

Virgo Praedicanda

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**LEGION OF MARY
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Cover image is designed by Gerald O'Byrne. D. March 1964. A well-known legionary artist whose distinctive work has on many occasions adorned our publications. The cover illustrates St. Louis-Marie de Montfort in Acies time, penning his celebrated prophecy which some believe to have been realised in the Legion of Mary.

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Archangel Raphael

All ye heavenly powers, Mary's Legion of Angels, pray for us. I talk to you about one of them: the Archangel Raphael.

The Book of Tobias is one of the short books of the Old Testament. It sets out as entertaining, touching and elevating a tale as could be imagined. It lifts the curtain on God's ways with us and has most valuable doctrinal lessons. The book contains the life story of the Tobias' family, father and son, and of their wives.

Tobias the elder was of the Tribe of Naphtali which belonged to the upper part of Galilee. Even as a boy he displayed extraordinary maturity of mind, such that the scripture says that he never did anything childish. He fled from the worship of the golden calves which at that time prevailed in Israel. Although not yet a man by the Old Law, he went regularly to the Temple in Jerusalem and fulfilled all the ritual there, while his deeds of charity were such as to be recorded in the Bible.

Reaching maturity, he married Anna of his own tribe, and the boy, called Tobias after him, was born. Carefully

tutored by his parents, this boy reflected their goodness and from his very infancy abstained from sin.

Then came one of the dreadful misfortunes which were permitted to descend upon the Jewish people when they had erred gravely from the law of God. The Assyrians, under King Shalmanseer, conquered them and transported either the whole people or a great section of them to Assyria. The Tobias family was stationed in Nineveh, the capital, one of the magnificent cities of antiquity. In those distressing conditions the family followed out all the religious rules, keeping themselves undefiled by the heathen ways or food. The uprightness of Tobias attracted the notice of the king who bestowed favour on him and permitted him to move about as he willed. Tobias used his opportunities to engage in trading and in this way he accumulated a fortune.

He put his freedom of movement and his money to most admirable use. He travelled widely to all his fellow victims of the captivity, helping them in their material wants and successfully encouraging them in the faithful following of their religion. The suggestion here is plain: that he alone was engaged in this apostolate – so necessary because of the inevitability that otherwise the captives would gradually be absorbed in the surrounding paganism.

One of his deeds at that time was destined to have a future immense consequence. In Rages, he met Gabelus, one of the captive Jews who were in great poverty. Having with him the large sum of ten talents of silver, he lent it to him.

One of his universal acts of goodness consisted in the burying of the dead Jews. The former king was dead and had been succeeded by his son, Sennacherib, a cruel monarch and a hater of the Jews. His venom in that

direction had been increased by the fact that he had been defeated in Judea and driven out. One of his vengeancees was to let anybody who liked slaughter the captive Jews, so that it was a common occurrence to find one of them lying dead in the streets, and unburied; because it was an offence to bury them. The extreme love of Tobias for his people led him to defy this order. Discovering a corpse, he would wait until he thought he was unobserved and then carry it to his own home. At night he would perform the burial. The legal penalty for this disobedience was death, and his family and friends entreated him not to run the risk. But to their terror he persisted. However, one day he was discovered and the fact reported to the king, who ordered him to be executed. Hearing this in time, Tobias fled with his wife and child. He was concealed by some of the other captives for all loved him. He lay hidden for forty five days. The king was killed by his own sons and was succeeded by Esarhaddon, who permitted Tobias to return. But apparently all his goods had been confiscated, and henceforth life was a struggle for the family.

Apparently the injustices to the Jews and the killing of them persisted, because Tobias resumed his former practice of burying them. His friends vainly pleaded with him, pointing out that he had escaped death once and could not expect a second chance.

One day, exhausted by this work of mercy, he lay down outside the wall of his house and went asleep.

Dung fell from a swallow's nest into his eyes and blinded him. He was then 56 years of age. This affliction brought his burying to a conclusion and probably saved his life.

