

# ST. PASCAL BAYLON

## WHY SAINT PASCHAL?

In 1907 Father Autbert Groeteken, a Franciscan of Saxony, wrote a charming, factual biography of St. Paschal Baylon. The present booklet is largely an adaptation from the German work of Father Autbert.

In our disordered world a look into the life of St. Paschal may prove soothing to our troubled spirits. Not only Franciscan lay-brothers regard him as their patron and model; he is an inspiration to all who strive for the better things of life.

Far from the hustle and bustle of crowded streets, he spent one-half of his life as a humble shepherd, the other half as a simple lay-brother in the monasteries of Spain. Well might we ask: "What did he ever do to deserve notice?" That is precisely what many people said when Pope Leo XIII selected him as the patron of all Eucharistic Congresses and societies.

Without any formal schooling, Paschal tended his flocks on the hills of Aragon. By nature bashful, he felt at home under the blue skies, and there he learned of God's beauty and goodness. Though he cut no figure in the history of his time, he is known and loved today the world over, while his politically powerful contemporaries have passed into oblivion. As we shall see, there was real poetry in his life, beauty in his spirit that sought its peace and its strength at the foot of the tabernacle.

### 1. CHILD OF GRACE

Pentecost fell on 16 May 1540 and on this day, in the town of Torre Hermosa, Aragon, our saint was born. He was named Paschal in honour of Pascua de Pentecosta, for local custom required that a child be called after the saint or feast day on which it was born. His mother was a deeply religious woman who spared no effort in the training of her child. She took him to Mass in the parish church, and from then on Paschal fell in love with the Blessed Sacrament. Many is the time he slipped away from his mother or his playmates to keep vigil before the tabernacle. He was indeed a child of grace who gave early indications of the wondrous plan of God in his regard. "The path of the just, as a shining light, goeth forwards and increaseth even to perfect day" (Proverb 4: 18).

Early in his life Paschal was given a flock of sheep to tend for his father. Shepherding the flocks was a common task for the youngsters of Aragon. But seldom, if ever, was there a shepherd more conscientious than Paschal. His father warned him to be most careful lest the sheep do damage to other people's fields. In spite of his vigilance, however, some of the flock managed to elude his watchful eye. Paschal was always ready to make good the loss which others suffered from his sheep.

Being alone in the fields, Paschal found it easy to think about God. While his eyes watched the sheep, his mind and heart would speed away to the village church to adore the Blessed Sacrament.

Though he never had a chance to go to school, he longed to be able to read and write. It was unusual courage that spurred him on to surmount all handicaps. Someone had given him a book of the Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He learned it the hard way - asking passers-by to help him with the words. He would copy letters of the alphabet on little slips of paper, adding something new each day to his store of knowledge. One must admire his zeal, for it was not long before he had learned to recite the Little Office of Our Lady.

A childlike love of Mary showed itself early in the life of Paschal. He loved to pasture his flocks near her little wayside shrines. On his shepherd's staff he carried a small statue of his heavenly Mother. If he remained in one spot for a long time, he would stick his staff in the ground and pray before his portable shrine. Soon the people called him "the holy, little shepherd." He was regarded with favour by heaven too as the following incident proves.

Near Alconchel he and a fellow shepherd were suddenly overtaken by a raging wild storm. They sought shelter near two giant trees that seemed to defy the force of the wind. Suddenly, with a mighty crash, the trees came tumbling to the ground. But the two youths were not hurt. Paschal said, "Let us thank God, for only by His mighty protection did we escape this danger."

## 2. EARLY TRIALS

No life is without its trials, not even the life of a child. True, the problems of a boy in his early years may appear trivial to his elders, but to the boy they are big and very real.

Paschal loved the life of a shepherd, but he also loved to pray and meditate. And sometimes, quite naturally, his sheep took advantage of his prayers to seek better pasture in the neighbour's fields. He always blamed himself severely when this happened, and hastened to the neighbours to beg pardon and make restitution.

To help support the family, Paschal was hired out by his father to tend the sheep of strangers. He found himself in rather unpleasant surroundings - the youngest among the shepherds, many of whom were uncouth. The leader was a tough character who delighted in bullying the others. Fighting and cursing were the order of the day. What a trial for the innocent Paschal. He was not a "sissy" by any means. He had the courage to stand up in defence of what was decent and just. Though some scoffed at first, others were moved to mend their ways. In later years they testified to Paschal's great holiness of life; they even carried a picture of their fellow shepherd who had shown such moral courage in his youth.

## 3. THE CALL

Paschal began to long in his inmost soul for the life of the cloister. He felt, with St. Bernard, that chastity suffered by giving reign to the passions, humility was endangered by the love of possessions, piety was rendered difficult by many occupations, truth was violated by too much talking and love was wont to cool in a wicked world. Hence he thought of entering religious life. His desire was indefinite as yet. Toward the Cistercian monastery in the neighbourhood he felt no particular attraction.

What did God want him to do? The great question of his vocation loomed in his mind, and wisely he sought help in prayer. In all trials, doubts and anxieties prayer is a sure refuge and a never failing source of strength. And Paschal, faced with the greatest decision of his life, prayed long and earnestly, sometimes far into the night. He invoked his heavenly Mother with special fervour and asked her to guide him aright.

