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Gracious Lady: Mary Vs. Lucifer

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GRACIOUS LADY

MARY VS. LUCIFER. *The Apparitions of Our Lady, 1531-1933.* By John Ireland Gallery. Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1960. x, 176 p.

This is a book of short essays on the various apparitions of Our Lady during the last 400 years. To read it is a joy and delight, to review it is a privilege. Although the title stresses the struggle of Mary against Lucifer, the content seems to substitute our own inattention and lethargy for the cunning of the devil. Our Lady has returned time and time again, pleading, loving, threatening, weeping, and always with the same message, but still man in his blindness pays no heed — at least in sufficient proportions so as to turn the heavy arm of punishment to that of a paternal embrace. Her message asks for a turning back to God, for she can no longer hold back His arm. God-sent suffering has only two functions — to motivate people to leave evil, and, for His friends, to fill up the sufferings of Christ. Our Lady has foretold the ravages that will take place — has left sufficient time for a change of heart and a promise that the calamities foretold will not happen if only people will pay heed, but always the threats become realities which prove that heaven is not satisfied. She foretold dire happenings as she went on the mountain at La Salette in 1846 and within the year wheat turned to dust and potatoes turned to sog and 750,000 children in Europe died of fever. To Catherine Labouré she revealed that dangers would come and that some would happen soon and worse things would happen in 40 years; in a few days convents and monasteries were pillaged and in 1870 "the Cross was trampled on, the blood ran in the streets" as Our Blessed Mother's words had stated. She repeated her warning in 1917 at Fatima that unless people return to God a more terrible war would break out during the next pontificate and, again, heaven was not satisfied with the quantity and quality of our conversion for World War II in now history. This is the message of the book, and always Our Lady's commands are accompanied by expressions of maternal love, affection and hope.

Father Gallery has done a fine piece of writing — telling the stories, some well known, some less known, but always with clarity and interest. He "thinks with the Church" in devotion to Our Lady—none of the skeptical questioning we hear raised today even by the devout; but, at the same time, he keeps his account firmly anchored to the facts.

The recorded apparitions of the Blessed Mother begin with the one in Mexico in 1531 — only a few years after the Spanish started the colonization of Central America. Juan Diego was only an Indian field worker, living in the Mexican variant of a nipa hut. After reading the

story we realize the deep impression this visitation made on Mexican culture — the story with its gracious dialogue between Our Lady and Juan: "My son, Juan Diego, whom I tenderly love as a little one and weak, whither goest thou?" and later she adds: "And it is my wish that here there be raised to me a temple in which as a loving Mother to thee and to those like thee, I shall show my tender mercy and the compassion I feel for those who love and seek me. . ." This is only a meager part of what actually passed between the Queen of Heaven and the *tao* of the fields and as Juan takes his leave of the Queen, he says to her, "And here, Lady, on this spot, I shall be waiting for you tomorrow evening at sunset to give you the answer that I shall have received. So peace be with you, my little one most high, and may God keep you." This manner of speaking, this gracious courtesy is now a part of the Mexican and is always seen especially among the poor who even in the midst of dire poverty show a sweetness of disposition. This character trait is one of the graces Our Lady has brought to these people — the first people to be so honored by the Queen of Heaven; another grace she brought: "continence became a mark of manhood." Two days later when Juan Diego wanted to reach a priest for his dying uncle, he tried to dodge the Lady by leaving home very early and taking a different path. When she meets him there he says, "My little one most beloved, and Lady mine, may God keep you! . . . how early you are around!"

These are some of the details that make the book delightful despite the earnestness and urgency of our Mother's demand for prayers and penance. It was our Lady's own request that the miraculous picture be called Our Lady of Guadalupe — a Moorish word meaning "hidden river." After the apparition, within a period of seven years, over eight million Indians were baptized.

A number of apparitions occurred in the following centuries, but one having enduring effect did not take place until 1820 when the apparition of the Miraculous Medal was vouchsafed to Catherine Labouré, a Sister of Charity in France. Many graces — usually spiritual graces — have been obtained through this medal. During one of the visits, some of the jewels on Our Lady's gown were dull. She said: "These are the graces people forget to ask for."

The other apparitions follow in order — the well known ones of Lourdes and Fatima need no summary in a review. But the vision at La Salette always needs a closer look. The details of the apparition are puzzling: Our Lady had a golden apron on, and a small crucifix hanging from her neck. On one side was a hammer and on the other a pincers. Father Gallery gives an explanation which is at least plausible. And the answer of Maximin, one of those who saw the vision, to

the question why he never became a saint is worth recording: "I am a good Catholic. Without La Salette I might have been a very bad one."

This book is recommended to all who wish to refresh their devotion to Our Blessed Mother.

SISTER MARY ALICE

MYSTIC AND REFORMER

CATHERINE OF SIENA. By Igino Giordani. Translated from the Italian by Thomas J. Tobin. Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1959. vi, 234p.

This 234-page biography of a great 14th-century mystic holds the reader's close attention. The author surrounds his main character with a description of the turbulent church history of the day. However, St. Catherine remains firmly in the center of the story.

Her life was extraordinary: an illiterate young woman, she was nevertheless a chosen soul, whose words ring out as a message to us, the readers of today, as they did to the leaders of state and church of yesterday. She was born on March 25, 1347, the twenty-fourth child of Giacomo and Lapa Benincasa. She entered the world in an age of crisis, political, economic and social. As a child in a lively household, she was convinced that she should dedicate herself to God. Even at the age of six she had received her first vision of God and the saints. Her many biographers agree with Giordani that Catherine's wisdom and knowledge were not acquired but infused. From the time of this first vision she determined to walk the road of sanctity, despite difficulties, not the least of which was the conflict in her own family. They considered Catherine's attitudes madness. The road she chose was that of charity, recollection, and penance.

At the age of 16 she was invested with the Dominican habit and she continued to live in her own home. Christ came to her, spoke and walked with her. It was He who taught her. These extraordinary daily encounters became ordinary events in her life, culminating in her 20th year in the mystical betrothal.

St. Catherine's rapid change from illiteracy to a deep knowledge of letters seems clear to all as evidence of divine intervention. How, then, did it come about that a mystic, a contemplative, could, in the thirteen years of life remaining, do so much to confound the learned ones and to astound the incredulous? Even in her own day—in the midst of unbelievers—all came to admit the reality of her miracles,