His patience in bearing his trials of blindness and poverty was such as to put him on a level with Job. Like the latter, he suffered much from the tongues of his friends. The last

straw was when his wife, in a hasty moment, upbraided him: 'where now are your alms and your righteous deeds!' This exclamation was but a thoughtless one, forced out of her by affection. Let it be remembered that she was supporting the disabled man by the labour of her hands. But her words pierced his heart and hurt him so much that he prayed either to be relieved from his suffering or to be taken to Heaven. That anguished prayer of his was heard and in an extraordinary way. But before I tell it, I have to switch the story over to that city of Rages which I have already mentioned.

At the same moment that Tobias uttered his cry of anguish, a maiden called Sara, the daughter of Raguel, likewise cried out to God in agony. Her prayer was the same: that she be either relieved from her terrible position or permitted to die. The circumstances were that she had been betrothed to seven men in succession and each of these had been killed by the devil Asmodeus just before the consummation of the marriage. Although she was the holiest and most estimable of women, she incurred intolerable suspicion as to being responsible for their deaths. One day a maid, whom she had reprimanded, openly accused her of being a murderess who had killed those seven men. That was the cause of her torment and of her prayer. Her petition, like that of Tobias' uttered at the same moment, was answered. Before I tell you how, let us return to the Tobias family at Nineveh.

Running acutely short of money, Tobias thought of asking for the repayment of that loan which he had made many years ago to Gabelus of Rages, which was not too distant from Ecbatana where Sara was living with her parents. In the meantime Gabelus had become wealthy. So Tobias instructed his son to go upon that errand to

the far off place where the debtor lived. The journey was perilous and especially so for a Jew. So the parents poured out their most fervent prayers that God would protect their beloved child who had in every way borne out his original promise. He had grown up into a young man of supreme excellence.

It was at that moment that God determined to act. The text describes it as follows (Tob 3:24): 'the prayers of both Tobias and Sara were heard in the sight of the glory of the Most High God. And the holy Angel of the Lord, Raphael, was sent to heal them both, whose prayers at the same time were rehearsed in the sight of the Lord.'

So young Tobias set out. Waiting outside his house he found Raphael in the appearance of a strong and handsome young man, who gave his name as Azarias. He offered to journey with Tobias, explaining that he knew the way well and that he had often stayed with Gabelus; that is the debtor in question. Overwhelmed by this coincidence, Tobias brought the stranger back to his parents who were reassured beyond all measure and commended their boy to him. He promised that he would bring Tobias back safe to them. Of course none of them had any inkling that Azarias was an angel.

After their departure, the mother had a great revulsion of feeling. Her fears overcame her and she lamented that they had let the boy go at all. She cried out that they should have been content to struggle along in their poverty rather than run the risk of losing him. But the father declared his faith that the boy was in the keeping of God and would return safe.

The first night the travellers lodged by the River Tigris. Going out in the morning to wash, a monstrous fish jumped from the water and made to devour young

Tobias. In terror he cried out to Azarias for help. But the angel answered calmly 'seize it by the gill and draw it out upon the land. Then take out the entrails and keep the heart and the gall and the liver, because these will provide important medicines for our future use'. These things Tobias did, the monster panting helpless in his hands.

The reference to a fish coming out upon the land to devour a man sounds puzzling. But there is a well-supported tradition which would seem to explain it, namely that the fish in question was really the Egyptian crocodile. Moreover, one might think that the Archangel was merely staging an impressive miracle and utilising items which presented themselves. Not so. He was revealing a power which those elements of the crocodile apparently possessed, that is to help in ailments like epilepsy and leucoma.

Coming to Rages, Tobias asked the angel where would they lodge and he replied that it would be in the house of Raguel, who proved to be a near kinsman of Tobias. The angel continued that he had a daughter, Sara, whom Tobias must take for a wife. But Tobias had heard the story of the seven husbands and was reluctant to become the eighth one. He explained this to the angel who reassured him and laid down a procedure by which the devil Asmodeus was to be defeated. Part of the ritual to be observed was the utilisation of the liver of the fish; it was to be burnt on the fire and the smoke would drive the devil away.

Then the angel and Tobias entered into the home of Raguel who received them with unutterable pleasure on learning that one of his visitors was the son of his well-beloved friend, the elder Tobias.