Even the crude leader of the shepherds, who formerly delighted in making life miserable for Paschal, now remarked that he never had to drag him out of bed in the morning, because he was already on his knees saying his prayers. Soon Paschal added penance to his prayer and made it doubly effective. Hard as was the life of a shepherd, he still had the courage to deny himself some of a meagre fare. When a companion asked him how he could do this, Paschal answered evasively: "For me it is better so; my body remains healthy and I can do my work more efficiently."

Just as penance and mortification lead to God and free the spirit of earthly bonds, so solitude allows the soul to grow healthy and strong, while quiet leads to enlightenment. Paschal felt all this, and that is why he had a preference for solitary places. He avoided the boisterous, nightly gatherings of the shepherds.

One among the shepherds became his friend and confidant. For three years John Apparicio was privileged to be the bosom friend of a saint and to learn the secrets of his heart and the power of his soul. Together they would pray and sing folk songs while Paschal accompanied on his guitar.

Though they discussed their mutual problems, Paschal, as yet, said nothing about his desire to enter a monastery. Then, one day his feelings in the matter overcame him and he talked freely. John cried out, "Why of course, Paschal, you are made for the cloister!" All the while John thought that Paschal intended to join the Cistercians, and one day he mentioned them in conversation. His friend was quick to correct him: "No, no. Not as you say. I have no intention of joining a religious community here, but far from home where I can serve God and live unknown to all."

An unusual occurrence helped him make up his mind. One day while he was praying in the fields, Paschal saw two persons, a man and a woman, dressed in Franciscan habits. They told him God wanted him to follow the Saint of Assisi. They spoke of the many spiritual advantages of the Order and assured Paschal of God's great love for him. Then they disappeared, leaving the saint supremely happy.

Who were the visitors that spoke to Paschal? Some writers conclude that they must have been St. Francis and St. Clare. But there is no proof of this, and Paschal himself never spoke of the supernatural character of the incident. He did, however, hasten to tell his friend John that God had made clear to him his vocation.

Shortly after this happened, he and his friend were out tending their flocks in the heat of the day. They were

suffering from thirst but could find no water that was fit to drink. John suggested that they go on still farther but Paschal refused. Instead, he walked to a spot of sandy soil, scratched it with his hands and with his staff - and, behold, a fresh spring welled up from dry sand. John was overcome with wonder and gratefully drank as Paschal did. From then on he regarded his friend with ever growing esteem until one day he got a new and final glimpse of the soul of Paschal.

The saint came to him in haste to say farewell. Paschal was dressed for a journey; his earnest eyes left no doubt in John's mind that this parting was the real thing. Paschal told his friend that God had revealed to him once more that he should leave the world and enter the monastery. They parted never to meet again here below.

Half a century went by, and Paschal's name was on the lips of countless people in the luxurious salons of the great as well as in the humble homes of the poor workers. No one, however, suspected that in far-off Aragon an old shepherd, named John Apparicio, was treasuring many secrets in his heart. The intimate details of Paschal's life, mentioned above, were not known in southern Spain where Paschal died. Gradually the fame of his miracles spread even to the steepes of Aragon, and his old friend decided to visit his grave in southern Spain.

Thus it happened one day that the Friars in Villareal saw an old man kneeling at the altar where Paschal lay buried. John Apparicio gave free play to his feelings; he shed tears as he recalled the days of his youth, spent in Paschal's holy company. The Friars questioned him and learned the precious details of the early life of the saint buried in their Church. The old shepherd's testimony was given under oath and is incorporated in the Acts of St. Paschal's canonization.

#### **4. IN A STRANGE LAND**

"Go forth out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and out of thy father's house, and come into the land which I shall show thee." Thus spoke the Lord to Abraham (Genesis 12 : 1). Paschal heard a similar call when he was about 18 years of age. He was definitely chosen to serve God, not in the world, but in the monastery. His family made no objections; in fact, they expected that Paschal would leave his home to become a religious. His portion of the family property he left to his brother and two sisters.

In Italy, three hundred years before, St. Francis of Assisi had established his Order. Soon his sons were active in southern and western Spain; by 1500 some sixteen monasteries had been established there, though none were found in Aragon to the north. That is why Paschal began his long journey southward. Little is known of this trip, except that he stopped in Murcia to visit a half-sister who was very devoted to him.

At long last, the saint stood breathless on a mountain top. Directly below lay the beautiful valley which has been called "the Moorish paradise - the garden of Spain." The song of countless birds and the palm trees waving in the gentle breeze seemed to beckon him to come and make this his abode. It looked indeed like the promised land, flowing with milk and honey.

Two Franciscan friaries had recently been established, one at Elche, the other at Monforte. Paschal's heart beat in happy anticipation of joining the Franciscans, but for the time being, he hired himself out as a shepherd. He made the words of the Psalmist his very own, "This is my rest for ever and ever; here will I dwell, for I have chosen it" (Psalm 131:14).

#### **5. AT THE THRESHOLD**

Four long years Paschal tended sheep in the neighbourhood. He lived near the Franciscan monastery at Montforte and often visited a favourite shrine, honouring Our Lady of the Laurel-grove. In fact, he made it a point to shepherd his flocks near the shrine, just as he had done formerly in Aragon. When his master objected, Paschal answered, "I and my flocks feel most at home under the eyes of Our Blessed Lady. With her protection the flock will prosper." And so it was in reality.

