

The Medal Mary Designed

The Miraculous Medal

By Father John Robinson C.M.

Australian Catholic Truth Society No.1738 (1980)

Mary not only designed a medal in Heaven, but also in 1830, she prepared a Saint on earth to be the medium through which she would give her Medal to the world. St. Catherine, (Zoe Laboure) was born on May 2, 1806, at Bain-les-Moutiers in France. Her parents were good simple country folk blessed with seven sons and three daughters. When Catherine was only eight years old, her mother died. Taking the two youngest children to a statue of the Blessed Virgin, Catherine said to them: "kneel down, I have something very sad to tell you; we have no mother on earth now, but here is another Mother". And, turning towards the statue, she said: "Mary, you will have to be our Mother now". Later on Catherine related: "I felt that the Blessed Virgin wished to be my only Mother".

A Dream, or a Vision?

One night in a dream, it seemed to her that she was in the Parish Church, when a venerable old Priest appeared to say Mass. She was greatly impressed by the devout way in which he offered the Holy Sacrifice. After Mass, he beckoned Catherine to come to him. Instead, she fled from the church. On the way home, (still in the same dream), she visited a sick person. And here also appeared the same venerable Priest. Again she vainly sought escape. He spoke to her: "My daughter, it is a good thing to care for the sick: you fly from me now, but a day will come when you will be happy to come to me. God has designs on you, do not forget it". At last she escaped and fled home. Then she awoke. Catherine told this dream to the parish priest of Chatillon, who said to her: "I believe, my child, that this old Priest is St. Vincent, who calls you to be a Daughter of Charity".

St. Catherine's Vocation

She already had a sister in the Community of the Daughters of Charity, consequently her thoughts turned towards them. Her sister-in-law accompanied her to an interview with the Sister Servant of the Daughters at Chatillon. There, hanging in the parlour was a portrait of a venerable old Priest. On seeing it, Catherine exclaimed: "That is the the Priest I saw in my dream. Who is he?" And on being told it was a portrait of St. Vincent de Paul, all doubts as to her vocation vanished. After surmounting many difficulties, in the beginning of 1830 she became a postulant at Chatillon.

At that time in the Mother House of the Daughters of Charity, in Rue de Bac, Paris, was the zealous priest Father Aladel C.M., as Spiritual Director to the Seminarist Sisters. Under his devoted attention and prudent guidance, the Spirit of St. Vincent and of St. Louise de Marillac the Co-Founders of the Institute of the Daughters of Charity, took control of the heart and soul of Sister Catherine. Immense was her love for St. Vincent. And immense was the paternal regard of St. Vincent for Catherine. "I had", she says: "the consolation of seeing his heart above the shrine when his Relics were exposed. It appeared to me three successive days". St. Vincent revealed to her, by filling her own heart with sadness, the calamities that were soon to overwhelm France.

At Holy Mass, Catherine had continually an undisguised vision of Our Lord in the Eucharist, according to the spirit of each Feast. As a result of one of these Apparitions of Jesus, Catherine said: "It was then that the gloomiest and saddest thoughts oppressed me, for I understood from this that the King would be stripped of his royal garb, and the greatest disasters would ensue".

Catherine's Devotion to Mary

Among her writings are found the following reflections: "I will take Mary for my model at the commencing of all my actions. In everything I will consider if Mary were engaged thus, how and wherefore would she do this, with what intention? O how beautiful and consoling is the name of Mary! Mary, O Mary! Grant me your love, without which I perish... O Immaculate Heart of Mary! O Mary, happy are those who serve you and put their confidence in you. O Mary, Mary, Mary, pray for us poor sinners, now, and at the hour of our death". Catherine prayed to her Guardian Angel to obtain for her the grace of seeing the Blessed Virgin.

APPARITIONS OF OUR LADY

The Apparition of July 18, 1830.

On, the night of July 18, 1830, at about 11.30, Sister Catherine was awakened by a voice calling her name three times. There she saw standing at her bedside a child of heavenly beauty with rays of light issuing from him. "Sister Laboure, Sister Laboure, Sister Laboure", he said, "Come to the chapel, the Blessed Virgin awaits you". "But", thought Catherine, "I shall be discovered. The others will hear me".

