

# SAINT PHILOMENA

## The Little Wonder-Worker of the Twentieth Century

### A NOVENA IN HONOUR OF ST. PHILOMENA.

O Glorious Virgin and Martyr, beloved child of God, blessed Philomena! I rejoice in thy glory, and give God thanks, that He has bestowed on thee such power, for the glory of His Name, for the edification of His Church, and to honour thy merits in life, and thy sufferings and martyrdom in death. Looking up to thee in heaven, I rejoice to see thee so exalted, so powerful, so generous. I congratulate thee on having been so faithful to the precepts and counsels of Jesus Christ, while on earth, and on being so munificently rewarded by Him in heaven. Moved by thine example to the practice of solid virtue, filled with hope at the view of the rewards bestowed upon thee, I resolve to imitate thee in the avoidance of all evil, and in the fulfilment of God's Holy Will. Assist me, O glorious little Saint, by thy powerful intercession, and obtain especially for me perfect purity—invincible fortitude in all trials, temptations, and sufferings—generosity which refuses nothing to God—and love stronger than death for the one true Faith—a ready and willing obedience to the Holy Roman Catholic Church and to our Sovereign Pontiff, the common father of all the Faithful, the pastor of pastors and of their flocks, and vice-regent of Jesus Christ, throughout the world.

Besides these favours which I have now asked through thy powerful intercession, O blessed Philomena! I also ask an additional grace and favour, which I have the fullest confidence of obtaining through thy powerful intercession. (Here mention the graces and favour)

Surely God, Who is so good, and for Whom thou hast given up thy life—God Who is so good, and Who has bestowed so many gifts and favours upon and through thee—God Who is so good as to have died for me, and to give Himself to me in Holy Communion—God Who is so good as to have revealed the burning love of His Sacred Heart for me, surely He will not refuse to hearken graciously to thy prayers, to my supplications, and even to His own desire to help the afflicted. For this do I hope, while I put all my confidence in God and in thee, O Blessed Philomena! Amen.

O Jesus, grant me grace to love Thee and to make others love Thee. O Mary, my tender Mother, obtain for me a great love for Thy Divine Son, Jesus. Holy St. Joseph, bless me and intercede for me. St. Philomena, pray for me. Amen.

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For close on a hundred years the name of St. Philomena has been accorded in the Church a veneration which, growing intensified by the number of miracles vouchsafed through her intercession, has spread over the whole world. Previous to the discovery of her tomb and relics in the Catacomb of St. Priscilla, outside the walls of Rome, in the year 1802, her name had found no place in sacred story.

Hence what can be authoritatively written regarding this wonder-working little saint of the nineteenth century is more a narrative of the extraordinary chain of miracles associated with her intercession than the recital of facts relating to her life. There is, however, a pious tradition that she was a child-martyr and a contemporary of St. Sebastian, who suffered in the reign of the Emperor Diocletian about the year of our Lord 286. Some holy souls who were devoutly interested in promoting devotion to the saint, some years after the translation of her relics, are said to have been favoured with revelations, in which Philomena made known to them the circumstances under which she shed her blood for Christ. According to this evidence she was thirteen years of age at the time of her martyrdom, and her relics bear testimony that she could scarcely have been older. In these pages, however, we shall confine ourselves to the facts attendant on the discovery of her tomb and to subsequent wonders which have surrounded her memory with a blessed immortality.

The Catacombs of Rome have long, been centres of Christian interest and veneration. Until a century ago their origin was a subject of controversy and speculation among learned writers. Now their conflicting theories are set at rest. It is fully accepted by archeologists and historians that these subterranean passages were the secret hiding-places of the primitive Christians, and later on, became the resting-places of their dead. When, after the early persecutions, peace and liberty were restored to the Church, these cemeteries, which enclosed the remains of so many martyrs—and were sacred

to the sufferings and trials of generations of the faithful—became places of devotion and of great resort. Each of them came to be associated with the names of eminent martyred saints, at whose tombs the Divine mysteries were frequently offered up. As time went on and the desire of obtaining relics of the saints spread throughout the universal Church, the tombs of the Catacombs, with permission of the Holy See, supplied these treasures so jealously regarded as the precious inheritance of the altars of Christendom. Yet the exercise of this privilege of procuring from the Catacombs memorials of the saints and martyrs left the tomb and relics of St. Philomena unnoticed and undisturbed, until it pleased Almighty God to reveal this young virgin-martyr to the world as one of the heavenly wonder-workers of the nineteenth century.

