

THE SPIRITUALITY OF ST. ROSE

"Hear me, ye divine offspring, and bud forth as the rose planted by the brooks of waters."¹

The story of St. Rose should be doubly interesting to us, for besides being the first American pronounced a saint by the infallible voice of our Holy Mother the Church, this devoted spouse of Christ has also been declared the Patroness of the New World. But even more interesting should the recital of her soul's sanctification prove to us, for hers was a humble, retired and even commonplace life, filled with its round of duties and simple joys. In fact, it was a state of life not unlike that which falls to the lot of many of us plain, unremarkable mortals. Unlike her patroness, the Seraph of Siena, it was not her glory to counsel the Vicar of Christ or to heal the heart-wound in the Church; nor was she destined to reign over a mighty people, like the saint-queen, Elizabeth of Hungary. Hers, rather, was the life—the hidden, quiet, silent life—of Nazareth. What a shining example does she not furnish us! What glorious lessons should we not learn from this girl-saint of America, not only in patient and cheerful submission to the Divine Will, but also in joyous gratitude to God for his graces and consuming love for the Heart that wrought our salvation!

I

"He who arms himself with prayer will rise to Heaven."²

"Those who love one another, even in the natural order, desire to be together. The whole instinct of love draws their thoughts and affections one to the other."³ How much greater, in the spiritual order, must be the desire of the lover of Christ to commune with the Spouse of all beauty! Is it to be wondered at, then, that Rose should have passed her life in constant union with God?

Even as a child this little saint was accustomed to spend long hours in meditation and prayer. Especially noteworthy was her constancy in reciting the chaplet of Our Lady, and many were the favors that the Queen of the Most Holy Rosary showered upon her devoted client. Another form of prayer peculiar to this

¹ Ecclus. XXXIX, 17.

² St. John Chrys.

³ Buckler, Reginald, O. P. Spir. Perf., p. 171.

spouse of the Crucified was the recital of a chaplet of one hundred and fifty of the Divine Perfections, which was composed at her request by her confessor. These she loved to repeat, meditating the while upon the power and goodness of the Lord of all.

Realizing the sweet intimacy of our Creator with His elect, we are prepared to find that Rose was a frequent visitor to our sacramental God. Her ardent devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, her visualization of our Lord's presence among men, were to be expected of one who had chosen our Infant Saviour as her Spouse even in her tenderest years. Her countenance after Holy Communion was suffused with glory, and glowed with such an exquisitely attractive love that it seemed to those beholding her that she was made a partaker, even whilst still in this vale of sorrow, of the vision of the blessed.

After St. Rose received the white habit of the Order of Truth she daily recited the Divine Office. We can but faintly imagine the joy and peace that flooded her soul as she chanted the praises of her Love and meditated on the wonders of God in His saints. What devotion, what eager attention and care, she must have given to the performance of this labor of love can be fully realized only by those who have drunk deep of the waters of eternal life and have, like her, tasted and seen how sweet the Lord is.⁴ Moreover, as a child of Mary, Rose especially loved the Office of the Blessed Virgin and daily recited it in honor of the Mother of her Spouse. Particularly pleasing must this beautiful trait be to the members of the Third Order, whose daily task it is to recite these praises of the Immaculate.

But the most wonderful characteristic of the Flower of Christ was her extraordinary application to *mental* prayer. Her constant recollection, "her deep, earnest and all but perfect union with God"⁵ may be compared to a sweet odor perpetually exhaled by this Rose of surpassing beauty.

Her entire life was a seeking of her last end, a lifting of her heart and mind to God. He was ever uppermost in her thoughts, He was the constant motive of her every act, and her pure heart never ceased longing for union with Jesus. How fitting, then, that He should often visit her, addressing her as "Rose of My Heart."

⁴ Ps. XXXIII, 8.

⁵ Capes, F. M., *Life of St. Rose*, p. 15.

II

"The Holy Spirit leads us by different ways to the wine-cellar of His love."⁶

The saintly life of the holy maid of Lima was a miracle of God's love. The Spirit of God filled her heart and enkindled in it the flame that burned so brightly. She was a lamb under the Hand of the Lord, acquiescing in every detail to the drawings of the Divine Guide. She hearkened to the loving call of Christ to be His and none other's; and to know the impulses, movements and inspiration of the Holy Ghost,—

"The Living Spring, the Living Fire,
Sweet Unction and True Love,"—

was to order her life accordingly. A striking example of her docility may be seen in her early childhood: One day when Rose was at play with some other children, her brother Ferdinand playfully threw some mud in her hair, much to her annoyance, for she always was scrupulously neat. Her brother, noting her momentary vexation, exclaimed at random: "Rose, a holy girl would not mind a little dirt on her head—she would know that fine hair is all vanity." These words, uttered in jest, struck deep into the heart of our saint, and, realizing that they were the whisperings of the Divine Dove, she forthwith cut off all her beautiful tresses, and there and then vowed perpetual virginity to the Bridegroom of her soul. With all truth could this docile child cry out: "My heart is ready, O Lord! my heart is ready!"⁷

III

"He who followeth me walketh not in darkness."⁸

The beloved spouse of the Man of Sorrows, like her patroness, St. Catherine, strove constantly to follow in His footsteps. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me,"⁹ were no meaningless words to the espoused of Christ. "She studied in the school of suffering; her book was the Cross; her Master, the Crucified."¹⁰ Although naturally of delicate health, weak in body and physically feeble,

⁶ Blossius, *Spec. Monach.*, c. V.