The Child, (most certainly her Guardian Angel), in answer to her thought, said: "Do not fear. It is half-past eleven. all are asleep, I will accompany you". Sister Catherine dressed quickly and followed the Child who walked at her left. The lights came on at his approach, and locked doors opened at his touch. The Altar was bathed in light, as if for midnight Mass. Catherine waited at the altar rails, until about midnight, when the Child exclaimed: "Behold the Blessed Virgin, behold her!" Catherine heard a slight sound coming from the right side of the altar, like the rustling of a silk dress.

At that moment a Lady of dazzling beauty appeared in the Sanctuary, and seated herself in the chair the Spiritual Director used when talking, to the Seminary Sisters. The Lady was dressed in a white robe of a golden tinge and a blue veil. Doubts must have entered Catherine's mind; surely this is a great condescension; "Whence is this to me". she must have thought, "that the Mother of the Lord should come to me"?

The angel, assuming the voice of a strong man, said: "May not the Queen of Heaven appear to a poor mortal under whatever form she pleases". All her doubts vanished. She then entered the Sanctuary, and cast herself on her knees at the feet of the Blessed Virgin, and placed her hands on Our Lady's lap. The Catholic faith in her heart told Catherine that this heavenly Visitor was her Mother Catherine was at home with Mary.

"There passed the sweetest moments of my life," Sister Catherine related. "It is impossible for me to express all that I experienced. She instructed how I was to act in moments of trial, and pointing with her left hand to the altar, she told me to come and prostrate myself at the foot of the altar, adding that I should receive there all the consolations that I needed".

The Blessed Virgin continued to instruct her favoured child: "My child, I am going to confide to you a mission; you will suffer many trials, but you will surmount them, knowing that you endure them for the glory of God. You will be contradicted, but you will be given grace. Do not fear. Tell him who is charged with your direction all that passes within you, with simplicity and confidence. You will see certain things; you will receive inspirations. Render an account of them. Have confidence, do not fear.

"My child, the times are very evil. Misfortunes are about to fall upon France. The Throne will be overturned; the entire world will be afflicted by misery of every kind". Catherine relates that when Mary said this, she was very sad. Our Lady continued: "But come to the foot of this altar, here graces will be bestowed upon all who ask with confidence and fervour. They will be given to the rich and to the poor. At a certain time the danger will be great indeed, it will seem as if all were lost, but do not fear, I shall be with you; you will acknowledge my visit, the protection of God and of St. Vincent upon the two communities; have confidence, do not be discouraged, you are in my special keeping.

"There will be victims in other Communities (the Blessed Virgin shed tears when she said this); among the clergy of Paris there will be many victims. The Archbishop will die. My child., the Cross will be despised, blood will flow in the streets (again Our Lady's emotion was so great that she could not speak for a time). My child," she continued, "the whole world will be in tribulation". The query arose in Catherine's mind: When shall this happen? An interior voice told her distinctly that it would be in about 40 years time.

To show the authenticity of these revelations, Mary uttered this Prophecy; and Catherine was still alive to see it fulfilled to the letter. "About 40 years time" Our Lady had said in July 1830. On May 24, 1871, with the rise of the Commune in Paris, the Archbishop of Paris, Monseigneur Georges Darboy, two secular priests, two Jesuits, and a magistrate stood against a wall and were shot down at close quarters. The Archbishop raised his hand to bless, but one of the executioners cried out: "Here, take my blessing" as he gave the signal to fire.

On the following day, May 25, five Dominican Priests, together with eight lay members of the Dominican College of Argueil, were commanded to walk into the street. The good Superior, Father Captier O.P., led the rest with encouraging words, "Let us go, my friends, for the sake of God". Again on the following day, May 26, fifty prisoners were taken from the prison of La Roquette by the revolutionists. Among them were 3 Jesuits, 4 members of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, 3 secular priests and one seminarian. This was an organized execution in which the victims were handed over to an infuriated mob. The massacre, in an enclosure, lasted but an hour, after which most of the bodies were beyond recognition. This took place at Belleville, the last stronghold of the communists, who were completely routed by the regular troops soon after the above slaughter.