The Catacomb of St. Priscilla lies beneath the Via Salaria Nova. Here, in the Pontificate of Pius VII., a remarkable slab attracted the custodians of the cemetery, who were then prosecuting investigations there, and on the 25th of May, 1802, the tomb was formally examined. On the tiles that enclosed it, the following inscription was read:—“PHILOMENA PAX TECUM.”

The devices which were interwoven with these simple words—an anchor, an arrow, and a palm—determined the spot as the last resting-place of a martyr. The tomb was opened by Monsignor Ludovici, who disclosed to the gaze of his assistants and bystanders the precious remains. Beside them stood the phial containing the blood of the saint. An examination of the relics having been made, it was ascertained that Philomena had been martyred in her tender youth, at about twelve or thirteen years of age, scarcely more. The relics were then fervently removed to the Custodia, and deposited among the relics of the other servants of God, to await the decision of the Vicar of Jesus Christ as to where they should finally rest as objects of the veneration of the faithful. The tiles bearing the simple inscription were for a time placed in the college of the Jesuits at Rome. Later on they were transferred to the Museum of Antiquities at the Vatican. However, in 1827, they were bestowed on the Church of Mugnano, which was destined, through the possession of the relics of our saint, to become one of the most honoured shrines in the Christian world.

During three years which followed, the relics of St. Philomena lay in the Custodia, unnoticed and undisturbed, almost as they had lain for fifteen hundred years in the silence of the Catacombs.

In the summer of 1805 the Bishop-Elect of Potenza came to Rome to receive his consecration.

His companion was a saintly priest of Mugnano—Don Francesco di Lucia—who availed of his visit to the Eternal City to seek the possession of the body of a saint for his private chapel. Accordingly he asked permission to visit the treasury of sacred relics. Complying with his desire, the guardian, Mgr. Ponzetti, offered the holy priest his choice, to the great delight of the latter. None of the caskets bore the names of the saints whose bodies they enclosed, except three. Amongst these was that of St. Philomena.

As the priest stood before this reliquary he felt his soul filled with an indescribable feeling of spiritual joy, and at once he petitioned to have the relics. A few days afterwards, however, the guardian of the Custodia retracted the permission he had given, stating reasonably that the saints of well-ascertained names were so few, that they ought to be reserved for Bishops and Catholic princes.

The Bishop of Potenza, however, intervened on behalf of his anxious companion, saying he felt convinced the saint wished her to go to his parish of Mugnano, and would bless the place with miracles. And so the request was at length granted. From that day commenced the long succession of wonders which have since made the name of Philomena illustrious over the world.

Don Francesco fell ill during his visit to Rome, and, sinking under a virulent attack of fever, made a vow to St. Philomena that if his health were restored, he would choose her for his patron. Instantly the malady subsided, and he was restored to perfect health. On his telling the Bishop of the miracle both returned thanks to God, promising to carry the bones of the saint to Naples with all possible honour.

They set out shortly afterwards, and reached Naples on the 2nd of July, 1805. There the casket was deposited in the private chapel of Don Antonio Terres—a wealthy citizen of the place. The relics were opened by ecclesiastical authority, and the bones arranged in a lifelike-size figure in papier-mache, and enclosed in an outer case of ebony, which was duly sealed in four places. Donna Angela Terres, the wife of Don Antonio was deputed to dress and adorn the figure, and was

rewarded by the Saint for her devotion by being immediately healed of a malignant malady, from which she had been suffering for twelve years. Marvellous, too, during the dressing, many changes were observed in the countenance of the figure, while the virginal remains exhaled a sweet perfume. During three days the body was exposed in the church of St. Angelo. A great concourse of the faithful visited the shrine, but as no miracle took place it was believed to be an indication of the saint's wish not to remain in that city. Again, the relics were brought from the church to the house of Terres, and here again miraculous cures began to be vouchsafed. Amongst them was that of a lady suffering from gangrene in the hand which her physician had decided on amputating. A small portion of the sacred relics which had been presented to the Terres family was applied to the suffering hand. That night the patient slept, and in the morning the surgeons found that the gangrene had disappeared.

