

MARIA VALTORTA READERS GROUP

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THE SUPPLEMENT No. 96 – DECEMBER 2019



St Catherine of Alexandria, St Francis of Assisi St Clare, St. Therese of Lisieux
Inspired by the Catherine's Classroom column, this month's theme is
Maria Valtorta's Encounters or Visions of the Saints

Saint Francis of Assisi

(Maria says:) I see and immediately recognize my St. Francis of Assisi. I see him twice. The first time in the morning. He is standing in his poor cowl, not brown, but grey-brown, like the feathers of a wild turtledove. He is barefoot, with his head uncovered, and already with the stigmata. I clearly see the wounds in the palms of his thin hands. He is standing with his arms bent at the elbow and held close to his body, with his hands at shoulder level, like a priest when he says, 'The Lord be with you.' I thus see the wounds in his palms distinctly. He is looking at me with compassionate gentleness. He does not speak.

The second time, in the evening, he comes back and I see him even better. His face is so gaunt that it looks almost triangular. His hair, trimmed in a circle, forms a slightly wavy line, grizzled in its light chestnut brown, on the high, very pale brow. He has light-brown eyes, sad and good, deeply sunken in his sockets, a long, thin nose, and very pale, slender cheeks, lengthened by a sparse beard trimmed into a point. He is smiling, but without joy: a smile seeking only to encourage. He speaks slowly in a clearly intoned voice, but as if weary.

Signaling with his wounded hand, he asks, 'Do you like my olive trees?'

'No,' I answer.

'And yet... I liked them so much because they reminded me of our Lord Jesus in his Prayer.'

'You, Father, saw Jesus in their midst. I no longer see anything and they bring me only sadness.'

'Strive, daughter, to find peace and joy in them. I said so, and I suffered so *much* then, for I, too, was disillusioned with men and, I would say, with God's approval of my work:" 'Blessed are those who do God's will and for his sake face every tribulation.'" Try to reach this painful blessedness. It is the stigmatization of the spirit, and it is more painful than this one...which opens my flesh. I know. But try. Weep and try. I, too, suffered so much and for so *many* reasons. I, too, experienced fondness. I, too, was full of longing. I, too, felt the prayer I had offered in certain

hours failing back upon me. I endured hours in which I was able only to moan. I know what your pain is. But I say to you, "Strive to find peace and joy in all the pain." Afterwards, joy and peace come. Be good. I will stay close to you. I bless you with my blessing: 'May the Lord have mercy on you, turn his face towards you, and grant you peace. May He give you His blessing.'"

It is not much. But it is already a glimmer of Heaven which comes to me. I had never seen or heard the Saint whom, if you recall, I greatly venerate, and I was astonished. He came to console me a little in this desolation...

(*Notebooks 1944*, pp. 272-3)

Saint Margaret Mary

(Maria says:) A tall, and certainly very thin, sister comes in. For, in spite of her ample religious habit, she is very slender. She goes to kneel at the bench. She lifts up the veil with which she covered her face and I see a youthful visage, not very beautiful, but graceful, very pale, and meek. Two light-coloured eyes (they seem to be greenish brown) shine gently when she raises them to look at the tabernacle, and the small mouth opens into a soft smile. The face is a long oval between the white bands, which are slightly whiter than her countenance. The black veil flows down over her black robe, in such fashion that in the kneeling figure, only the delicate face, the long, well-formed hands joined in prayer and a silver cross shining on her breast, in addition to the wimple, are seen to be light in colour. She is praying fervently, with her eyes fixed upon the tabernacle.

And now the beautiful part of the vision comes. The grating, the *whole* grating, shines as if beyond the velarium, a very intense fire has been ignited. The lamp, which previously looked like a radiant star is now cancelled out in the growing light, which is increasingly becoming a very bright silver white. So bright that one's eyes no longer see anything but this. The grating is wiped out in the brilliant radiance. And in this splendour, Jesus appears [...] standing upright in his white robe and red mantle, smiling, very handsome.

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'Margaret!' He calls, to rouse the sister, who has remained in ecstasy looking at Him. He calls her three times, more and more gently, and smiling with ever-greater intensity. He advances, walking high above the ground on the carpet of light which is under Him. 'It is I, Jesus, whom you love. Do not fear.'

Margaret Mary looks at Him blissfully and, amidst her tears, asks, 'What do You want from me, Lord? Why are You appearing to me?'

'I am Jesus, who loves you, Margaret, and I want you to make Me be loved.'