Mary had promised that "St. Vincent will watch over you, and the protection of God is always here in a particular manner. I myself will be with you, I will always keep my eye upon you, and I will enrich you with many graces". There were no victims among the Daughters of Charity, nor among the Vincentians during the uprising of the Commune in 1871.

Back to the first Apparition of Our Lady in July 1830, Catherine continues, "I could not tell how long I remained with the Blessed Virgin; all I can say is that after talking with me a long time, she disappeared like a shadow that vanished". Looking away from the empty chair, Catherine saw the

Child still standing where she had left him when the Blessed Virgin appeared. "She has gone" he said, and stationing himself at her left hand he conducted her back to the dormitory. "Returned to bed". said Catherine. "I heard the clock strike two. There was no more sleep for me that night". Mary had told Sister Catherine that she had a special mission for Catherine. What this mission was, the Saint found out in November of that same year 1830.

ST. CATHERINE'S MAIN MISSION IN LIFE ABOUT TO BEGIN.

Here is the Saint's own account of it. "On November 27, 1830, which was a Saturday and the Eve of the first Sunday in Advent, whilst making my meditation in profound silence, at half-past five in the evening, I seemed to hear on the right hand side of the Sanctuary something like the rustling of a silk dress, and, glancing in that direction, I perceived the Blessed Virgin standing near St. Joseph's picture; her height was medium, and her countenance so beautiful that it would be impossible for me to describe it.

"She was standing, clothed in a robe the colour of auroral light, the style that is usually called 'a la vierge', that is, high neck and plain sleeves. Her head was covered with a white veil, which descended on each side to her feet. Her hair was smooth on the forehead, and above was a coif ornamented with a little lace and fitting close to the head. Her face was only partially covered, and her feet rested upon a globe, or rather a hemisphere (at least, I saw but half a globe). Her hands were raised about as high as her waist, and she held in a graceful attitude another globe, (a figure of the universe). Her eyes were lifted up to heaven, and her countenance was radiant as she offered the globe to Our Lord.

"Suddenly her fingers were filled with rings and most beautiful precious stones; the rays gleaming forth and reflected on all sides, enveloped her in such dazzling light that I could see neither her feet nor her robe. The stones were of different sizes, and the rays emanating from them were more or less brilliant in proportion to the size. I could not express what I felt, nor what I learned, in these few moments. Whilst occupied contemplating this vision, the Blessed Virgin cast her eyes upon me, and a voice said in the depths of my heart: 'The globe that you see represents the entire world, and particularly France, and each person in particular'.

"I would not know how to express the beauty and brilliance of these rays. And the Blessed Virgin added: 'Behold the symbol of the graces I shed upon those who ask me for them,' and thus making me understand how generous she is to all who implore her intercession... how many graces she grants to those who ask... and what a joy it is for her to bestow them.

"At this moment I was not myself, I was in raptures. There now formed around the Blessed Virgin a frame, slightly oval, upon which appeared, in golden letters, these words: 'O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to Thee!' Then I heard a voice which said: 'Have a medal struck like this, persons who wear it indulgenced, will receive great graces, especially if they wear it around the neck; graces will be bestowed in abundance upon those who have confidence'.

"Suddenly the picture seemed to turn".

Our Lady then gave her a vision of the reverse side of the medal. Saint Catherine saw, still within the oval frame, the letter 'M' in the centre of the frame. There was a bar on top of the 'M', and a cross resting upon the bar. Beneath the 'M', were two Hearts, the first encircled with a crown of thorns, and the other pierced with a sword.

This Apparition took place at the right hand side of the High Altar in the Mother House of the Daughters of Charity, 140 Rue du Bac, Paris, on the 27th of November 1830, Our Lady was elevated at a height of about three metres from the floor, and standing near the picture of St. Joseph. In December of that same year, 1830, these visions were repeated with this difference: Instead of standing near the picture of St. Joseph, the Blessed Virgin appeared standing above the High Altar. Father Aladel related that this Apparition was, as it were, framed from each hand, within the Invocation: "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee", which seems to indicate that the Blessed Virgin had her hands extended down by her sides. The Invocation was again traced in letters of gold. And again the reverse side was shown to her as identical with the previous Apparition. And again Mary said: "Have a medal struck on this model..." St. Catherine finishes her account of the Apparitions in these words: "To tell you what I understood at the moment the Blessed Virgin offered the globe to Our Lord, would be impossible, or what my feelings were whilst gazing on her! A voice in the depths of my heart said to me: 'These rays are symbolic of the graces the Blessed Virgin obtains for those who ask for them'." St. Catherine gave instructions that these last words were to be inscribed on the base of the statue of Our Lady.