In another case—a lawyer, who for six months had been bed-ridden from sciatica, had himself carried to the house where the body of Philomena lay, and while he prayed to the holy Martyr, was completely cured.

The Bishop of Potenza and Don Francesco now determined to proceed on their journey to Mugnano. The month of August was fixed for their departure from Maples, two carriers being summoned from Mugnano to convey the saint. The grief of Donna Angela on parting with the venerable remains was so great that she would scarcely allow them to be removed. Don Francesco, to console her, presented her with the key of the casket, saying, "I leave you this. Henceforward you and your family shall be the owners of the holy body. I will be only its guardian."

As the procession moved on its way, its course was marked by many miracles. When night set in, a column of light descended and rested on the relics, illuminating the path by which the bearers passed as they drew near to Cimitile, a suburb of Nola. Here the burden grew so heavy that the bearers declared they could carry it no further. On hearing this, Don Francesco feared that the saint desired to remain at Cimitile, a place sacred to the martyrdom of many saints. He immediately despatched one of the carriers, who had come with him from Naples, to Mugnano to secure additional bearers, meanwhile urging on the others to move the case, at least a little further, on the way. With great difficulty they succeeded in transporting it; but as they receded from Cimitile their burden became lighter and lighter, and soon was so easily borne that the bearers began to cry out with joy, "a miracle! a miracle! The saint has once more become as light as she was at Naples!"

At Mugnano, on the eve of the arrival, the bells of all the churches were rung, and cannon were fired in honour of the advent of the relics. The inhabitants made their first petition to the saint by asking, through her intercession, that the long-continued drought from which their crops suffered, might come to an end. The sound of the bells from the church towers had scarcely ceased when rain fell in copious torrents. At sunrise, the procession entered Mugnano. The joyful inhabitants turned out in vast multitudes with olive branches in their hands to welcome the youthful martyr—and the little children as they saw the case of relics dressed with flowers, filled the air with the cries of "Viva la Santa! Viva la Santa! Hail to the saint!"

During the course of the procession to the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie—which occupied two hours—many manifestations of the power of the saint were witnessed.

Although the day was serene and beautiful at one time a whirlwind arose, and yet not a single one of the lights which were carried before the Shrine of Philomena was extinguished.

The body of the saint was placed under a splendid canopy at the Gospel side of the principal altar, where High Mass was celebrated. That day--the 10th of August—was observed as a feast day of obligation, and the spiritual rejoicings lasted over many weeks.

The numerous wonders which immediately began to be wrought at this Shrine induced Don Francesco to renounce his long-cherished intention of keeping the relics in his private chapel. After a short time he bestowed them on the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie.

Here a side chapel was prepared to receive them, and an altar erected, beneath which they were henceforth to rest for public veneration.

On the feast of St. Michael the Archangel, September 26th, 1805, after the celebration of High Mass, the relics were

carried in procession, and solemnly deposited in their appointed place.

Mass was again chanted at the new altar, and thus ended the translation of the relics of St. Philomena.

## II.

The story of the Shrine of St. Philomena, and of the remarkable manifestations associated with it, possesses an unique interest among narratives of the kind. Much of it might, indeed, be difficult to accept without question, were not the authority in its support so strong.

The first in time, of the favours we shall record, is assigned to a date shortly after the translation of the relics of the saint to Mugnano.

While at Naples, as we may remember, the bones of the Virgin-Martyr were placed within a figure of childlike form, which was enclosed in an ebony casket. The casket being of small dimensions, the figure, though not larger than a child of about eight years of age, had to be placed in a cramped and ungraceful position.

One morning, however, shortly after the arrival of the saint within the chapel of Mugnano, to the amazement of some clients who had come to pay their homage at her shrine, the figure was found to have changed its attitude and whole appearance. Originally it had lain flat within the case, the effect aimed at in its arrangement being that of the repose of death. Now the representation of the saint had mysteriously assumed a half sitting posture—full of majesty and grace—the face being turned towards the spectators. The hands too had changed their position, the arrow, the emblem of martyrdom, which had been placed in one of them, being reversed—in a word, the whole figure had become different. But the most striking marvel of the transformation was that the countenance no longer continued the same. The artist, by whom the figure had originally been designed, at Naples, had done his work hastily, and the features, imperfectly modelled, had been coloured to represent the pallor of a corpse. All these defects now disappeared, and an expression of great beauty took their place, while the colourless hue, which the face had hitherto presented, changed into a soft life-like complexion.