Later, Tobias sought Sara as his wife but her parents did not agree, fearing that he might suffer the same fate

as the other seven. Then Azarias won them over by a promise that all would turn out well. The marriage was arranged and took place. The ritual ordered by the angel was fulfilled; the devil was taken hold of by Raphael and confined to the desert of Upper Egypt.

It forms a somewhat quaint circumstance that Raguel, the father of the bride, was only half convinced by the word of Azarias. For on the evening of the nuptials he had a grave dug, ready to receive the body of Tobias if he became number eight. But all went off happily as the angel had declared, and the grave was filled in without an occupant.

In the meantime, Raphael had taken some servants of Raguel and two camels and had gone off to Gabelus the debtor. The latter was rejoiced to hear that the son of his old friend was about to be married and set out with Azarias to attend the ceremony. He gave to Raphael the amount of the debt.

The wedding of course delayed Tobias considerably. Those were not the days of expeditious means of communication, so the elder Tobias and his wife were reduced to a pitiful condition of suspense and grief. Finally, at the first possible moment, young Tobias set out. Sara's parents bestowed upon him half of their substance of all kinds, including servants, flocks and herds and money, and sent him away with the prayer that the holy angel would be with their children along every mile of the journey. This prayer was being honoured in a manner more substantial than they dreamt. Azarias and Tobias set out for Nineveh.

During her son's absence, Anna had sat on the top of a hill for a portion of each day, whence she hoped to see him return. Now indeed that happy day was come. She

saw him in the distance and forthwith ran to her husband crying, 'Behold thy son cometh'.

Before they entered in, Azarias said to Tobias: 'Immediately after you had adored God and given thanks to him for your safety, go to your father and kiss him, then at once anoint his eyes with this gall of the fish which you have carried with you. Be assured that his eyes will be opened.'

After the indescribable rejoicings of the first moments, Tobias took the gall and anointed his father's eyes. Within half an hour his father recovered his sight. His first thought was to cry: 'I bless thee, O Lord God of Israel, because thou hast chastised me: and now thou hast saved me, and behold I see Tobias my son.'

In the succeeding days Tobias junior told of his adventures and of all that Azarias had done for him. His father was overwhelmed and they debated between them how they could express their gratitude. So they brought Azarias in and spoke to him their gratitude for such services which could never be repaid. They besought him as a small offering to accept half of all their new possessions. Also they petitioned him to make his abode with them. Then followed the astounding revelation of which they had no previous notion. He disclosed that he was Raphael, one of the seven angels who stand before the Lord. He told them that God had noted every noble deed which the father had performed. Likewise he had heard the agonised pleadings of Sara and her parents over the trial of the seven husbands. So he had commissioned Raphael to go first to Nineveh to escort young Tobias to Rages, and then to rectify the sorrows of the other family by relieving them from the devil and bringing about the marriage. Then he, Raphael, by the

instruction of God, had returned to heal the blindness of Tobias.

When he had spoken these things, Raphael was taken from their sight and they saw him never more on earth. They lay prostrate for three hours upon their faces, blessing God.

The rest of the days of the family were spent in unmixed happiness. After the restoration of his sight, Tobias lived 42 years; that is to 102 years of age. He saw the children of his grandchildren, and then he died and was buried honourably in Nineveh. After his death his son went to live in Rages. Sometime after that, Nineveh was destroyed by the Medes.

The chief lesson of this story is the light it casts upon the ministration of the angels. Among them St Raphael has always been credited with an important place in the office of healing. His name means he who heals. It is not to be thought that this reputation attaches to him merely by reason of the part he played in the episode of Tobias. From time immemorial that power had been attributed to him. In one of the more ancient Jewish writings, it is narrated that Raphael was commissioned by God to put down the evil spirits which vexed the sons of Noah with the plagues and sicknesses after the Flood. It was Raphael, according to that tradition, who taught man the use of herbs and minerals and other substances for the healing of ailments. It is even alleged that the Apocryphal Book, the Book of Noah, contained the first treatise on medicines, and that all this material was furnished by the Archangel Raphael.