Father Aladel tells of the spontaneous exclamations of joy that came from Catherine at the thought of the homage that Mary would receive: "Oh! How delightful to hear it said: 'Mary is Queen of the Universe, and of France!' The children will proclaim it, she is Queen of each soul!" These Apparitions were repeated at least once more.

SAINT CATHERINE'S CROSS

In obedience to the Blessed Virgin, Sister Catherine related all to Father Aladel, who showed great prudence in not accepting readily the account of visions from a young novice in her first year of the Religious Life. He awaited more certain signs, and showed himself almost harsh. He would advise her to return to her prayers, and be content to walk the sure and well worn path trodden by all her sisters in Religion. How could he be sure that this Sister is not a victim of delusion, even a plaything of the devil!

Poor Catherine! She finds herself straightened between two: The Blessed Virgin on the one hand, is displeased with the delay in having the medal struck. "My good Mother", she said in prayer, "you know well that Father Aladel will not believe me". "Do not be anxious", Mary replied, "a day will come when he will do what I desire, he is my servant and he would fear to displease me". It is evident that this delay was rather for her sanctification in God's crucible. It was the trial of her faith, "more precious than gold and silver," as St. Peter said. Mary knew well that she could trust her devoted servant, Father Aladel, whose filial heart was at the disposal of his heavenly Mother.

When Sister Catherine told the priest that Our Lady was displeased with the delay, Mary inspired him with a realization of the heavenly character of Catherine's visions. "If Mary is displeased", he reasoned, "it is not with the Sister, for she could do no more; it is with me!" From then on, Father Aladel entered wholeheartedly into the work of the Medal. He asked Catherine if she had seen anything written on the reverse side of the Medal "Ask the Blessed Virgin", he said, "what is to be written there". Catherine obeyed, and was told in prayer that "the 'M' and the two Hearts say enough". Nothing was to be written on this side.

DETAILS NOT WRITTEN

There are certain details on the Medal, as we have it today, that are not found in the written account from the hand of Sister Catherine. We have these details by verbal tradition. She supplied by word

of mouth all the details which Mary designed for her Medal. So, if we find details on the Medal which are not in the written description, the only conclusion to be drawn, is that the written account is not complete, but was completed by Catherine's verbal description to Father Aladel. Now we have the complete revelation of Mary regarding her Medal.

1. The first detail that strikes one, is the position of the hands. In the written account it seems that Mary's hands were at the height of her breast, when she said: "Have a Medal made like this". But the traditional position of Our Lady's hands is lowered and extended by her sides; with the Prayer: "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee", beginning at the right hand, going within the oval frame over her head, and ending at the left hand. This detail Father Aladel learned from Catherine; otherwise she would not have approved the Medal made by him except it agreed in every respect with the pattern shown her by Mary.
2. The Stars which are now found on the reverse side of the Medal are not found in the written account. Mary must have revealed this detail also to Catherine, for neither the Priest nor the Sister would have dared to improve on that which the Queen of Heaven had perfected.
3. Regarding the serpent not found in the written account: the Saint, on her death bed, was asked by her Superior whether the serpent should be included? She replied without hesitation: "Yes, there was a serpent of a greenish colour with yellow spots".
4. The rays coming from Mary's hands are significant: some of the diamonds in the rings on Mary's fingers did not give forth any rays of light. As she was wondering at this, an interior voice said: "These jewels which do not emit rays symbolize the graces for which people forget to ask".
5. Another smaller detail, not written, is that Catherine saw a small cross surmounting the globe Mary was holding in her hands at the height of her breast.

Mary's dress was the colour of the sky at dawn, that is, a deep white with auroral tint. Her veil was pure white. In the statues of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, her mantle is blue. This is not mentioned in the written account, because Our Lady was revealing a Medal not a statue. However, Mary did inspire the Saint to have a Statue made of Mary holding the globe at the height of her breast, the Statue which has since become the Statue of Mary, Queen of the Missions. Father Aladel said that: "White and blue combined constitute the Blessed Virgin's Livery, as emblems of celestial purity, and give the mantle an azure tint". Catherine remarked: "white signifies innocence, and blue is the livery of Mary".