And all the while, the four seals which had been attached to the casket by the Bishop of Potenza were intact, and the glass which surrounded it could not have been removed. The rumour of this occurrence, having quickly spread abroad, soon reached Naples. On hearing of the marvellous event, the members of the Terres family, by whom the figure of St. Philomena had been at first dressed, accompanied by the artist who had designed and painted it, together with some others, set out for Mugnano. It was beyond doubt that the key of the reliquary, which the Signora Terres, the custodian, held, had never left her possession, and yet, all attested that in no way was the attitude or appearance of the martyr like what it had been when the relics had left their home in Naples.

Further changes were subsequently, from time to time, observed in the position of the miraculous figure. Thus, some years after, when the garments in which the saint was clothed began to look worn and faded, another extraordinary circumstance occurred. The stitched seams loosened of themselves. The rich trimmings and accessories became detached, till at length, little by little, the whole vesture became disordered and scattered! The final and complete disarrangement of the exterior of the little figure took place about the Feast of Pentecost, 1824, when Don Francesco decided on having the relics arrayed in a new and costly attire, and also to provide a larger and more elegant shrine to receive them. Previous to the opening of the old reliquary, it was observed that the silken hair on the head of the saint had become sparse and scanty. As the date fixed for the translation of the relics was close at hand, no time remained to procure fresh silken hair. Then another wonder took place. An abundance of flowing tresses made their appearance before the beginning of the ceremony, which was carried out with great devotion and splendour by the Archbishop and his suite, in presence of the Vicar-General of the diocese, on July 5th, 1824.

Some time after the occurrence of this prodigy, this silken hair, which had been of a chestnut shade, suddenly turned to a deep black. At the same time the flowing tresses grew to such length, that it became necessary to open the case to re-arrange them over the shoulders. In 1833, nine years after the second dressing of the figure, the hair was found to have grown twenty-seven inches. Soon again a further development manifested itself. Another and larger shrine was deemed

insufficient owing to the increased proportions of the wondrous figure of the occupant. A new receptacle was, therefore, again procured. On this occasion, Monsignor Cupola, Bishop of Vola, whose veneration for St. Philomena bordered almost on enthusiasm, came to Mugnano, to place, as an offering, a rich crown of silver on her head. On this occasion a similar miracle again took place. On the 27th of September, 1828, Cardinal Ruffo Scilla, Archbishop of Naples, opened the shrine, and removed the relics to the beautiful and spacious case where they have since rested. From the appearance of a child of tender years, as our saint was first represented, she had now grown to bear the appearance of a beautiful maiden of twenty.

When the Cardinal Archbishop of Naples, in fulfilment of a vow, came to Mugnano for a fifth time, he declared after he had celebrated Mass, in presence of the Shrine, that since he had sealed the reliquary, six months before, the holy form of the saint had changed anew its appearance.

Miraculous manifestations after that time became so frequent as to be regarded as a matter of course. Sometimes the countenance lost its habitual brightness of expression and became overcast and sad. The lips too of the saint were seen at times to move as if in prayer, in union with the supplications of her clients.

During the celebrations of the annual festival in 1847, among the vast congregation was a poor blind man who was fervently imploring the saint to procure for him the recovery of his sight. Suddenly the whole body was seen to move, turning on its side to face the congregation. This event was attested by numerous witnesses, and after careful inquiries solemnly published. This attestation concludes as follows:— “We can testify that similar changes are continually occurring—either the opening of the eyes, the movements of the lips, or, varied expressions of the countenance which sometimes appears pale and sad, sometimes pleased and bright. . . . He who will not believe what is stated, should himself repair to the sanctuary, where, he will see with his own eyes how God glorifies His saints.”

After so many extraordinary evidences of the miraculous power of St. Philomena one can scarcely wonder at the astonishing rapidity with which devotion to her was spread throughout the whole world.

Nevertheless the solemn approbation of the Church was not bestowed upon the devotion to St. Philomena till long after the dates of the incidents we have been recording. That prudent circumspection which at all times rules the decisions of the Holy See, demanded a long and mature consideration of the novel and marvellous circumstances which made up the history of the miracles of the saint. Although the pastors and laity of almost every diocese in Italy had more than once petitioned the Holy Father to authorize the public veneration of St. Philomena, she was not raised to the altars of the Church till the year 1837. The promulgation by the Supreme Pontiff of the decree so long sought for was mainly due to a miracle worked by the saint on Pauline Marie Jaricot, friend of the Cure d’Ars, and foundress of the Association for the Propagation of the Faith, and of the devotion of the “Living Rosary.”