Paschal's spiritual life was developing from day to day; he nourished that life by much prayer while he tended his sheep. The rosary was his constant companion but his deepest love was for the Blessed Sacrament. The greatest favour his master could grant him was to allow him to attend Mass in the village Church. When he could not leave the flocks, he would turn toward the Church at the sound of its bells.

On one occasion, as he was kneeling in prayer out in the fields, God rewarded his faith and his love in a miraculous manner. As the saint opened his eyes he beheld a vision of the Blessed Sacrament, surrounded by a brilliant light. This vision is well authenticated and is often recalled in pictures of the saint.

These years of waiting provided many occasions for the practice of heroic virtue. The life of a shepherd was not an easy one; the moral hazards were great too and it took more than ordinary courage to keep himself upright and clean before God and men.

Martin Garcia was the wealthy landlord for whom Paschal was working. The innocence and sincerity of the saint won the affection of his employer. Martin wanted to adopt Paschal as a son and leave him his inheritance. The offer came as a great surprise to Paschal, who promptly declined because he had chosen to lead a life of voluntary poverty.

His act of renunciation of earthly wealth was truly heroic. God rewarded him by opening the doors of the Franciscan monastery. Like an eagle, freed from captivity, Paschal's soul was ready for its flight to the very heart of God.

## 6. DESIRE FULFILLED

Early in 1565 Paschal met Brother Alphonse of Llerena, the Superior at Elche. To the request of the 23 ½ year old youth, Brother Alphonse readily gave his consent. He probably felt that this humble shepherd was a jewel that would lend lustre to any monastery. So he sent him to Montforte, some two hours away, where Paschal received the Franciscan habit on the feast of Candlemas, 1564.

Need we say that Paschal was happy? The spring flowers that opened in Valencia's paradise were but an image of the joy that dawned in the heart of the shepherd, now turned Friar. The Franciscan Breviary says of him: "Paschal grew up in the world as a flower of the fields; now, however, transplanted to the house of God, he spreads far and wide the perfume of his virtues."

Exactly a year after his investiture, Paschal pronounced his vows for life. It was a happy day for one who had already given his whole life to God. Now the solemn act was ratified by the ritual of the Church and the Franciscan Order. It was no empty formula when Paschal promised to observe the Rule of St. Francis. He really kept it to the letter all the days of his life. To him it was a sure way to salvation. When another Brother asked him, "Paschal, what must I do to be saved?" the saint had a ready answer. "Keep the Rule, and keep it to the letter." That is what he himself tried to do so much so that his contemporaries could say of him, "This young man has brought great credit on our Order; he will become its pride and joy."

Above all, Paschal loved the spirit of poverty which St Francis tried to instill into his followers - that whole-souled detachment from the things of this world. At times, Paschal went to extremes in the matter of poverty. His habit was so patched that it was difficult to know the colour of the original material! No wonder Father Ximenez could say that he had met many people who excelled in their love of poverty, but none that could outshine Paschal.

Purity had graced his soul from youth, but its practice was not always easy. It is a grave mistake to picture the saints as anaemic individuals who are ignorant of the power of passion. Paschal was a red-blooded young man who kept himself chaste in spite of the allurements of the world and the stress of violent temptations. He did it by prayer and penance. Actually, there is no other way. He knew the force of the current, precisely because he was willing to swim against it. Herein lies the heroism of the saints.

Obedience is for many the most difficult of the religious vows, because it demands a total renunciation of one's own will. No doubt Paschal found it irksome too. But he had vowed to serve God by obeying his superiors. If they wanted him to work in the garden or in the kitchen, in the sickroom or at the door of the monastery, that is what he did; and he did it cheerfully. Had he followed his own bent, he would have remained in the chapel all day; he loved nothing more than to kneel in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. But obedience came first in Paschal's life. His superiors could render an account of him "with joy and not with grief." (cf. Hebrews 13 : 17)

The mortifications and penances which Paschal practised make us shudder, when we read about them in this twentieth century. It would be imprudent and, in many cases, impossible to do what Paschal did. But the spirit of mortification which prompted penances is needed today as much as ever. We may not dress in winter the same as in summer and go barefooted through ice and snow; we may not wear thorns in our underclothing and chains about our

limbs; we may not be able to fast as rigorously as he did; but we can and should imitate his spirit, being content with what we have and not complaining at the slightest discomfort. To harm one's health by imprudent mortifications is wrong; to harm one's soul by sensual indulgence and pampering the body is wrong too. The former mistake was quite prevalent in Paschal's day; the latter seems to be the great evil of our own times. St Paul's words still ring true: "Even though our outer man (the body) is decaying, yet the inner man (the soul) is being renewed day by day. For our present light affliction, which is for the moment, prepares for us an eternal weight of glory that is beyond all measure." (II Corinthians 4 : 16-17)

## **7. THE POWER OF DIVINE LOVE**

A lover's thoughts are with the object of his love; his mind's eye sees the beloved always and everywhere. If he is in her presence, his heart thrills at the sound of her voice. Simple words that fall from her lips seem to him like precious pearls. In the spiritual life it is the same. To one in love with God, as Paschal was, nothing brings greater delight than the thought of God. As the Psalmist says; "I set the Lord always in my sight; for he is at my right hand, that I be not moved. Therefore my heart hath been glad, and my tongue hath rejoiced: moreover my flesh also shall rest in hope." (Ps. 15 : 8-9)

Those who lived with him testify that a smile was constantly on Paschal's face. It was a reflection of the joy of God's love that graced his soul. Here is a prayer that was often on his lips: "O my love, my happiness, my Saviour, my friend, my master! I desire nothing except you, my God. You are sufficient for me, O my Father, my Brother, my Protector. You are worthy of all my hope, all my love."