Our Blessed Lady's beauty, according to Catherine, was beyond description. "She was beautiful in the perfection of her beauty". Mary appeared to be about 40 years of age. At one time, she revealed gravity mingled with sorrow in her countenance. But this soon vanished and her face "became irradiated with love". "Nothing can equal the beauty, the grace, the expression of tenderness depicted in the attitude of the Virgin, whose graciously down-cast glances, and hands filled with blessings, proclaim her the Mother, inviting her child to cast itself into her arms, or earnestly entreating the prodigal son to confide in her merciful mediation".

This Medal must be perfect, for it was designed by Mary, herself. It is entirely heavenly. It is the only Medal designed in Heaven. It was brought down to earth by the Queen herself, and modelled for us by her. And the Prayer inscribed on it was never heard on earth before Mary revealed it to us.

This is Mary's Medal, the perfect Medal. It contains a panoramic view from Genesis to Apocalypse of all Revelation. This is not only the "Miraculous Medal", not only the Medal of the Immaculate Conception, it is the Medal of Christianity.

THE MEDAL IS MADE

Finally convinced of the heavenly character of the Apparitions Father Aladel approached the Archbishop of Paris, Monseigneur de Quelen, who gave his approval to have the Medal made. "There is nothing in this contrary to the approved practice of the Church", declared the Archbishop. "The Medal will spread devotion to Mary; it will strengthen belief in her Immaculate Conception. Go ahead with it".

The first medals appeared in June 1832. Happy indeed was Sister Catherine when she took in her hand the first Medal! But ever of a practical mind, she exclaimed: "Now it must be propagated". The propagation of the medals was prodigious! The demand soon exceeded the supply, especially when graces were given in abundance to those who wore it with confidence. In the early stages of the Medal six miraculous conversions were recorded. It circulated in a truly wonderful manner, in all places and among all classes.

Pope Pius IX gave verbal approbation to the Medal; but what meant more was his example in the use he made of it. His successor, Pope Leo XIII, instituted a Feast in commemoration of "the Manifestation of the Blessed and Immaculate Virgin Mary of the Miraculous Medal" to be celebrated on the 27th of November. His successor, Pope St. Pius X, approved the erection of a "Pious Association of the Miraculous Medal in honour of the Immaculate Conception".

After Catherine had finished the mission Mary gave her, she continued her life of trials and sufferings, prayers and penances, to outward appearances indistinguishable from that led by her sisters in the Community; but inwardly, her "conversation was in Heaven". Mary had said to her, "My Child, you will not see me any more, but you will hear my voice during your prayers". The other Sisters knew that one of their number has been selected by Our Lady for the Apparitions, but no one knew that Catherine was the favoured one. She kept her secret well.

For 46 years Sister Catherine worked in the "Old People's Home" at Enghien. Her spirit was often ruffled, but she did not forget Mary's advice: "Mary instructed me how I was to act in moments of trial, and, pointing with her left hand to the Altar, she told me to come and prostrate myself at the foot of the Altar and pour out my heart, adding that I would receive all the consolation I needed."

In 1876, Catherine, a victim of asthma, and feeling the weight of many hard years, said that she would not see the year 1877. Knowing well when she would die, it is not without a touch of humour that she uttered this prophecy. 1876 wore on to December, and Catherine was still alive, but confined to bed. The last day of 1876 dawned with Catherine still alive, though very weak. She saw the sun go down, but, at about 7 p m., she closed her eyes on this world, in order to see God "face to face". When asked if she was afraid to die, she replied: "Afraid? How can you think I should be afraid? I am going to find Our Lord, Our Lady, and St. Vincent". These are the three who found Catherine on earth, and who "set her in a place of Pasture, and brought her up on the waters of Reflection," (Ps. 22.). For there she grew up spiritually and became one of the "Cedars of Lebanon".

She had completed 70 years and eight months in this world. Her body remains incorrupt. Her body is resting in the Chapel of the Apparitions.