About the year 1819, some Brothers of St. John of God, who were seeking to revive their once famous order for the care of incurables, travelled through Brittany to the South of France, relating as they went along, the wonders they had witnessed at the shrine of Mugnano. At Lyons, the Brothers called on the Jaricot family, whose members were inspired with such enthusiasm at the recital of the miracles of the saint that they were filled with a great desire to possess a portion of her relics. The pious wish was eventually gratified, and among the blessings of which this family became the instrument in the hands of Providence, not the least remarkable was the promoting of devotion to St. Philomena.

In the year 1834 Pauline Marie Jaricot was stricken, beyond all hopes of recovery, with an aggravated form of heart disease. Various other sufferings of a complicated nature increased the intensity of the malady, which, in addition to its dreadful uncertainty, furnished symptoms of a quickly approaching dissolution. During the whole year Pauline describes her condition as one of continued agony, save during some few moments of passing relief which she attributed to prayers offered for her by some devoted friends.

The first amelioration of her sad condition that she experienced occurred at the close of a Novena offered on her behalf to St. Philomena. The complete prostration, which had deprived her of the use of her limbs, slightly subsided, and great was her joy at being able, unaided, to move even a little.

Day by day the improvement continued, and with the happy and wondrous change she became filled with a longing to

visit, in thanksgiving, the shrine of the Sacred Heart at Paray-le-Monial.

Inspired with this thought, she redoubled her anxious pleadings to St. Philomena. Having made known her wish to the members of her family, they in turn mentioned the matter to her physician, who, while admitting the slight improvement as inexplicable, looked upon her project as merely visionary. At length her entreaties overcame his reluctance, and he consented to her departure, prophesying, however, that she would never reach the first stage of the journey, and that the return would be a funeral. Her confidence in God, however, grew stronger as the time approached at which she had, determined to risk the perilous venture.

Contrary to the expectations of those who charitably accompanied her, Pauline reached Paray in safety. Her first visit to the chapel of the Monastery of the Visitation filled her with joy and holy consolation, and gave her a degree of vigour which astonished her companions.

Another and still greater surprise was theirs, when the poor invalid made known her decision to proceed from Paray to Rome, there to seek the blessing of the Vicar of Christ.

To make this journey had, indeed, been with her a life-long dream, but in the face of her excessive weakness, her friends were terrified at her determination. Filled with trust in God she carried her point against their fears. It was a tedious journey, accomplished in very easy and short stages, and so the little strength she had regained did not fail her. Visiting on the way the shrines of Chambéry and Loreto, she reached the Eternal City, and was warmly received at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, the Trinita de Monte. The fame of the two great works she had inaugurated for the glory of the Church had preceded her, while the sight of her great sufferings won for her the sympathy of all.

Although Pauline had realized her wish to visit Rome, her prostrate condition still forbade her undergoing the fatiguing ceremonial of an audience with the Holy Father. But the paternal kindness of Gregory XVI., furnished a solution for this difficulty. Having heard of Pauline's arrival, he deigned to thank her in person for the benefits the Church owed her, and he came on two occasions to visit her at Trinita de Monte. Like others, the Holy Father deemed her condition hopeless. In one of his visits he asked her to pray for him, when she should get into heaven. Pauline replied, "Yes, most certainly Holy Father, I promise to do so, but if I visit the shrine of Mugnano, and then return on foot to the Vatican, will your Holiness deign to proceed with the definite examination of the cause of Philomena." "Yes, my child," replied the Pope, "for that would indeed be a miracle of the first class."