The fact that those early writings have not been received as authentic scripture need not deprive them of all value. Such books often hand down to us correct

history and tradition. In any case they represent the ideas of the people of the time and may thus possess utility. Though not accepted scripture, they can be read as admirable spiritual reading affording sidelights otherwise not available. In this case for instance, the Book of Noah professes to tell us about that more than interesting time, that of the original great calamity of mankind, the Flood.

The suggestions that the archangel was used to enlighten the earliest men in regard to availing of the natural things around them for curative purposes is intriguing. For how else did those primitive men at once turn to the natural things around them and put them to medical purposes. They had not our modern aids towards analysis and experiment. So the fact that from the first they seemed to be able, in a rather expert manner, to attend to the physical evils suggests that a higher power was at work to illuminate their first steps.

Moreover, from the earliest times religion and healing were associated. There was a link between the priests and that science in every one of the ancient religions. We see this carried on into Christianity too. The monasteries provided the first dispensaries. In each one, several monks were set aside for that office. They delved into that science and provided medicines. This tendency would fit in with that most ancient idea about St Raphael being the instructor in that science.

It is one of our terrible mistakes to think that mankind was utterly deprived and benighted in all those respects before the days of our modern science. Much evidence exists to the contrary. May this impressive story of the Tobias father and son, cause you to think more in terms of the angels, whom the Legion of Mary calls the Heavenly Legion of Mary. We are told that we are to regard their

warfare as paralleling ours, each necessary to the other. They supply the immense power and we supplement them in the capacity of instruments.

Also, for the future give greater thought to St Raphael.

What Shall a Man Give for a Soul

It is indescribably joyful to see that the *Peregrinatio Pro Christo* has entered on a new stage. It has begun to grow in a higher sense than that of mere size. Many other places, having received it, are now sending out their own sparks which in turn will start fires. This suggests the rate of increase called 'geometric'; after a while this multiplies itself to inconceivable proportions. To bring home to you the possibilities of it, I give you the story of the eastern emperor who, wishing to remunerate his doctor for a cure, asked him to name his own fee. The doctor pointed to a chessboard which lay before the monarch and said: 'One grain of wheat for the first square, two for the second, four for the third, and so on.' The emperor laughed at the inadequacy of this reward until his mathematicians worked it out. Then it was discovered that his realm could not afford the transaction!

That rate of growth is necessary to the Catholic apostolate. I have mentioned mathematics in connection

with the chessboard. Now let us apply that science to the chessboard of the world. It tells us that if Catholicism as a proportion of the world population continues to diminish at the rate which has prevailed in recent centuries, we will have descended to five per cent by the end of this century. In human affairs this would point to approaching extinction. That cannot be – we are assured by the divine promise. But none the less it is an intolerable contemplation, for it is the opposite to the Catholic programme as delivered to us by the same divine lips. That programme was one of universal conquest, a going out to all men to deliver the Christian message and presumably to convert very great numbers of them. But to sink to five per cent would almost seem to deprive us of the right to call ourselves ‘Catholic’ which means universal. Therefore a most determined mobilising of the Church must be set in motion. The Peregrinatio has already shown itself to be a worthy part of that mobilisation.

It is not alone the pagan territories which need attention. Even in the Church itself many lead lives of the poorest quality. It would be conservative to say that half the practising Catholics only half-believe. The Peregrinatio must seek to breathe into those poor spiritless ones its own vehement conviction.

What shall a man give for a soul? Once St Francis Xavier answered this by the outburst: ‘To travel the whole world over, to suffer everything and at the end of it all to have won a soul – oh, what a triumph!’ The Peregrinatio would echo that magnificent cry. It too, has felt that urge for souls and has been stirred to travel for them. Soon it will have taken on gigantic proportions. Here must enter in a word of warning. Size is only secondary. Quality is primary and it must be studied all the time. Every beginning has a

touch of quality in it. A first venturing into the unknown may represent heroic faith and courage. But after that it is no longer at the same height, and it may be nothing more than respectable performance. Therefore faith must always be kept at some degree of strain. In other words there must be progressive adventuring. Progressive towards what?