The prayers and labours of a long day did not satisfy Paschal. Often, at night, he would steal away to a secluded spot near the monastery and there pour out his heart in prayer, while others slept.

The cycle of great feasts in the Church's calendar provided him with new thoughts and incentives to increase his love of God. Christmas delighted him above all other feasts. He described the scene at Bethlehem so vividly, say his fellow religious, that one would think he had been one of the shepherds who knelt at the crib and embraced the Divine Infant.

When he was sick in bed in Elche, a friend of the Friars visited him. Paschal talked all afternoon about the love of God and would have gone on into the night had not the superior intervened to tell the visitor that it was getting late and that Brother Paschal was a sick man. The visitor left, saying he had not noticed the passage of time while listening to Brother Paschal.

## **8. BEFORE THE TABERNACLE**

One of the saddest results of the so-called Reformation was indifference toward the Blessed Sacrament. In the thirteenth century, St Thomas Aquinas had set the Church aflame with his exquisite poetry in honour of the Eucharist. The fourteenth century saw the glories of public processions that were a grateful tribute of love even the State took part. In Spain, particularly, the feast of Corpus Christi became a national as well as a religious festival. But with the religious revolution of the sixteenth century came also neglect of the Eucharist, abandoned altars, desecrated churches.

In Catholic Spain, however, God had chosen St Paschal to renew devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. He did this more by his example than by his words. To him the Eucharist was the very centre of his religious life, the source and inspiration of all holiness. Paschal's attitude was thoroughly Catholic, for, as Pope Leo XIII said in our day: "The twentieth century must be a century of the Blessed Sacrament if it means to be a century of resurrection and of life." And the Pope pointed to the humble lay-brother, St Paschal, as the model for all.

The saint found his greatest delight in visiting the Blessed Sacrament and remaining in adoration as long as possible. His numerous duties called him away from prayer a hundred times a day, but always he would come back to the altar, drawn by the magnetic power of the Saviour's love.

Paschal attended the midnight Office in the choir and, though the others returned to bed, he often remained before the altar until morning. Then he would go from room to room to awaken the Friars. He was now ready to serve the early Mass. If occasion offered, he served a second Mass - such was his love for the Blessed Sacrament and his reverence for priests.

His devotion at Mass permeated his entire life and brought him glory even in death; for at his funeral God worked an outstanding miracle. The church was crowded with people who had come to see their saint laid to rest. The coffin was open during the Mass and eager worshippers fought for a place near the earthly remains of Brother Paschal. At the elevation of the Host and Chalice, he opened his eyes in adoration of the Object of his love. Catherine Simon, a girl who had been ill for many years had a place near the coffin. Her parents prayed with deep faith and confidence in the power of Paschal's intercession. She was cured instantly after the elevation. The miracle is attested by doctors who examined the girl. Thus did God reward His servant, Paschal, and bring him to the honours of our Catholic Altars.

## 9. MISSION TO FRANCE

When Paschal was 30 years old, his superior in Spain decided to send him on an important mission to Brittany in France. It was the year 1570—a time when France was harassed by civil wars and religious persecutions. The Calvinists and Huguenots were doing their utmost to wipe out the Catholics who professed a belief in the Blessed Sacrament. The records of the martyrs of those days are eloquent proof of the faith and courage of the sons of St. Francis. Hundreds of them were put to death amid great cruelty and unheard of torture.

In obedience, Paschal tucked away the letters he was carrying for Father Christopher of Cheffontaine, the Provincial in France. Having crossed the Pyrenees, Paschal was warmly welcomed by the Friars living on the Franco-Spanish border. Because of the very real dangers of this journey, some advised against it. It seemed foolhardy to expose Brother Paschal to such serious dangers and perhaps death. But his spirit of obedience triumphed over all the objections. And, as for the danger of martyrdom—well that would have pleased the saint more than anything else. He continued his journey, dressed in a patched Franciscan habit. He had not a coin in his pocket but depended solely on the charity of the villagers along the way. This journey proved to be the most thrilling and dangerous experience of Paschal's life. It was certainly in striking contrast to the quiet life he had been leading in the Spanish monastery.

Shortly after he had entered France proper, a mob stopped him and shouted, "Down with this papist!" Paschal kept on walking, ignoring their threats. They threw stones at him, and he fell to the ground. He hurried on his way as soon as he could, but the wound inflicted on his left shoulder bothered him the rest of his life.