THE MEDAL'S MOST FAMED MIRACLE (The Conversion of Alphonse Ratisbonne; Jan. 20, 1842)

Alphonse Ratisbonne was born into a distinguished Jewish family of Strasbourg. In the beginning of 1842 he found himself, through change of plans, in Rome. For one so bitterly anti-Catholic Rome was the last place on earth. His hatred of everything Catholic was almost violent, and he would fly into a rage when reminded of his brother, Theodore Ratisbonne, who had renounced Judaism to embrace Catholicism; and not content with that blow, but even became a Priest! So his first thought on entering Rome was to deal speedily with the business on hand and move out as soon as possible.

His natural goodness however, would not allow him to leave until he had seen an old school-mate, who was living in Rome, named M. Gustard de Bussiere, a zealous Protestant. This same friend had once tried in vain to convert Alphonse Ratisbonne to Protestantism! Divine Providence, "which reaches from end to end mightily, and orders all things sweetly" is clearly evident. For, Alphonse Ratisbonne called to see M. Gustard de Bussiere, who was absent at the time, so, instead, he met Gustard's brother, M. Theodore de Bussiere, a Baron, who was also himself a convert to the Catholic Faith.

A religious discussion arose in which Ratisbonne did not hide his deep anti-Catholic bias, and, his firm determination to remain a Jew. Baron de Bussiere's answer was to offer him a Miraculous Medal: "Promise me", he said, "to wear this little image; I beg you not to refuse"

Ratisbonne was indignant. De Bussiere came forward with the argument "I cannot understand the reason for refusal, for, according to your view of things the wearing of this object must be to you a matter of total indifference, whilst to me it would be a real consolation, if you would condescend to my request". "Ah! well, I will comply", replied Ratisbonne, "if you attach so much importance to it. I should not be sorry, moreover, to have the opportunity of convincing you that Jews are not so headstrong as they are represented. Besides, it will give me an interesting chapter to add to my notes and impressions of travel."

Two of De Bussiere's children put a cord on the Medal, and their father placed it around the Jew's neck; and immediately made another request. He presented Ratisbonne with a copy of St. Bernard's "Memorare", and asked him to say it. The Jew promised both.

Meanwhile, M. Theodore de Bussiere and his family stormed heaven for the conversion of Alphonse Ratisbonne. The latter was hastening to leave Rome faster than ever now. "Do not think of going", de Bussiere said to him, "I want you to grant me just eight more days. Our conversation of yesterday occupies my mind more than ever. Let me entreat you to prolong your stay...". Ratisbonne refused to remain any longer, and continued to ridicule the Catholic Church, much to the great sorrow of de Bussiere. A friend of de Bussiere died during those days, named M. de Ferronays, whom the Baron had told of his attempt to convert Alphonse Ratisbonne. The dying man replied: "If you have succeeded in making him say the 'Memorare' he is yours". M. de Bussiere went to the Church of St. Andrew delle Fratte, to make the funeral arrangements for his late friend. On the way to the church, (and here is another mark of Divine Providence), he met Ratisbonne out on his usual walk for exercise. He joined de Bussiere and together they entered the church. After a short time on his knees before the Blessed Sacrament, the Baron went into the Priests' Residence to make the funeral arrangements, leaving Ratisbonne in the church alone.

Ratisbonne, unlike the Hebrew Saul of Tarsus, who was "breathing out slaughter and threatenings" at the time grace had struck him, was glancing about coolly, with an air of indifference, if not of disdain. But, like Saul of Tarsus, grace struck him down in a marvellous way.

Away for about ten minutes, the Baron returned, and looked for his friend, and found another Jew vanquished by Heaven. A sight he could hardly believe: Ratisbonne, on his knees in the Chapel of St Michael M. de Bussiere approached, spoke to him, but he did not reply. Again, and again he tried to attract Ratisbonne's attention, who at last, turned on him a face bathed in tears. He could not speak for a while. "When they shall be converted to the Lord," said St. Paul, "the veil shall be taken away" (II Cor. 3).