Well, the campaign, both in faith and in dimension, must bear a proper proportion to the task as stated by Our Lord: 'Speak to every creature.' The estimated population of the world is three thousand million. By the end of this century it will have doubled. Present outlook and methods will have to be infinitely improved on if effective approach is to be made to that multitude. Such being the colossal programme towards which you are planning, I must speak to you in words befitting your spirit. Nothing less must be proposed to you than the very noblest examples which the Church has been producing during the ages. Then you must be urged to go forth and do likewise. But at the same time I tremble lest you take me at my word and proceed to do those very things.

What – you may cry – are you really saying that the headlines afforded by the saints are only ornamental and not to be seriously presented for fear that people follow them?

This blunt objection puts me on the sharp horns of a dilemma. One horn is represented by the command of Our Lord that all men be approached, and by the efforts of the saints to obey him. The other horn is that a cautious philosophy towards souls dominates us today. Its key-note is safety. Its adjective is 'prudent'. Its language is a sort of double-talk, almost amounting to this: 'Go forth on bold adventure provided you are sure it cannot fail. Be heroic

up to the point where danger threatens. Manifest a blind faith but keep your eyes wide open lest you edge off the beaten path.'

But the foregoing is a study in contradictions! Yes it is ridiculous. It is a subordinating of the divine operations to the rules of human prudence. But it is the outlook of the day. And that is why the Legion is nearly afraid to talk to you in terms of the grand enthusiasm of the saints. If anything unfortunate were to happen to one of you on the Peregrinatio, there would be a denunciation of Legion recklessness. But that outcry would in reality be directed against the authentic Christian standards as manifested in every page of the story of the Church.

So I speak to you according to the formula proposed by Leo XIII which you will find quoted in the handbook: You will avoid worldly prudence and you will avoid mere recklessness. Faith, love of Mary, and obedience will be your watchwords. They will carry you afar, as they have already brought you far. Some of the things which today you are doing would seven years ago have been regarded as wild recklessness, but they have been demonstrated to be practicable and easy. You have not yet got a martyr!

The thought which rises up in my mind about you is this: What would St Francis Xavier think of you if he could have cast his vision forward to your time? I assure you that the sight would have been a shock to him, a pleasant one, because you represent something unthought-of in his day; that is the entry of the ordinary people into the direct working for souls. The saint had bitter need for such helpers, but they were not available. If he had this help he could have multiplied his field of action a thousand fold. If this had happened, the history of Asia would be different.

I have been mentioning St Francis and now I am going to propose him to you as a model for your work. He was a worthy successor to those Monks of the West, as Montalembert calls them, who traversed the Continent of Europe on their great adventure, the *Peregrinatio Pro Christo*, from which you have taken your name. That was at the time when the Roman Empire had collapsed and barbarism had taken its place; when Christianity was, in the words of Pius XI, a lost cause humanly speaking. Like the Magi of old, those monks had a vision and they pursued it. They cut a path through every obstacle, and they rebuilt the Christian faith.

Of that same mould was Francis Xavier who 800 years later went travelling in like manner for Christ. He was born in 1506 in Spanish Navarre. His language was Basque which still survives: in his last delirium he babbled away in that tongue. In 1525 he went to the University of Paris where he remained for 11 years, obtaining his master's degree and doing some teaching. At that time the university had 44,000 students in fifty colleges. They came from many nations: Latin was the common language. Among his contemporaries there were the Presbyterians, Calvin and Buchanan. The Reformation had dawned and was soon to rise fully. St Francis encountered them and talked with them. But his fire was still choked under the ashes in him.

The generality of his biographers paint Francis as a man of soaring worldly ambitions and working hard towards realising them. But one modern biography depicts him as more or less putting in time there and with no particular programme for the future. Contrast that position and the potential which was in him. Francis was a reserved individual, whose manner did not exactly invite approach.

More or less lost in the crowd, there was nothing in his behaviour to cause those around him to discern the mighty force that lay in him. So no one devoted themselves to him until St Ignatius did. St Ignatius saw and finally made the conquest. St Francis was totally won to the cause of Christ.