Upon his return to Spain his brethren naturally asked him many questions about his dangerous journey to France. He told them a number of other experiences which show the loving Providence of God. One day he arrived at a nobleman's castle. He was hungry and begged a piece of bread from the guard at the gate. When the guard heard that Paschal was a Spaniard, he grew suspicious and reported to his master, who was a fanatical hater of the Catholics. Paschal was brought into the Castle where the nobleman was just then dining. "You're a Spanish spy; your pious features do not deceive me. You will pay for this with your life!"

Thoughts of martyrdom danced about in the saint's mind. He was certainly ready to die. But the nobleman's wife took pity on him and, when she saw her opportunity, she had him sent out by another door. Thus his life was spared, but he was still hungry. A poor woman along the road finally gave him food and drink.

In another town, the people gathered round him, mocked him and began to throw stones. One of the men led him away, and locked him in a filthy barn. Once more Paschal thought his hour had come; he spent the entire night in prayer. Early the next morning the barn door opened. Paschal thought that now he would be killed. Instead, the same man appeared, handed him alms, and bade him on his way.

A Huguenot on horseback met the saint coming down a country road. He spoke harshly to Paschal and said: "Brother, is God in heaven?" In all simplicity the saint answered, "Why, of course!" The Huguenots deny the presence of God in the Eucharist; they claim God is only in heaven. The rider took Paschal's answer as proof that he did not believe in the real presence. Had the Huguenot known how deep was Paschal's faith in the Blessed Sacrament, the saint might not have lived to tell his story. But here again, by God's protection, his simple answer saved his life.

When he got to Orleans, the people tried to force him to deny the Blessed Sacrament. Their efforts, of course, proved useless. Paschal not only affirmed his faith but tried to convert his persecutors.

Weary and hungry, the faithful messenger finally arrived at his destination in Brittany and delivered the important papers to Father Christopher, the Provincial, who later became the Minister General of the whole Order. What those papers contained we do not know; we can only surmise that it must have been something very important.

The heart of Paschal was sorely grieved at the horrible profanation of the Blessed Sacrament in France. In some places, the sacred hosts were burned publicly; in Paris, the people trampled them under foot. Paschal's feelings in this matter are best described in his own words: "Holy Scripture already calls heretics senseless, unreasonable . . . Against them God will avenge Himself . . . St. Peter calls them irrational beasts (cf. II Peter 2 : 12). St Paul says they have minds covered in darkness; they have left the way of God by their ignorance which they brought on themselves through their blindness of heart."

Paschal's hair was black when he left Spain, upon his return his head was white. The dangers he underwent, the things he suffered in mind and body are proof sufficient that God must have been shielding him most marvellously. He could say with the Psalmist: "The Lord ruleth me: and I shall want nothing. He hath led me on the paths of justice, for His own name's sake. For though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for thou art with me. . . And thy mercy will follow me all the days of my life." (Psalm 22)

## **10. LOVE OF NEIGHBOUR**

A sincere kindness toward one's fellowmen is a mark of the true Christian. Piety that shies away from others, that acts in a superior and snobbish manner is a false piety. St Paschal made it a point never to let his personal devotions interfere with his duties towards others. His fellow Friars found him most affable. He had charge of the dining room and saw to it that the sick and old members of the community received an extra tasty morsel as occasion offered. It was his genuine charity that prompted him to do this. When he lay dying, he begged the guardian to have a special care for the Friars who were sick and might need special food.

His service to others, however, had nothing servile or fawning about it, as though he were trying to curry the favours of others. When necessary, he corrected others, even his superiors, but he always did it in the proper spirit of charity and respect. As a result, his fellow religious were usually glad to have the saint help and advise them. Many a Friar owed much to the kind words of correction and encouragement of Brother Paschal. He had a special reverence for the preachers of the Order and gave them many a useful hint on what to say and how to say it.

Towards the poor and lowly he felt a special compassion. He aided them in many ways—comforting them in their trials, instructing them in their religion, and dispensing material alms. A superior once warned him against being too generous to loafers who came to the monastery door; Paschal answered: "I give the alms for the love of God, and who knows whether Christ Himself might not be found among these needy brethren?" That was a saint's viewpoint, and who would dare say that it was wrong? The results of his charity proved the wisdom of his attitude, for, as Stolberg says: "Charity gives light to the mind and a holy glow to the heart. Just as a ray of light breaks into seven colours, so charity sends forth all the virtues and makes them return to her again. Brought to perfection by God's love, such charity renders a man godlike and turns his life into beautiful harmony, making it a song of praise."

## **11. TRIALS APLENTY**

Life in a monastery is not always easy and pleasant. Human nature asserts itself there, as elsewhere in the world. Sometimes there are misunderstandings that render life trying in the extreme. It is but natural that such things should happen, and they usually happen to men like Paschal. There were superiors who considered him a fake saint; they questioned his motives and reprimanded him severely. Paschal took all the corrections in good part; at least he showed no outward resentment.

His fellow Brothers felt a great deal of sympathy for him; so did Brother Peter, his Provincial. The latter was convinced that some local superiors were too hard on the saint. One day he said: "Brother, since you are having such a hard time here, why not ask to be transferred to another monastery?" The Provincial really loved Paschal and was charmed by his answer: "No, Father, I'd never think of asking for a change. I have found that if we have a guardian who is not so good, he is usually succeeded by one who is better. And, furthermore, I've noticed that if one chooses his own superior, he usually does not fare so well. It is like jumping from the frying pan into the fire!"