At last Ratisbonne spoke: "Lead me" said this other newly converted Jew, "Lead me where you will... After what I have seen, I obey". He took the Medal which was hanging around his neck, covered it with kisses and tears, amid deep sobs and sighs. "How good is God! What a plenitude of gifts! What joy unknown! Ah! How happy I am, and how much to be pitied are they who do not believe". He continued, "I am not crazy, I know well what is in my mind". He asked to be brought to a Priest. He asked for baptism. He will not tell de Bussiere what he had seen or heard. He must wait till he finds a Priest, and then tell all on his knees.

Father Villefort, S.J., is the Ananias chosen for this newly converted Saul, who is to tell him what he must do. Kneeling before the Priest, he again kissed the Medal, and exclaimed with joy: "I have seen her, I have seen her!" Then overcoming his emotion, he spoke calmly: "I had been in the church but an instant, when suddenly I was seized with an inexplicable fear. I raised my eyes, the whole edifice had disappeared from my view, and all the light was concentrated on one chapel alone, and in the midst of this effulgence there appeared standing upon the Altar, the Blessed Virgin Mary, grand, brilliant, full of majesty and sweetness, such as she is represented on the Medal; an irresistible force impelled me to her. The Virgin made me a sign to kneel, and she seemed to say: 'it is well'. She did not speak to me, but I understood all."

Alphonse Ratisbonne wished the Vision to be kept secret. However, Father Villefort thought differently, and advised accordingly. Ten days separated his Conversion from his Baptism, during which time, apart from the interviews with the Priest, he was to be found in the churches of Rome. His realization of the Truth penetrated him with holy fear. Awe overwhelmed him as he knelt before the Tabernacle, and he would seek refuge in a Chapel dedicated to the Blessed Virgin; "Here I have no fears", he said, "for I feel myself under the protection of boundless mercy". Like Peter, James and John on Mount Thabor, he would exclaim: "Ah! How delightful it is to be here! What great reason Catholics have to love their churches, and frequent them ! How sweet to spend a life-time in these holy places! They are truly not of earth but of Heaven".

During those ten days, an army officer, General Chlabonski, visited the home of Baron de Bussiere to see Ratisbonne. "So you have seen the image of the Blessed Virgin", said the General. "The image", Ratisbonne replied. "Ah, it was not the image, but herself I saw; yes, Monsieur, her real self, just as I see you now".

Whilst speaking of the Rays of Grace coming from Mary's hands as seen by St Catherine, he said: "I could not express what I saw of mercy and liberality in Mary's hands. It was not only an effulgence of light, it was not rays I distinguished; words are inadequate to depict the ineffable gifts filling our Mother's hands, and descending from them, the bounty, mercy, tenderness, the celestial sweetness and riches, flowing in torrents and inundating the soul she protects".

Alphonse Ratisbonne has left in writing his own impressions of those days. "O, My God, I, who but an hour before was blaspheming! I, who felt such violent hatred against the Catholic Religion! Everyone of my acquaintances knew full well, that to all human appearance, it was impossible for me ever, to think of changing my religion. My family was Jewish, my betrothed, my uncle, were Jewish. In embracing Christianity, I knew that I break away from all earthly hopes and interests... And yet I do it willingly; I renounce the passing happiness of a future which was promised me; I do so without hesitation, I act from conviction... for I am not crazy, and have never been; they well know it. Who then could refuse to believe me, and believe the Truth?

"The most powerful interests enchain me to my religion, and consequently all should be convinced that a man who sacrifices everything to a profound conviction must sacrifice to a celestial Light, which has revealed itself by incontrovertible evidence. What I have affirmed is true. I know it, I feel it; and what could be my object in thus betraying the Truth, and turning aside from religion by a sacrilegious lie? My words must carry conviction".

Just as St. Paul could never forgive himself for having persecuted the Church, so does this "other Paul" bewail his past bitterness. "Alas! When my excellent brother embraced Catholicism, and afterwards embraced the Ecclesiastical state, I, of all his relatives, was his most unrelenting persecutor... I could not forgive his desertion of our religion; we were at variance, at least; I detested him, though he had none but the kindest thoughts for me... However, at the time of my betrothal, I wrote him a few cold lines to which he replied by a letter full of charity and tenderness. One of my nephews died. My good brother, having learned that he was seriously ill, asked as a personal favour that the child be baptized before death, adding, with great delicacy, that to us it would be a matter of indifference, whilst to himself it would be a veritable happiness, and he hoped we would not refuse. I was infuriated at such a request!"