With unwavering courage the heroic girl proceeded from Rome to Mugnano, which she reached August 8th, 1835. Her diary, which lies before us, furnishes a thrilling illustration of the reward which God vouchsafes to grant to the faith of those who seek His mercies through the intercession of His saints. The celebration of the solemn festival of St. Philomena had just commenced. Two days later, that is to say on the actual feast day, Pauline was carried to the church. At the moment of receiving Holy Communion, she experienced a fearful anguish in her whole frame. Her heart throbbed, as though it would burst. Overcome by the intensity of her suffering, she swooned away, and a death-like pallor overspread her countenance. To all appearance life seemed extinct. The bystanders terrified at what they witnessed, were about to bear her away in the chair wherein she lay. Consciousness, however, soon returned, and the poor sufferer feebly signified her wish to remain. A few moments later the dimmed eyes, already glazed with the film of death, began to shed copious tears—colour returned to the pallid cheeks—Pauline Marie Jaricot was cured!

An outburst of jubilation followed the miracle. Unrestrained enthusiasm, within and outside the church prevailed. The air resounded with the cry "Viva Santa Filomena! Viva the holy French lady!"

Two months later full of health and strength, the restored client of St. Philomena presented herself at the feet of Gregory XVI., in the great hall of the Vatican. Filled with surprise the Holy Father exclaimed: "Is this, indeed, my dear child? Has she risen from the tomb, or, has God shown in her the power of the Virgin Martyr?" "Yes," replied Pauline, "I am the person whom your Holiness saw at the point of death two months ago, and since St. Philomena has restored me to health, grant me permission to fulfil a vow which I have made, to erect a church in honour of my benefactress."

Having received a detailed account of Pauline's visit to the shrine of Mugnano and the circumstances of her wonderful cure, the Pope promised to proceed at once to the examination of the "cause" of the saint.

Within a year after the departure of Mademoiselle Jaricot from her house, she returned to Lyons where her restoration to perfect health was regarded as an undoubted miracle. When she repaired on foot to the church of Notre Dame de Fourvieres, pious crowds followed her and joined her in hymns of praise and thanksgiving at the shrine of our Blessed Lady.

Later on, the grateful child of St. Philomena fulfilled her vow by building a beautiful chapel dedicated to her patroness on the slope that leads up to the Basilica of Notre Dame. No sacrifice or trouble was henceforth considered too great by Pauline in spreading devotion to the Holy Martyr. She promoted it, together with the other pious associations which, through her efforts, had already gained ground in the Church. In one of her letters she tells us—that, when in company with her—the representatives of the “Living Rosary,” prostrated themselves at the feet of Gregory XVI., supreme Pontiff imparted a special blessing to their association, and commended them and their work to the protection of St. Philomena. And on the occasion of Pauline’s last presentation at the Vatican His Holiness renewed this commendation, saying:—“Pray to St. Philomena—whatever you ask from her she will obtain for you.”

The miracles wrought at the chapel at Lyons became almost as numerous and remarkable as the favours vouchsafed at the Shrine of Mugnano, and, at the present day, the devotion of the citizens to the saint manifests itself with extraordinary fervour.

It was at Lyons that the cure of Mademoiselle Le Clerc took place. This pious lady had been a hopeless invalid for eight years, having totally lost the use of her limbs. Through the intercession of St. Philomena she was miraculously restored. The miracle wrought in her behalf was attested by the Bishop of Belley, the Mayor of Ambrieux, and twenty-four physicians. Returning to her home at Roussillon she built a chapel in honour of the little wonder-working saint.

Between Pauline Jaricot and the Venerable Curé of d’Ars, a friendship of the holiest kind long existed. She impressed this holy priest with such veneration for her favourite saint that he became an ardent promoter of devotion to St. Philomena. To her advocacy he attributed many marvellous graces and favours, which are recorded in the story of his life. Having erected a shrine containing a portion of the saint’s relics in his church, cures of earthly ills and extraordinary conversions of obdurate hearts were witnessed in this holy spot. The oil that burned before the altar became a source of miraculous healing, while the innumerable *ex voto* tributes of gratitude that line the walls of the little sanctuary, bear witness to the veneration and love in which she is held at the present day. To the zeal and sanctity of the Curé of Are may be ascribed, in great measure, the rapid and universal spread of devotion to St. Philomena throughout France. Medals and other memorials of the Virgin-Martyr distributed by him were fruitful of many miracles. The story of the extinction of a fire at his house (caused by the agency of the devil) through the presence of a statue of St. Philomena, will be remembered by many readers of Monsieur Vianney’s life.

During the last thirty years, France has, so to speak, been covered, with votive churches to our saint, while the three festivals—the 10th of August, the 25th of May, and the Sunday within the octave of the Ascension—are preceded by novenas and observed with great devotion and solemnity. The limits of these pages prevent our noticing the myriads of graces and favours showered on the faithful of France by St. Philomena.