Besides, the trials that came from his superiors or fellow religious, Paschal had to endure many years of misery and torture from the powers of darkness. These visitations of the evil spirits were not due to his imagination; they were real and terrible. The devil frequently appeared to him when he was meditating on the Passion of Christ. At times

satan would assume the disguise of the Crucified Himself! But Paschal always detected the ruse and fought off these temptations with the sign of the Cross. He seldom spoke of these trials to others; in fact, he did not like to talk about himself at all. But his brethren and his confessor testify that he suffered much. He bore trials patiently. That is the way of the saints.

## 12. GIFTS OF WISDOM, PROPHECY AND MIRACLES

A human soul can be compared to a canvas on which the Holy Spirit paints a beautiful picture —the likeness of the Son of God. Because the saints placed no obstacle in the way of the Divine Artist, their souls became truly marvellous works of divine art. They were enhanced with many gifts and graces. Such, too, was the soul of Paschal. Truly humble, he distrusted himself. Therefore God exalted him and gave him the gifts of spiritual wisdom which put worldly learning to shame.

We know that Paschal taught himself to read and write; he never had a chance to go to school. How is it then that he could speak on theological subjects and give answers that made learned teachers marvel? God enlightened him. That is the only answer. In prayer and contemplation he learned more than others gleaned from books. Those who knew him well testify to his deep knowledge of the mysteries of faith, and they also insist that his wisdom came from on high.

Biographers of the saint refer to his writings, some even claim that he was the author of works of ascetical and mystical theology; but there is no proof of this whatever. It is true Paschal left some writings but these are not original. They are simply a collection of thoughts which he copied from his favourite authors for his own use.

God gave to Paschal the gift of prophecy. The following incidents are attested, under oath, in the process of his canonization:

In October, 1591, a Provincial election was to take place among the Friars in Valencia. At that time Brother Paschal was living in Villareal and had for his superior Father Diego Castellon. When the latter arrived in Valencia for the voting, he hurried to the room of Father Ximenez and greeted him as the new Provincial. The 32-year-old Father Ximenez thought his friend was merely joking. But Father Castellon said he would become Provincial and that he himself would be elected as one of the counsellors and novice-master besides. How did he know so much about it? Brother Paschal had told him. The two Friars kept their secret well but were, nevertheless, very much surprised several days later, when the elections turned out just as Brother Paschal had foretold.

A certain layman disliked the Franciscans heartily; he avoided all contacts with them. When Paschal heard of this, he said: "The time will come when this man will do much for the Friars." In reality, he became one of the greatest benefactors of the Franciscans at Elche.

One day a sick woman begged St. Paschal to pray for her recovery. The saint answered: "My sister, your prayer is not right; say rather, 'Lord, if it be Thy will, take me out of this world. Thy will be done!'" The woman disliked Paschal's advice and told him so in no uncertain terms. He, however, was firm in his reply: "Prepare yourself; soon both you and I are going on a long journey." The woman died the following Monday and St. Paschal the Sunday after! The woman's husband, John Ibanez, testified, under oath, to the truth of this incident.

The druggist at Villena was extremely kind to the Friars. He supplied all their medicines free of charge. Paschal said: "God will reward him richly; he will have a son, who will become a fervent Franciscan!" That happened too, just as Paschal said it would.

Sinners were also the object of the saint's special prayers. He could read the secrets of their hearts and was instrumental in bring about many conversions.

And, as for miracles, there are a large number of proven cases in which Brother Paschal, by his intercession, restored the sick to perfect health during his lifetime. Let us recall just one incident. It concerns a little boy who had fallen from a high step and had fractured his skull. Doctors were called and they thought they would have to operate. The child was almost lifeless but Paschal cured it instantly.

Blessed Nicholas Factor knew the divine gifts that enhanced the soul of his friend Paschal. On one occasion, in Madrid, he spoke in detail of God's favours to the humble Brother who was indeed one of God's favourites.

### 13. THE DEATH OF A SAINT

Now we come to the most important event in Paschal's life - his death. It was unusual in many respects. All his life Paschal had been preparing for a happy death, and he had the added advantage of knowing in advance just when he would leave this world. The Sunday before Pentecost, 1592, he was unusually cheerful. He visited a number of friends in the city and thanked them for their kindness to him. Then he said good-bye, as if he was going on a long journey. That same evening he suffered from a high fever and severe pains in his side, but he said nothing about it at the time.

Monday morning came and the church doors remained locked. Where was Brother Paschal? Usually he was the first one in the church, and he had the keys to the outer doors. One of the Brothers rushed to Paschal's room and found him deadly sick. The saint now explained just how he felt; he gave the church keys to the Brother and asked him to inform the superior. The doctor was called at once and ordered the saint moved to the infirmary where things were more comfortable. The doctor also insisted that he wear a linen garment in place of his rough habit and use a soft pillow. This was not what the saint had been accustomed to, but he obeyed.