Although the details of a life so great would be stimulating, I must skip through the years. In 1534 the preliminary vows were taken by the first group of Jesuits at Montmartre. Peter Favre was the only priest among them; he said the Mass. Ignatius and Francis were ordained priests on 24 June 1537, as subsequently after wondrous deeds they was canonised together. Europe was a whirlpool at the time, faith and conduct having suffered serious collapse. The Reformers were feverishly at work, successfully exploiting the situation.

That little band threw themselves into the thick of that mess. When one thinks it out, it must have been very much akin to what you have been meeting in the Peregrinatio, except that in the people of that time there would have been more faith and more misery.

Leaving themselves open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they sought every opportunity of talking to souls about God and the Church, and they performed services for those souls in order to prove their love for them. They joyfully submitted to the terrible hardships, sufferings, frustrations which such wanderings then entailed. Today it would be hard to find parallel for their privations. Those were days of fever unchecked, poverty unrelieved and every sort of misfortune running riot among the people.

Wherever St Francis was he would, immediately after Mass, set off to move among the people, talking to them, teaching, hearing their Confessions – all day long if needs

be, catechising children and grown-ups. It was certainly true that he gave every breath most perfectly to God. It was in the midst of these labours that the tremendous call to his life's work came.

The King of Portugal applied to St Ignatius for missionaries for India. Two were commissioned, but fate intervened; neither was able to go. It was a case resembling that of St Patrick who was passed over in favour of Palladius. In the latter case St Patrick was eventually sent; in the former case, St Francis.

St Francis was appointed in 1540. As the King of Portugal required that the missionaries going to India should set off from Lisbon, Francis had to proceed there from Rome, a journey of 2,000 miles done on horseback. Then followed the prolonged, perilous sea voyage. Oh, when one reads the details of that ghastly journey of his to the East, one feels the contrast with your luxurious boat journeys, and the still more luxurious air flights. Not that this diminishes your gift; you use the means which are provided for you, and you cannot lose a minute of your limited time. But nevertheless, think of what he had to do.

There were 1,000 people on that ship, a little craft without sanitation, which nowadays would not be licensed for a fraction of that number. A painful ordeal for a delicately constituted person would be the inescapable stench to which everything contributed, especially the amount of sickness. Some of this was sea sickness, but fever and other ailments were also rife. To cope with this situation there would very often be no physician on board. Here again St Francis was at the beck and call of everyone, teaching consoling, rendering every sort of service which the individual case seemed to need. His impact on all was prodigious. Such were his manner of

life and his humble approach as to leave no loophole for ascribing improper motives to him. He was undeniably holy, loving God, representing God, giving God. That was all. Everyone listened and was moved.

At length that nightmare journey of over a year came to an end. His real mission began. It was at Goa. That territory presented the earliest colonising field. The Portuguese and the Spaniards were the first openers up of the undiscovered world. Conquest, commerce, colonisation followed automatically. There is one thing that has to be recorded in favour of those particular nations. Though their conquests were attended by dark deeds and ineradicable stains, nevertheless through the whole picture ran a true faith, a belief in the Church, and a genuine desire to give that treasure to the people. Many of their administrators touched the very summits of moral grandeur. Therein they stood out among the other colonising nations. St Francis benefited by that.

He began his enterprise with the ardour which he had already shown. Ever after he continued at a pressure which would seem to be humanly impossible, never letting down. Look at him: his form and face gaunt, his garments threadbare, his luggage miserable – no more in fact than Mass equipment and an umbrella, the latter to give him some shielding from the heavy rain and the merciless sun. It is told that he carried with him a little square of leather to sole his boots. He used to walk barefoot a great deal, but sometimes the conditions of heat and surface were such as to make this impossible. Due to the extreme heat and the consequent discomfort and to the unrelieved operations of vermin, mosquitoes, ants and insects of every description, St Francis can be said to have passed his life in the circumstances of the fourth plague of Egypt.

He never gave himself any proper rest. He was usually heard praying away at night when all others had retired. He would lie down for an hour or two to give himself some sleep; then up again to resume that superhuman existence. He was consumed with the love of God; it drove him on and put him at the disposal of every person.

