shortly afterwards and, on reaching the place where the Hosts were hidden, the four horses of his carriage knelt down and refused to move. The traveller searched for a cause of this strange phenomenon and discovered the blood-stained cloth containing the Hosts. He called a priest who came with a crowd of people and carried the Hosts, in solemn procession, back to Langenwiese. The fame of this miracle spread far and wide resulting in great pilgrimages of reparation. It was during this time that the Turks were completing their capture of Constantinople and advancing into Europe. Because of this, pilgrimages to the shrine took on the purpose of praying for deliverance from the Turks. St. John Capistran himself headed the army which defeated the Turks at Belgrade in 1456.

Turin, Italy:

During battles between city-states which seem to have been the chief occupation of various dukes in the fifteenth century, the soldiers were kept happy by what they could loot from the land as they passed through. Most of them were mercenaries. So it was that, in 1453, a soldier of the Piedmontese army stole a monstrance containing the Blessed Sacrament from the church in Exilles and deposited it with other loot in a sack. He sold the sack to a merchant, who sold it on to another. This dealer took it to Turin but, outside the Church of St. Silvester, the donkey carrying the sack stumbled, fell and refused to get up. A crowd gathered to watch the sport of the dealer trying to move the donkey and, in the tussle, the sack fell off, spilling its contents. Everyone was struck by the brilliant light which came from the Host in the monstrance which then proceeded to rise to about 12 feet into the air. Father Cocono of St. Silvester's saw what had happened and fetched the Bishop, who came with a full company of priests. When the Bishop arrived, the monstrance opened itself and fell to the ground, leaving the Host suspended, surrounded by a brilliant aura. The Bishop held out a chalice and the Host descended gently into it. The Host was preserved and venerated until 1584 when orders came from Rome that it should be consumed. Nevertheless, the spot where the miracle occurred is marked by the Basilica of the Blessed Sacrament which contains a railed-off area where the donkey fell.

Volterra, Italy (near Florence): Another case of looting by mercenaries occurred in 1472. A soldier entered the Church of St. Francis and, disregarding the friars there, stole an ivory pyx from the tabernacle. The friars prayed hard and their prayers were answered immediately. The thief could find no door out of the church then he became blind and very wild, whirling his sword around in rage and frustration. The friars reasoned with him that all might be well if he would hand back the pyx but as he plunged his hand into the sack he started to scream, rant and rave. He threw the pyx against a column and, at that moment, the worst earthquake which ever struck the city rocked the church. The thief was completely overcome by all this, confessed his sins and regained his sight. The Host, still intact, was restored to the tabernacle.

La Viluena, Spain (near Zaragoza): In 1601 fire broke out in the church, spread quickly and was evidently unquenchable; some men braved the flames and rescued the tabernacle but, when it was opened, it was found to be empty. The silver chest containing the Consecrated Hosts, which had been in the tabernacle, was then discovered on top of a pile of embers, with its veil, about 20 feet from the altar. The Bishop was informed but took seven years to come and see for himself; he then ordered the Hosts to be consumed, much to the disappointment of the people. However, the silver chest has been preserved and the shrine is still a centre for pilgrimage. A special feast of the miracle celebrated on 9th November each year.

Siena, Italy:

On the Eve of the Assumption in the year 1730, thieves stole a ciborium full of Consecrated Hosts from the Basilica of St. Francis. The theft went undiscovered until the next day. The Bishop called for public prayers that the Hosts may be returned and an intense search for them was started. It was three days before they were discovered in the poor-box of the nearby church of St. Mary in Provenzano. The Archbishop sent some priests there and they found the box full of Hosts - the full number of 351 which had been Consecrated in preparation for The Assumption. The Hosts were not distributed in Communion at the time but, on special occasions, one of the Hosts would be consumed and they were always found to be perfectly fresh until, in 1780, it was decided that they should not be consumed in the future. There were 230 Hosts remaining. A quantity of unconsecrated hosts was stored in a hermetically sealed container as a 'control' and the original Hosts remained in the normal, unsealed ciborium. Ten years later, the unconsecrated hosts were found to have deteriorated badly, whilst the original Hosts were still fresh. Sixty years later, in 1850, the unconsecrated hosts were found to have become virtually powder, but the consecrated Hosts were still fresh. In 1914, scientific tests were carried out on the Hosts and, once more, no deterioration could be found. In 1922, a large gathering of bishops examined all the evidence and declared this marvellous preservation to be a supernatural gift from God. The Hosts were transferred from their original ciborium to an elaborate reliquary in 1950 only for a thief to steal the reliquary on 9th February 1951, scattering the Hosts on the floor. The Hosts survived this treatment and were rehoused in another reliquary. A celebration to mark the 250th anniversary of this miracle was attended by Pope John Paul II on 14th September 1980.