Among the clients of the martyr, whose special holiness has distinguished them in the annals of this century may be named—Père Varin, one of the restorers of the Society of Jesus in France; Venerable Mother Barat, foundress of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart; Madame d’Houet, foundress of the Faithful Companions of Jesus and Mary; Pere Eymart, founder of the Priests of the Most Holy Sacrament.

In the year 1835, the devotion to the saint was introduced into Paris, where, ever since it has found an abiding centre. A parishioner of St. Gervais, having obtained a miraculous favour through the intercession of St. Philomena, presented to the church some relics which he had received from Mademoiselle Jaricot, together with a picture of the saint. Shortly afterwards a side chapel was dedicated to her honour, St. Gervais is now a place of frequent pilgrimages, while the display of *ex voto* offerings and tablets rivals that of the mother-shrine at Mugnano. Those who have visited Paris will remember the position of the Church of St. Gervais, close to the Hotel de Ville. This quarter of the city was the unhappy scene of the worst excesses of the Communists in 1870. The Hotel de Ville, as many of us recollect, was then reduced to ashes, while

churches on every side were desecrated and profaned during those days of anarchy. Strange to say, although preparations had been made by the Communists to set fire to St. Gervais and sack its treasury, by some mysterious intervention the impious purpose was never carried out. And while the Prussian shells wrought pitiless havoc over the whole city, the church of St. Gervais and the house of the parish priest escaped injury. The priests attached to the church never forsook their posts, yet not one of them was arrested, nor did they suffer any loss in the midst of general ruin and pillage.

In recognition of this preservation, thirteen lamps commemorative of the thirteen childhood years of St. Philomena, perpetually burn before her altar, and the oil in them is deemed to possess healing powers. An Association of prayer, under her invocation, in the Church of St. Gervais has been raised to the dignity of an Arch-confraternity by our present Holy Father Leo XIII.

Let us now return to the shrine at Mugnano. The present beautiful church, surmounted by its dome and towers, was undertaken in 1853, and completed three years later. Its great attraction is the chapel containing the relics of St. Philomena. A profusion of the finest marbles, mingled with agate and porphyry, cover the walls from floor to ceiling. Stately columns, supporting Corinthian capitols of white marble, impart an appearance of chaste splendour to the whole interior. Over the white marble altar stands the case containing the relics, revealing the figure of the saint, half sitting, half reclining on her couch, radiant in jewels and costly attire. Above is the familiar picture of our Lady of Good Counsel. At the opposite side of the nave is an altar, on which rests the reliquary containing the phial of the martyr's blood. This exquisite casket was the gift of Marie Thèrese, Queen of Naples. It is entirely composed of silver, and through an aperture filled with glass, the sacred relic may be easily seen. The generosity of faithful hearts, in happier times, bestowed vast endowments, and estates on this church of St. Philomena, and thus provided for the relief of the poor and the advancement of other meritorious works. But, alas! the sacrilegious hands of the usurper have confiscated all.

The constant stream of pilgrims has, however, never ceased. Old and young, rich and poor of all nationalities, assemble there, and bring away with them graces untold, and a deep sense of the power of God through the efficacy of His saints.

The roll of pilgrims contains many royal names, among which we notice:—Ferdinand II. of Naples, two queens of Naples and one of Sardinia, Marie Amelie of France, wife of Louis Phillippe; and Maria Christina, Queen of the two Sicilies. The latter was foundress of the Orphanage of the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, which adjoins the sanctuary. She raised it in thanksgiving for petitions granted on the many occasions of her visits to the shrine. Hosts of distinguished personages, including Cardinals, Archbishops, and Bishops from all the world over, have inscribed their names on these records of piety and faith.

The decree authorizing the devotion to St. Philomena, and granting to the clergy of Nola the privilege of saying Mass in her honour, was published by Gregory XVI. on January 30th, 1837. In March, 1839, the same Pontiff, by decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, raised her feast to the dignity of a double of the second class. It is to be noted that hers is the only instance of a "Proper Office" being granted in honour of a saint of whom no details are recorded or known, except the bare fact of her martyrdom. This was indicated, as we have already remarked, by the emblems cut on her tomb, and the three simple words inscribed on the slab enclosing her place of rest:

"Pax tecum! Philomena." "Peace be with thee! Philomena."

