

The Cardinal Was Prepared to Die

Right: Cardinal Tisserant follows Pope Paul on arrival in Portugal for visit to Fatima, May 13, 1967.

by
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Everyone in the Western World seems to have heard that Cardinal Tisserant died February 21st on the eve of the Feast of St. Peter's Chair. Newspapers, radio and television have carried the news... that he was top Cardinal of the Church, that he convoked the Cardinals who elected John XXIII and Paul VI, that he spoke over a dozen languages with native fluency and was a member of the French Academy.

How many knew that he lived the "total consecration to the Blessed Virgin" taught by St. Grignon de Montfort? How many knew that his bedroom, behind the plush gold and velvet throne room, was like a monk's cell... with an iron bed, a canvas chair, and nothing else but wooden closets around the walls? How many knew that it was he who was responsible for the dogma of the Assumption? And how many knew that if it were not for him there probably would be no Blue Army of Our Lady of Fatima in the world today?

I know, because I had the
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privileged joy of being his friend.

In 1948 I wrote a book called **RUSSIA WILL BE CONVERTED**. Someone sent a copy to the Cardinal who was then head of the Oriental Churches in union with Rome. Eight years later His Eminence came to Fatima to bless the International Centre of the Blue Army. He took me aside and said softly:

Read it Daily

"I kept your book by my bed and I read a little from it every day."

Perhaps one of the reasons I gained his love was because of the book. But I think another was because I never told anyone what he had told me. It would have been great publicity for the book because at that time he was the most famous Cardinal in the world. But the way he told me... in a soft voice, almost a whisper... gave me the impression that it was a personal confidence. And I never published it... until now, a quarter of a century after the book was written... and long after most people

have forgotten it. (It is even out of print).

Wherever Pope Paul traveled, Cardinal Tisserant accompanied him. And for this reason the world thought the Cardinal was a close friend of the present Pope. And what could be more glamorous than to be the head of the College of Cardinals, the traveling companion of the Pope to India, to South America, to Fatima, to the Phillipines, to Australia, to the United Nations... What could be more glamorous than to be the first Cardinal since Richilieu to be elected to the "Immortals" of the French Academy? What could be more glamorous than to be the one man to stand before the Pope when all the Cardinals were gathered in St. Peter's and the Pope stood "beneath the chair" to make a solemn pronouncement? What could be more glamorous than to have been the head of the Church in the interims between Pius XII and John XIII and then before Paul VI?

But behind the apparent glamour was the Christian reality.

Eugene Cardinal Tisserant, for all his brilliance and for all his success as a Churchman, was first and last a true Christian, a dedicated, Marian priest.

Perhaps because of my love for the Cardinal... which made him seem to me just like another child of Mary... I sensed even in the time of John XXIII the humiliations coming into his life. And since I thought that most people would be too much in awe of him to share this preparation for his death I wrote and told him a story which had impressed me:

Deprived of Vote

My great uncle (mentioned in my book *THE BROTHER AND I*) was something like Cardinal Tisserant in brilliance, languages, and even to some degree in prestige. He was the second American to become a Carmelite and he rose to prominence in the Order, served in positions of authority in different countries, and was Provincial in the United States. He was swindled out of a large sum of money by a contractor in Chicago. (The man asked for a large sum of money before beginning the building of a college, and then disappeared.) As a result my uncle was deprived even a vote in the Community and had to sit at the foot of the table with the laybrothers.

Some men might have left the Community. But being a child of the Lady of the Magnificat, my uncle accepted the humiliation. And even though he seemed in the prime of his life, shortly afterwards he died. And the undertaker was one of those who testified to the extraordinary fragrance that emanated from this great but humble Carmelite's body from the moment of death.

I wrote this story to Cardinal Tisserant, hoping he would not be offended at my suggestion that the humiliations now coming to him were a precious gift from the Lady of the Magnificat, a precious preparation for death.

Not only was he not offended, but

he was grateful. I don't think he considered my recent book on the Eucharist as great as he managed to imply... to encourage others to read it. My last visit with him was last March, although it seems almost as though it were last week.

Her Virtue

Perhaps one virtue that can be called more Marian than most others is humility. Our Lady said her soul magnified the Lord not for having made her the Mother of the Incarnate Word; not because He preserved her from original sin; not because he set her above all creatures. Rather it was because He had looked upon the humility... the lowliness of His handmaid.

And in truly Marian souls, Our Lady herself certainly safeguards this basic truth which is at the root of all virtue, even as pride is at the root of all sin.

And Cardinal Tisserant in his later years, especially just prior to his death, was humiliated to a degree

only those closest to him could possibly know.

He was beautifully prepared to die.

Knowing he was near the end of his life I asked two interesting questions: Who was the greatest Pope of our time (since he had served at the right hand of several)? and what did Our Lady of Fatima mean by the words "conversion of Russia"?

Both his answers surprised me.

He felt that "without question" the greatest Pope of this century was Pius XI. "He did not have the personal charisma of men like Pius XII and John XXIII." the Cardinal said, "but his achievements for the Church were the most important."

His Eminence dodged the question about the conversion of Russia... which might mean the conversion of the Communists, the union of the Orthodox with Rome, or even both. Instead he hesitated a moment and said:

"I believe that the world will have to endure another great cataclysm before the conversion of Russia."



Above, Cardinal Tisserant presides at meeting of leaders of the Blue Army at Fatima in 1956. Left to right are Bishop Rupp of Paris (now Bishop of Monaco); the first Bishop of Fatima (who died a few years later); the Cardinal; the present Bishop of Fatima; and Monsignor Colgan (standing). At this time the Cardinal was at the peak of his influence in the Church, the greatest Cardinal of this century. He was still Dean of the College of Cardinals when he died on Feb. 21st, and became the first Cardinal since Richelieu to be a member of the French Academy.