He went to Cape Comorin in 1542, to Malacca in 1545, to Ceylon in 1548, and to Cochin at the end of that same year. In all of these places, according to unimpeachable testimony, he worked miracles to attest his preaching. In one place a dreadful pestilence ceased on the very day that he entered there. He raised a number of people from the dead; his process of canonisation specifies four of them. He had a strange facility for mastering enough of the language of each place to enable him to carry on his work. It has always been considered that this represented the gift of tongues. One of his biographers attributes it to a prodigious memory and capacity. This explanation would not satisfy most of us.

Francis knew the names of people whom he had never met, and he greeted them by name. Repeatedly he requested prayers for persons whom he declared had just died, and this was proved later. An astounding episode is minutely testified to. One time when he was journeying on a boat, a crucifix to which he attached great value, slipped off his dress and sank into the deep. The following day a crab crawled out at the edge of the water, bearing in its claw the lost crucifix. It waited until somebody relieved it of its burden; then it retreated into its watery abode. Do not be led by the modern disrespect of the miraculous to laugh at those prodigies. The marvellous is an integral part of the Christian faith, especially to be expected when there is question of giving testimony to the truth of the Faith.

In each place where he was, he worked with a passionate sense of urgency. He really can be said to have hungered for souls. It is related that as he covered, sometimes running in his ardour, the distance from place to place he used to talk with the Mother of Souls about their need and beg her intercession on their behalf. Their necessities were acutely present to his mind and he was always full of the desire to move on to a new place. But this was his great pain. He could not leave those whom he had evangelised without the care of a priest, so he was always writing home pleading for others to come out to help him. He declared that he would love to make a tour of the universities of Europe to turn their thoughts in the direction of the need for priests in the Far East. He regarded it as a triumph to receive one priest and it was joy beyond measure if he got two or three. He would instruct them as to his methods and start them off in his own way of operating. Then he would feel able to move off to another place. His thoughts were winged. They flew to the limits of the territories which recent discoveries had made known and they went even beyond that out into the absolute unknown.

In 1548 he met a Japanese, Angeroo, who enkindled in the saint a great desire to go to Japan. He went there in 1549 and remained for something over two years. He then returned to India but subsequently made another visit to Japan, this time with the ultimate idea of entering China.

In Japan his work led on to the making of immense numbers of conversions. Then he proceeded to try to realise the final chapter of his ambition. China was then a land of mystery and imagination, a country of teeming millions, with its own peculiar civilisation. It was urgent to him that he now go there, for it was evident that the sands of life were running out for him. He was only forty-

five, but already he was a worn out old man. How he went on, nobody knew. He landed on the coast of China. That landing was illegal. The Emperor had recently prohibited the entry of the Portuguese who had discovered the country and were now beginning to come in fair numbers.

So, St Francis was quickly apprehended and expelled. He did not go far. He landed on a small island off the coast from which the mainland was plainly visible. There he waited, racked with fever, tortured by ague, sick in every limb and organ of his body. But dauntlessly he sought the opportunity of slipping over again. No doubt he was eager to have his exhausted life finally extinguished by force. For that was something he often spoke about: How people should aspire to martyrdom – the glory of laying down their lives for Jesus and the good and sweet and all-powerful Mother of Jesus. That was his great longing. But on that little island of Sancian [now Shangchuan] he died. That I suppose is a typical picture of all life: to die with one's ambitions unrealised; to die a failure in one's own eyes; to die like one's Master, a public failure! But was there failure in that? Was there failure in anything he did? It would be impossible to say that there was.

Even that disappointment of China has the divine hallmark upon it. It is a striking fact that on the day he breathed forth his life a child was born in Italy who was destined to take up his work where he had laid it down. That is to enter China and to begin the evangelisation of it. That was Fr Mathew Ricci. Looking down with love on his servant Francis, whom he was taking to himself, God ratified his mission, approved his ambition and provided for the succession.