The successors of Gregory XVI. in the Pontifical chair, have given evidences of a similar veneration for this martyr of the primitive Church.

Pius IX., when Archbishop of Spoleto, was prostrated by an illness, in which his life was despaired of. In his apartment was a figure of the saint, resting within an enclosed case. As he lay apparently awaiting death, a knocking seemed to proceed from the little shrine. From that moment the Archbishop began to recover, and soon he was perfectly restored to health. Afterwards, when he had been raised to the Pontificate, he made a pilgrimage in person to Mugnano. It was performed during the period of his exile, Nov. 7th, 1849. His reception was one of memorable splendour. At the church of St. Philomena he was received by the King of Naples, who humbly knelt on the bare ground, when assisting him to alight. The Queen, with seven children, and many royal personages, knelt on the steps leading to the church door to receive the

blessing of the Holy Father as he ascended. In memory of the event, Pius IX. granted many new spiritual favours to the Sanctuary of Mugnano. During his sojourn at Naples, he named St. Philomena one of the patrons of the kingdom, and later on, in 1862, gave her as patron to “The Children of Mary,” and confirmed her title of “Protector of the Living Rosary.”

The present Pope, while administrator of the diocese of Benevento, visited Mugnano twice, and since then, has sent a costly offering to the Church of St. Philomena. Confraternities and Sodalties placed under her invocation have been many times favoured by Leo XIII. with increased indulgences.

In Ireland, the devotion to this child-saint and martyr has been taken up with great fervour, and rewarded with many striking favours.

The pious sisterhoods, to whose hands is confided the great work of Catholic education, have not been slow to find how powerful is the help of the “little wonder-worker.” Schools, special works of charity, the wants of the sick and afflicted, have many a time been blessed and promoted in wonderful ways through the invocation of St. Philomena. Her name is a household word in many Irish homes. Many a stricken heart turns to her for aid in the necessities which encompass our various paths through this land of distress and sorrow. And it is sweet to think that much of that beautiful fervour and devotion towards St. Philomena, which has spread like the odour of some delicate fragrant flower over pagan and far-off lands, has been borne thither by Irish hands and Irish hearts.

The Messenger de St. Philomene et du Venerable Cure d’Ars, published in Paris (monthly) contains interesting records of the miracles worked, and favours granted by the “Virgin Wonder-worker” in every portion of the globe. We should recommend its perusal to our educated readers, especially to the clients of St. Philomena.

Were space at our disposal, we should gladly place some extracts from it on record here. However, before we close this sketch, we select one which has struck us by its simple beauty, and tells how our saint hearkens to the prayers of the little ones of Christ.

In a province of France there lived a child named Marie Philomene, who, from her earliest years had been taught to invoke her holy patron, by whom more than once she was delivered from danger. In May, 1883, when but five years old, she was attacked by a fatal illness. The physician declared her case quite hopeless, and one evening informed the afflicted parents of the little sufferer that it was useless for him to return, inasmuch as all the symptoms of death had already set in.

Her godmother, who was kneeling by her little cot, bethought of invoking St. Philomena, and made the child kiss a picture representing her.

She could no longer see nor lift her hands, but could still hear. Suddenly with a trembling voice she exclaimed, “Godmother, where is St. Philomena? what shall I say to her?” “Ask her to come to you,” was the reply. “Tell her you will give yourself to God, and teach little children. Ask her to send you some sleep, and promise to go to Mass tomorrow to thank her.”

A few moments later the child said she would like to go to sleep, and then fell into a gentle slumber. At 6 o’clock the following morning, she sat up in bed, saying “St Philomena has cured me! I want to go to Mass!” Arising, she dressed herself, and walked to church, a mile distant, holding her godmother’s hand.

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Our story of the great wonders wrought by the intercession of Philomena may not for the present extend farther.

May our efforts to retrace some of the glories which surround the name of the youthful Martyr of the Catacombs increase the fervour of those devoted to her. May they urge others to spread wider still veneration for her virtues of constancy and heroism, by which she obtained such favour with God, and merited so many benedictions for those who invoke her! St. Philomena! Pray for us.

Nihil Obstat:  
JOANNES KEANE. S. J.  
Cens. Theol.Deput.

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