'How can I, Lord?'

'Look and you will be capable of everything, for what you will see will give you strength and a voice to rouse the world and bring it to Me. This is my Heart. Look. It is the Heart which has so loved men, wishing to be loved by them. But it is not loved. And in this love, the salvation of the human race would be found. Margaret, tell the world that I *want my Heart to be loved*. I am thirsty! Give Me something to drink. I am hungry! Give Me something to eat. I suffer! Console Me. This mission will be your joy and your sorrow. But I ask you not to refuse it. Come. Come to Me. Come close to Me. Kiss my Heart. You will no longer be afraid of anything...'

Margaret Mary rises and walks in ecstasy towards Jesus. The intense light makes her face even whiter. She prostrates herself at Jesus' feet.

But He lifts her up and, supporting her with his left hand, opens his robe over his chest, and his flesh seems to open along with his robe, and his Divine Heart appears, alive, beating amidst torrents of light setting the poor choir aflame and making the human body of the beloved disciple shine, like an already spiritualized body. Jesus inclines his cherished one towards Himself and, with loving violence, brings her face up to the level of his Heart, against which he clasps it, holding up the ecstatic, who would collapse out of joy. When He separates her, He continues to hold her up, with gentle care, and sets her back on the ground (for Margaret walked over the wake of light to reach Jesus) and does not let her go until He sees she is safely in her place. He then says, 'I shall come back to tell you what I want. Love Me more and more. Go in peace.'

The light absorbs Him like a cloud and then fades out progressively, finally disappearing, and in the now darkened choir, only the little yellow star of the lamp shines.

This is what I saw. And Jesus says to me, 'You have carried out the adoration for Thursday, the eve of the First Friday. What do you want that's better than this?' He smiles and leaves me. (**Notebooks 1944, pp. 337-9**)

Saint Therese of Lisieux

St. Therese says:

'Yes, it is really I who come to spend this hour of agony with you and to spend it by recalling Jesus, whose face is altered with the sweat of blood and begins to take on the painful expression which is what makes us, his little victims and brides, rave with compassionate love.

It is I. I, too, come to caress you. It is my hour. For when the "great silences" are about to begin, which are the touches of perfection of the Divine Artificer of our souls, it

is necessary to have a friend nearby who is familiar with them.

Do not be afraid. Our Jesus also died of thirst... Oh, divine thirst! And yet, though nearly unable to speak any more because of his dried-out jaws, He uttered the saving words. And He uttered the saving prayer: "Father, forgive them"; "Today you shall be with Me"; "Into your hands I entrust my spirit." Almost mute with thirst and the agony, almost blind with the scab of blood on his eyelids and approaching death, He was able to say the saving prayers and go on seeing and adoring the Father's Will.

It is not necessary to do much when we are close to immolation, little sister. *It suffices to be able to remain faithful. And to see God beyond the scab of pain ulcerating our hearts and say to God that we still love Him, always...*

Do not be afraid. God is content with you. He sends me to tell you so. Do you think you are not a "child in spiritual childhood"? You are. Because you do everything with simplicity. Even your imperfections. And you do not try to conceal them with the craftiness of an adult in a false robe of justice. You are 'small' in the way I taught, for Jesus likes the "small" and said that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them. And you are a "victim." An adult, then. For the spirit voluntarily choosing to be immolated, even if that of a small child, is an adult spirit.

Yesterday you wondered what the "twofold love" is which I requested for myself. For you it is this, little sister: *to be a child and love Jesus with the simplicity of a child and to be a victim and love Him with the heroism of a martyr*. With Him in the poor cradle of straw, with Him on the rough cross. Always with Him. So as never to leave Him alone. To make Him smile. To drink his tears and die with Him.

How He loves you! He has given you his two holiest beds: the cradle over which the Mother watches and the cross over which all of Heaven bends. They are the places where his love calls you to a divine appointment of love. From them you will take flight for Heaven.

Rest now, little sister. I remain here to pray with you. *But believe that it suffices to love, to love very much, and say only: "Jesus, I love you!" and say it with true love to be not only justified, but loved by God with a preferential love.*

Happy are those who with every heartbeat are able to say, "I love You." They will expire with this profession of love in their minds, in their hearts, and on their lips. And it will open Paradise for them. For God loves whoever loves Him and gives Himself to whoever loves Him.'