Certain items of his outlook have provoked criticism. They do not tally with modern ideas. He was a person

who baptised without too much inquiry. He had an extraordinary gift for moving people. When they came into his presence they sensed holiness, and the sincerity and the love that poured out of his eyes. People were willing to listen to him and to be convinced by him. He would come among a people; teach them the rudiments of religion; get the prayers into their own language; and then he would baptise them. Often he would then have to move off and leave them. One school of thought would say that he should not have spoken to those people at all; that unless it is quite certain that one's work is going to be followed up, it should not be undertaken. In other words, the gospel is to be reduced to the exclusive level of human planning.

But baptism is more than a ceremony by which we make one a child of God. It is also the adoption of a soul by God as his child and therefore it confers a right to his parental care.

We may be sure that St Francis had his measuring lines mapped out for himself. He knew what he was doing, and he did it; and observe the way in which things worked out. He went to the Island of Mannar off the coast of India and he converted the entire population. After working there for a comparatively short time he baptised all the people. Then he had to depart. But the fact remains that within a few more months 700 of those people laid down their lives in martyrdom for the Faith which had been so hurriedly communicated to them.

The same could be said on a grander scale of the conversions which were made in Japan. After some years the government of that country became alarmed at the up rise of the Christian faith. They passed a law against it and death was prescribed as the penalty for refusing to

relinquish Christianity. It was impossible to interrogate such numbers. So the government chose a rough and ready method for establishing a person's status. They cordoned around each place and ordered all to leave it for a time by certain exits. At each exit they put a cast-iron plate bearing a great crucifix, so that to leave one had to trample on the crucifix. That did not trouble the pagans, of course, and sorrowful to say it did not trouble the European Protestant merchants who were now coming to Japan. Inside that enclosure were then left the Christians who were forthwith massacred.

A historical sequel illustrated the tenacity of those people. There was one Christian place which was not visited by death in that manner, due to its being shut in between hills. Its priest told them that one day another priest would come to them and renew the sacrifice. In the meantime they must loyally carry on. He appointed a Council of Elders whose duty it would be to administer baptism, to teach the catechism, to conduct services, in substitution for the Mass, to govern the community. For 300 years that faithful maintaining of the Christian usages persisted. Then once again Japan was opened to the missionaries. A traveller coming to this particular place and observing their church and way of behaviour, told them that not far distant was a church exactly like their own. The news produced excitement. The Council of Elders debated the announcement and a deputation of them set off at once to investigate. When they arrived they examined the church thoroughly. What they saw satisfied them. They sought out the missionary and told their strange tale. The result was that priests were sent to them and the fullness of the Catholic worship was restored. It represents one of the special tragedies of all history, an

affair like that of the Holy Innocents, that this place was the one obliterated by the atom bomb. It was Nagasaki!

St Francis had no doubt that salvation was a matter of the Catholic Church. It was necessary to die in the visible membership of the Church and in the very embrace of its sacraments. We are disconcerted to find him stating that certain people who had not died in those conditions had gone to hell. Today the Church would not allow him to go that far. It is to be hoped that many outside the visible fold of the Church will be saved. But that is something which lies in the hands of God and about which we know nothing.

We must be clear about one thing: Catholicism is the Church of Christ. Its teaching and its saving power are unique. It would be a gross impiety to make such allowances for other religions as would depreciate the value of baptism, the Eucharist, the Mass, Our Lady, etc. Or which would suggest that it is unnecessary for men to subject themselves to a revealed code of belief and conduct.

Your own idealism and exertions depend on your regarding the Church as thus offering treasures not otherwise available. If people are all right in their nebulous faiths, believing what they will and doing what they like, it would be a folly for you to tread hard ways. And it would be madness to burn yourselves up or squeeze out your life by slow torture as St Francis Xavier did.

So believe with all your heart that you cannot offer to anyone a greater benefit than the Holy Catholic Church. This was the conviction which drove St Francis relentlessly on. Towards that end he lived his wondrous life in which he brought to pass that exclamation of which I gave you at the beginning: He journeyed over the world. He suffered

everything under the sun to gain souls for Christ. In him you have an incomparable model for your work, a man whose very name stands for missionary endeavour.

He has been likened to St Paul and to St Jerome – to which names I must add St Columbanus, the special patron of the Peregrinatio.