Just as St. Paul, on embracing Christianity embraced the Cross, finding in it the essence of Christianity, and source of all Wisdom and Power, so did Alphonse Ratisbonne desire the Cross of Christ. "I hope, Oh! yes, I hope my God will send me severe trials which may redound to his honour and glory..." He relates that the night before his conversion, there was constantly before his eyes a large cross without Christ. It made him tired, even though he tried to banish it as being of no account. "I made", said he, "incredible efforts to banish this image, but in vain. It was only later, when having, by chance, seen the reverse of the Miraculous Medal, I recognized the exact sign which had struck me".

The Baptism:

On January 31, 1842, after having made a Retreat, Alphonse was baptized by Father Villefort, in the 'Gesu', the Jesuit church in Rome, on the eleventh day after Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal appeared to him. The Ceremony took place at 9 a.m., with Baron de Bussiere standing as God-parent. The Cardinal Vicar of Rome, received his Profession of Faith. When asked, what name do you wish?" he replied, "Mary". The famous French Preacher, the Abbe Dupanloup, delivered the Occasional Sermon.

The Holy Mass was then offered, and the sacred Ceremony was brought to a conclusion with a solemn Te Deum.

An audience with the Holy Father, Pope Gregory XVI, was arranged for him, in the company of the Father General of the Jesuits, and Baron de Bussiere, and he knelt at the feet of the Successor of St. Peter. "He was exceedingly kind", said the newly converted Alphonse Mary Ratisbonne, "as to take

us into his private room where he showed us near his bed, a magnificent picture of my dear Medal, a picture for which he has the greatest devotion. I had procured quite a number of Miraculous Medals. His Holiness blessed them for me, and these are the weapons I shall use in conquering souls for Jesus and Mary".

The Pope gave him a Crucifix bearing the figure of Christ Crucified, because he now bore Christ in his soul; but before his conversion, he had imprinted on his mind an image of a Cross without the Christ.

His devotion led him to make a Retreat before Baptism; and now his gratitude led him to make another Retreat in thanksgiving after Baptism.

The conversion of Alphonse Mar Mary Ratisbonne caused such a stir in Rome that the Pope ordered a Canonical Examination to be made of the Apparition. A favourable conclusion was arrived after nine witnesses were examined, and all circumstances duly considered. On the 3rd of June, 1842, the Cardinal Vicar of Rome declared: "The instantaneous and perfect Conversion of Alphonse Mary Ratisbonne, from Judaism to Catholicism, was a true and incontrovertible Miracle, wrought by the Most Blessed and Powerful God, through the Intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. For the greater glory of God, and the increase of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, his Eminence deigned to permit the account of this signal Miracle to be printed and published".

Later on Alphonse became a Priest, and afforded himself many times the great joy of celebrating Holy Mass in the Mother House of the Daughters of Charity, Rue du Bac, Paris, where Our Lady appeared to St. Catherine. He associated himself with his brother Theodore, also a Priest, in the Order of Our Lady of Sion, for the conversion of the Jews. He died in the Holy Land in 1884, after having "spent himself, and been spent" for his "kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption of children, and the glory, and the testament, and the giving of the law, and the services of God and the Promises: whose are the fathers, and of whom who is Christ, according to the flesh, who is over all things God blessed for ever. Amen" (Rom 9;4-5).

Lest this heavenly favour be forgotten by men, and by the same token to stir up our confidence in the divine aid, and in Mary, Mediatrix of all Graces, the pilgrim to Rome, kneeling in the church of St. Andrew delle Fratte, in the Chapel of St. Michael, will see this inscription, written in Italian and in French:

"On the twentieth of January, 1842,
Alphonse Ratisbonne, of Strasbourg,
Came here, an obstinate Jew.
The Virgin appeared to him,
as you see here.
Falling down a Jew,
He rose up a Christian.
Stranger,
Store up this precious Remembrance
of the mercy of God
And the Power of the Virgin".

At Ain Karim, near Jerusalem is the Tomb of Father Alphonse Mary Ratisbonne. On a slab surmounting it, one can read, in French: "O Mary, be mindful of your Child, who is the sweet glorious victory of your Love".