The fever mounted steadily and the pains in his side increased. In spite of it all, he showed remarkable patience. It was difficult for him to lie in bed; breathing came with extreme effort. He told his fellow Friars that he would not die before Saturday. When the doctor referred to his critical condition, Paschal asked how much longer he would live. "You'll probably die on Saturday," said the doctor sadly. Then Paschal said with conviction: "Not before Saturday; it will be *after* Saturday; when God wills."

He loved his Franciscan habit, and though he could not wear it now he asked that it be hung in his room where he could see it. Brother Alonso told him to ask for it before his death. Paschal said he would do so, but the entire week went by and not a word about the habit. Even on Saturday night he did not ask for it.

Sunday came, the great feast of Pentecost, 1592. It was on the same feast in 1540 that Paschal was born in Aragon. Pentecost, this year, in Valencia meant much to him—it was his birthday into the Kingdom of Heaven. He called for his habit, and the Friars knew that death was near.

It is not difficult to imagine with what joy and fervour Brother Paschal received Viaticum the day before. At ten o'clock Sunday Morning he was thinking of the Object of his love. He asked if it was not time for the Solemn Mass. When he received an affirmative answer, he seemed satisfied. Suddenly a change set in as he prayed aloud with great fervour, calling upon his heavenly Mother. "O Mother of God," he cried, "look kindly upon this poor sinner. I call to you; come, sweet Lady, help me in my hour of distress. It is the hour on account of which I have invoked you all my life. Abandon me not in this moment, O my helper; with all my heart I appeal to you." A marked agitation then took place in the saint's body; twice he called out the Holy Name of Jesus. He was blessed with holy water, and peace seemed to return. He lay there quiet for a short while and then died.

### 14. PASCHAL TRIUMPHS IN DEATH

Since this was Pentecost, the monastery church was crowded with devout worshippers. They had known for some time of the saint's illness; now the word spread like wildfire that Brother Paschal - their saint - was dead.

The news was passed along from house to house and from town to town. Soon people came from everywhere to view the remains of the saint. At first, the guardian kept the corpse in the monastery choir. That was within the enclosure, and women were not allowed to enter. The men folks were telling everyone about the wonderful miracles that were taking place. Naturally the women were quite angry that they were barred from seeing these wonders. They threatened to invade the monastery! But the guardian acted quickly, and ordered the remains of the saint to be placed in the church itself, where all could come and pay their respects.

The sick were brought in large numbers and many were cured. The official accounts of Paschal's canonization tell of no less than twenty-five miracles that were wrought during the three days that the body was lying in state before the altar!

Let us recall a few of the miracles that happened during those momentous days in Villareal. The cure of the nine-year-old Catherine Simon has already been mentioned. It took place immediately after the Elevation of the Mass. A man who could not speak for forty years, began to talk. Balthasar Rupert, a blind man, took the hand of St. Paschal and touched it to his eyes. He was cured instantly. And so the story goes. One miracle after another. God was surely

glorifying His humble servant in a remarkable manner. The fame of his miracles spread far and wide. Soon eminent Church dignitaries and civil officials came to visit the church at Villareal where St Paschal lay buried under the altar of the Blessed Virgin. Even the king of Spain came to pay his respects to the humble Brother who had won the hearts of the people more than any king had ever done.

The tomb was opened several times to see whether decomposition had set in. thought quicklime had been put in the coffin, the body of the saint was still fresh; no decomposition had occurred. The lime, however, had eaten away the habit that covered the saint's body. At the request of the Holy Father the tomb was opened again in 1611—19 years after Paschal's death—and still the body was well preserved! This fact is sworn to by official medical witnesses who conducted a scientific examination.

It was but natural that those who loved and honoured Brother Paschal should wish to have his precious relics properly enshrined. Several noblemen were generous in their gifts, which made possible the beautiful chapel in honour of the saint.

### **15. THE SAINT'S GREATEST GLORY**

The civil authorities, the Church dignitaries, the common people—all were anxious to have Brother Paschal beatified. Miracles, worked through his intercession abounded. Canonical investigations were held and reported to Rome. In 1618, Pope Paul V declared Paschal, Blessed.

The miracles continued. Eleven dead were brought to life. A poor farmer near Valencia saw his land becoming useless, because of a severe drought. He went out into his field one day—invoked Brother Paschal; dug a shovelful of earth—and a spring shot up to irrigate his parched land. A six-year-old boy was rescued from certain death in the sight of two men who heard the boy's mother invoke Brother Paschal.

In the view of these miracles, and at the urgent request of the people of Spain, Brother Paschal's name was inscribed in the catalogue of saints on 16 October 1690. The reigning Pontiff was Alexander VIII, but he died before the decree was published. It was the following July when Pope Innocent XII canonized Brother Paschal—just 99 years after his death.

During the next century devotion to St. Paschal diminished. Toward the end of the 18th Century, however, attention was again focused on the humble Spanish Brother. It came about in a rather unusual way, through Brother Giles Mary, a Franciscan living in Naples, Italy. His work was like that of Brother Paschal—tending the monastery door, the refectory, and gathering alms for his fellow Friars. He tried to be like his famous model in all things. Attaining a high spirit of prayer, he was able to perform miracles in favour of the poor of Naples. For 40 years he served the poor and became the most popular man in the city. He too had the gift of prophecy and was sought out by Church dignitaries and civil officials for counsel and advice.