⁷ Ps. LVI, 8.

⁸ John VIII, 12.

⁹ Luke IX, 23.

¹⁰ Capes, F. M., *Life of St. Rose*, p. 15.

she did not shrink from the awful share in Christ's Passion allotted her. With our Redeemer, she suffered the derelictions of Gethsemani; in atonement for the sins of men she daily scourged her innocent body; for Christ's sweet sake, she wore a metal circlet which pierced her head with ninety-nine sharp points; with our bleeding Saviour, she stumbled up Calvary, burdened with a cross of untold weight; and like Jesus she died resting her head, not upon a soft pillow, but upon a block of wood. Not figuratively, but literally, could she say with the Apostle: "With Christ I am nailed to the cross; and I live, now, not I, but Christ liveth in me."¹¹

IV

"Be converted to Me with all your heart, in fasting, and in weeping, and in mourning."¹²

"Why are there so few saints today? Because ours is an age of luxury, of self-seeking—an easy and effeminate age. Penance and mortifications are spectres that terrify us;"¹³ but to the mind of the heroine of Lima they presented no such aspect. She realized that "a saint must be essentially and necessarily a man or woman of penance"¹⁴ . . . a victim on the altar of sacrifice. She knew that "self must abdicate if God is to reign."¹⁵ Hence, in her earliest years, we find her cheerfully giving her share of delicacies to her brothers and sisters and fasting three days each week. After her first Holy Communion she made a vow never to touch meat unless obliged by obedience; and as she advanced up the holy mount, we behold her, like St. Catherine, miraculously sustained by the Bread of Angels alone.

St. Rose's eager desire for suffering caused her to wear a long horse-hair shirt; to scourge herself in secret with a heavy knotted cord; to wear the spiked crown that pierced her head; to curtail her sleep that she might watch with her Bridegroom; to suffer patiently and with peaceful serenity all the trials that purified her "as gold in the furnace,"¹⁶ and, finally, to die praising the will of God. Despising the world, its glory and pomp, and as chaste as the mountain snow, do we wonder that, like the

¹¹ Gal. II, 19, 20.

¹² Joel II, 12.

¹³ Proctor, J., O. P. Intro. to Life of St. Rose.

¹⁴ *ibidem*.

¹⁵ *ibidem*.

¹⁶ Prov. XXVII, 21.

Maid of Siena, she was espoused to Christ, and that He said to her: "Rose, you are My flower! Henceforth let Me be the *only* flower of your heart!"

V

"God giveth grace to the humble."¹⁷

But if our Divine Master chose to have His beloved suffer He did not fail to console and reward her, even in this life. Many were the trials and spiritual desolations that she bore with resignation—trials that were appalling to flesh and blood; but, on the other hand, ineffably consoling were the graces and blessings showered like refreshing dew upon the Rose amid so many thorns. . . . Many and happy were the visits made to Rose's garden-cell by the Mother of God, St. Catherine of Siena, her special model, and her guardian angel. Nearly every day the Infant Jesus came to encourage and caress His chosen Flower; He was, in very truth, as she called Him, "God of her heart and of her life." These sweet communings with the Christ-Child brought forth the latent poetry of her soul; and one day she was heard singing softly, bidding her angel-guardian speed to the Divine Babe with her message:

"Fly, O swift messenger,
Fly to our Lord
Oh, haste to our Master adored!
Ask why he delays and remains
Far from my side."

Assuredly, "wonderful is God in His saints,"¹⁸ and Rose was no exception, for the power and glory of the Trinity are resplendent in the life of this servant of God. Innumerable were the prodigies: cures, prophecies, ecstasies, raptures, wrought during the life of the saint—rewards, all, of her patience, her charity and her hell-defying courage amidst so many tribulations and crosses. Finally, the crowning grace granted by her Divine Lover was her glorious death, truly "precious in the sight of the Lord."¹⁹ Her last words were an act of eager desire to be with Jesus: "Jesus! Jesus! be with me." Thus passed to her eternal reward the First Flower of the New World.

—Chrysostom Kearns, O. P.

¹⁷ James IV, 6.

¹⁸ Ps. LXVII, 36.

¹⁹ Ps. CXV, 15.