

PENTECOST



at SEA

By John M. Haffert

When I was writing *THE WORLD'S GREATEST SECRET*, I used to wonder where I would be on the Feast of Corpus Christi...because I was praying so much for light to write this book on the Body of the Lord. I had planned to celebrate the last Feast before finishing the book in Jerusalem, with a visit to the Upper Room. But the six day war broke out. I had to flee Jerusalem just two days before. So I found myself on that Feast of Corpus Christi at the tomb of Blessed Charbel in Lebanon. Those who have read the book know how much it meant.

An Extraordinary Thing

Now I am writing a book about Pentecost, a preliminary edition of which has already appeared in paperback. And an extraordinary thing happened to me last Pentecost Sunday.

I was with a group of forty-five making a floating pilgrimage down the Atlantic Coast to Africa, with the tomb of St. James as the focal point of the trip (1976 is the Holy Year of St. James) and also Pontevedra (Golden Jubilee of the apparition of the Child Jesus). The special intention of the pilgrimage was blessings upon America and world peace, with special thought of Africa. At least four of our group traced their ancestry to Africa... and they were among the most prayerful and outstanding persons in the group.

Although there were almost one thousand passengers on the ship, we forty-five had an "upper room" to ourselves every morning where we gathered for Rosary, meditation, and Holy Mass. Towards the end about five others joined us at least for Sunday Mass: two from France and three from England.

The Unexpected

We did not know when we set out on this trip how meaningful it was to be.

After we sailed from England, our first stop was at Fatima, the Castle of Ourem...the Castle of Fatima. During the "Castle Banquet" the history of Portugal was portrayed by actors and pictures emphasizing especially the story of the third Count of Ourem, Blessed Nuno, the "precursor of Fatima". He fought a decisive battle at the foot of the Fatima mountain in 1385 which saved the Portuguese nation. In thanksgiving he built a great Rosary monastery and Church at the foot of that mountain where Our Lady was to appear over six hundred years later with a promise to save THE WORLD. The banner of Bl. Nuno in that battle showed the words SANTA MARIA in one corner, Our Lady beneath the Cross in another, and St. James (the apostle, whose holy year occurs this year in Spain), in another.

Blessed Nuno's King had four sons, one of whom was Henry the Navigator.

This young prince followed in the traditions of holiness of Bl. Nuno. He is buried in that Rosary Church built by Bl. Nuno in 1385 at the foot of the Fatima mountain.

The prince had a vision of lands beyond the sea...of great discoveries to be made. He persuaded his father to invite cartographers to the Court. One of those who came was the brother of Columbus...and later Columbus himself. Due to a personality clash between the King and Columbus, the latter went to Spain where he got three ships for a voyage of discovery. He named the flagship SANTA MARIA.

Only 28 years after Nuno's victory at Fatima, Madeira was discovered by the Portuguese. Shortly after that the Canary Islands were found. And this was a turning point in history. As young Prince Henry had envisioned, there were lands to be discovered over the horizon! And for the first time sailors took courage to brave the unknown distances of the sea!

Where Columbus Prayed

Our unusual Pentecost Pilgrimage of 1976 took us down to Madeira and beyond to the Canary Islands where we gathered together to pray in the church on the very spot where Columbus assembled with all his crew for Holy Mass before sailing out on his voyage of discovery...a voyage which ended with the crew gathered at the rail

to sing the HAIL HOLY QUEEN as they first sighted America.

Our prayer in that old church in the Canary Islands on this 200th birthday of the United States, was spontaneous. Perhaps none of us could now remember the thoughts that flowed from the depths of our hearts. But we called to God for blessings on our land, the discovery of which we now knew *in a very real way traced back to the foot of the mountain of Fatima....* and to the banner of a saint which bore the words SANTA MARIA.

"I am SANTA MARIA"

Thirty-nine years after that first sighting of land by Columbus, Our Lady appeared in these newly discovered lands to an Indian. She spoke the Indians' language, with one exception: when She identified Herself. She said She was the Virgin Mother of the One True God, and Mother "to all in these lands", and added: "I am SANTA MARIA".

Off Dakar, in Africa, we visited the island of Dore through which twenty million slaves were processed, six million of whom are estimated to have died. Four of our members were distantly related to survivors of that moral tragedy for which the western world still pays a terrible price in hatred and political turmoil. Our prayers for America were not just FOR the victims of that tragedy, but to remind Our Lord of the resignation and suffering of those millions of afflicted persons and to ask that their own suffering would be accepted as a price *for a new Pentecost in America which would awaken the consciousness of us all to the fact that all hearts are the color of love.*

And then came Pentecost Sunday...after we had been meeting in our floating "upper room" of a 25,000 ton liner plying the ocean between the Old World and the New for nine days before Pentecost.

Had it been just a pious experience? Could the prayers of just forty-five persons be of much consequence? Or were the prayers

we were uniting with all the nations bordering the oceans of the world pleasing to God like the prayers of the few who gathered in the upper room in Jerusalem before that first Pentecost?

An extraordinary thing happened.

After the Pentecost Sunday Mass, one of the five few persons who had joined us from among the other more than nine hundred other passengers on the ship, approached rather timidly and said:

"At this very time last year I was cured in a prayer meeting much like your Rosary meditations here each day. Do you think I should tell about it?"

We gladly invited her, and sensing her nervousness (her hands were cold with apprehension of talking before the group) everyone clapped to make her feel welcome. She said:

Her Miracle

"Twenty-one years ago I was injured in an automobile accident. It left the lower part of my body twisted forward and I was in constant pain, so great that I frequently lost consciousness. I went to the best doctors in England over the years. They said they could fuse the discs in my lower spine but that would leave me immobile and I would still have pain, so there was really nothing to do.

"I was not a particularly holy person...one who bore pain with dignity and resignation and reparation. I think rather that as time went on it was just wearing me down. And then, last year, someone invited me to go to a Catholic church where persons were praying together in the manner suggested by St. James (James 5, 13). I went twice, and hesitatingly went a third time. The group asked me to sit in a chair while several placed hands on me and prayed for me.

"I was instantly and completely cured."

"That was a year ago, and I am now making this trip with my

husband, who is here (she pointed towards him) and who can verify all that I have said. I felt that since it was Pentecost Sunday I should tell you about it."

God Cares

Her name is Margaret Jackson, and her faith was so beautiful and almost tangible that all of us wanted to keep her there with us. She spoke of her present feelings... of her joy in God. She said that what impressed her most out of all this was not so much the miracle itself (which the doctors agreed upon) but that GOD CARES for us, each one. "I suddenly realized that even if I had been the only one in the world, He loves me and cares for me," Margaret said, and there was such a joy and light in the way she said it that we all felt tears starting.

Mr. Jackson, who had said very little, made one especially noteworthy remark:

"I used to live in constant fear," he said, "that I would not be there when Margaret's pain became so intense that she fainted...and that she might fall and strike her head."

Pentecost "Happens"

The Jacksons were a handsome couple in their thirties, and after twenty years of tragic suffering that had seemed almost meaningless to them, there was a miracle. They now say the Rosary daily. And the anniversary of their miracle came on our ship and was shared with us on Pentecost Sunday, 1976.

God cares. And He hears our prayers...especially when we pray sincerely together in little groups.

That is why our Blue Army Cells are so important! They begin with just a Rosary together once a week...and a few shared thoughts. Not more than one hour in length for the entire meeting.

But when those meditations are shared and prayed in the "upper room" of the Immaculate Heart of Mary...Pentecost happens.