On 7 February 1812, the monastery bell announced the death of Brother Giles. The sad but grateful populace hastened to pay their honours to the humble Brother who had befriended them. But his death had another result - it drew attention once more to the life of Paschal Baylon who lived over 200 years before.

Brother Giles was beatified by Pope Leo XIII in 1888. It was the same great Pontiff who, in 1897, chose Brother Paschal as the patron of all Eucharistic Leagues and Congresses. Many saints were outstanding in their devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, and the Pope's choice of Brother Paschal caused much surprise. Some had thought the choice would fall upon Tarcisius, the youthful martyr of the Blessed Sacrament. But Pope Leo chose Paschal, because he considered his love and devotion toward the Eucharist pre-eminent.

There was also a very human factor that influenced the Pontiff's decision. The human factor was Archbishop Briganti.

In 1891 the first Eucharistic Congress took place at Naples - the harbinger of many glorious demonstrations in honour of the Blessed Sacrament. The second Congress was held at Turin in 1894; the third at Milan in 1895. The fourth was held at Orvieto. In 1897 Cardinal Sarto, who later became Pope Pius X, presided at the fifth Congress in Venice. It was at this time that Archbishop Briganti wrote a beautiful tribute to St. Paschal and dedicated it to Cardinal Sarto. "It is my belief," wrote the Archbishop, "that St. Paschal Baylon should be chosen as the special protector and patron, first, of all Eucharistic Congresses, and, second, of all devout adorers of our Saviour in the Eucharist." And he

justified his preference for St. Paschal in these words: “In St. Paschal the love toward our Eucharistic God attains a depth and warmth that is extraordinary. This love seems to have grown with him from his childhood as a special privilege. It lasted not only to the end of his life, but extended even beyond the time of his death.” The Archbishop, was here referring to the miracle of St. Paschal’s funeral, when the humble lover of the Eucharist opened his eyes at the Elevation of the Host and Chalice.

It was 15 July 1897, when the Archbishop penned these lines. And on 28 November of the same year, Pope Leo XIII wrote his famous *Providentissimus*, declaring St. Paschal the heavenly patron of all Eucharistic Congresses and Societies both present and future.

With this solemn pronouncement by the head of the Church, the faithful once more turned their eyes to St. Paschal. Many altars and even churches, in all parts of the world, were erected in his honour. Devotion was revived, especially in Spain, where a grand pilgrimage was scheduled to take place in 1898. Delegates were expected to come from all Spain’s possessions, but the Spanish-American War interfered with these plans. However, a national pilgrimage on 17 May 1899, turned into a real triumph for the humble Brother Paschal.

Early in this century, the youthful King Alphonso knelt at Paschal’s grave. He was doing what other Spanish Kings had done two hundred years before. Father Autbert, referring to this visit of King Alphonso, says very aptly: “Behold, the mighty ones of this world bow down before the almighty power of God’s grace that manifested itself in this humble lay-brother. And the noble example of kings will not have been in vain. Many others will come, if only in spirit, and pray, and the name of the humble Brother will be invoked in future centuries, when the names of the kings will perhaps be entirely forgotten.”

#### THE ANSWER

The Holy Eucharist was the inspiration of St Paschal’s life. As a young shepherd and later as a Franciscan Brother he loved his Eucharistic King with a love that was extraordinary. Hour after hour he spent in prayer. Only obedience made him leave his post of “sentinel of the Blessed Sacrament.” And then came his death and the countless miracles by which God glorified him. Paschal may well be called the *Man of the Eucharist*. Little wonder that Pope Leo XIII chose him as the patron of all Eucharistic Associations.

As in the sixteenth century, so today —the Blessed Sacrament is the fountain from which we must draw our strength. Without Christ there is no Christian living. How can we hope to meet the dangers of the present day and the insidious snares of secularism; how can we expect to save our Christian families and our glorious heritage unless we seek light and life, strength and solace at its source?

It has been the aim of the Church through the years to encourage frequent Communion, but all too often the menfolk remain indifferent. Some thought they were doing enough by receiving a few times a year, and they left frequent Communion to the women and children. That is not fair. As the Cure of Ars used to say, the men want to lead in other fields; they want to be first in business and politics. They should lead in religion as well.

There is no better antidote against Communism than a revival of Catholic ideals—particularly frequent Communion—among the men of our nation. This wholesome practice, willed by Christ and encouraged by the Church is bound to set up a whole chain of events in the souls of men, who are the guardians of our nation’s security.

The body of St. Paschal was preserved incorrupt at Villareal until the Civil War in Spain when the Communists burned the church and tried to destroy the relics of the *Man of the Eucharist*. Today the forces of world Communism are seeking to destroy something more precious than the bodies of saints, even the immortal souls of men. They aim to tear all faith from the hearts of our people. In this grave hour of peril, St Paschal stands forth as a powerful protector and model. He is the inspiration not only of the Franciscan Brothers who follow his mode of life but also of all Catholics who strive to make the Blessed Sacrament the source and centre of their religious life.

With unerring simplicity St. Paschal points out the constant answer to men of faith in this trembling, questioning world— The Blessed Sacrament.

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