(**Notebooks 1944, pp. 430-2**)

Saint Catherine of Siena

(Maria says:) A tall, beautiful, imposing, luminous figure, cheerful with heavenly rejoicing, and a full voice with a gentle accent. In its tone, it reminds me of the loving velvet of Mary Magdalene, and in its accent, the clearest Tuscan style of speech.

She says, 'Sister, I, too, have come. Write down my words. They will bring you joy and great peace.' And she waits for me to take up the notebook and write this. She now speaks again:

'I am Catherine. You love me and do not love me, for you are like me, and yet you are frightened by my strength. Sweet sister, what are you frightened by? Don't you know that my strength is the same as the strength in you: that of

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the gentle Lamb that bled to death? Oh, all his Blood is in those who love Him! And by this Blood, which is fire, we can act in the world, and in Heaven we rejoice. Can those who have that Blood with them fail to be strength and fire? And don't you know that this Blood is the juice of God and possesses along with it what God's essence is: perfect Charity? Rejoice, sister.

It is fitting that you, too, as a lamb and falcon, should have had your Tuldo. It is fitting. You snatched away a greater prey with your loving face than I did on the scaffold. That one had committed a bloody crime; yours, a Satanic and spiritual crime. You led him to the same pasture, sweet lamb of my Shepherd, to the pasture of the three divine virtues and the infinite truths. You have given blood and fire. You will have blood and fire here as a robe and diadem. Sister, good-bye. Peace - that is, the sweet Lamb that bled to death - be with you always.'

(Notebooks 1944, pp. 607-8)

Saint Catherine of Alexandria

(Maria says:) On the evening of Thursday, 8 March, after having written a large part of the Last Supper, I wondered how I could understand the most obscure matters while Jesus was speaking. And I asked myself, 'Is this what happened to the others, too?' By others, I meant the men and women mystics in these twenty centuries of Christianity, the doctors, and so on.

I heard a voice speaking to me and a great gladness coming upon me. I was anything but glad for the distress of Jesus' last hours was upon me and crushed me to the point of physical suffering. It said, 'Do you know who I am?' But I did not know. I felt only a peace and saw only a bright light, moonlike, very lovely, in the form of a body, but so immaterial that I could not distinguish. 'I am Catherine.'

I said to myself, 'Oh, beautiful one! The other time, her voice was different! This is a crystalline, youthful, shrill voice; but it has nothing to do with the lovely voice of the saint from Siena.'

'I am not the one you are thinking of. She, too, was learned by the work of Divine Wisdom. But I am Catherine of Alexandria. Christ's martyr. And I protect you. I tell you that in us, as well everything, became light in the light of Jesus. Not through human study, but through superhuman action we became the learned ones of the Lord. To love Him that way. Serve Him that way. Praise Him that way. And to cause Him to be loved, served and praised through this doctrine, which came from on high and which, though humanly incomprehensible in its most sublime elements, was nonetheless as simple as a child's words if we heard it while remaining with Him, the Bridegroom. Good-bye. I have answered you. I love you. You are a little sister. May the Triune Love be with you.'

And the light faded out, and the voice grew silent. Nothing else. I fell asleep, happy about this new friend in Heaven.

(Notebooks 1945-50, pp. 41-2)

Saint Clare of Assisi

(Maria says:) I see - and it surely will not seem something impossible to see because it is known to many - the miracle of Saint Clare's driving away those attacking the convent in Assisi. But it is a joy for me to see it, and I am

not concerned about others. I shall describe what I see to you.

Quite a poor little convent, low-lying, with a roof sharply sloping down in front, a small cloister crying out the great Franciscan word from each stone, 'Poverty' and dark, short, narrow little corridors onto which the minute cell doors open. The convent resounds like a hive of voices in prayer and moans. And this little convent truly resembles a hive flabbergasted by an invasion. The din of the struggle outside also flows in, with a fusion of violent and prayerful voices.

I don't know if it is a lay sister who brings the news that the enemy hordes are trying to invade the convent or some resident of Assisi who warns the Poor Clares of the danger. I do know that panic is reaching its peak as they all rush into the cell of the Abbess who is prostrate in prayer near the edge of her couch and gets up, pale and consumed, but very beautiful and solemn, to receive her terrified daughters. She listens to them and tells them to go down to the choir with due order and faith, in the silence of the Rule, 'for *nothing*,' she says, '*no matter how tremendous it may be, must make us forget the holy Rule.*' And she follows them and goes into the small, unadorned choir, beyond which is the little dark church with a barred door containing only two small candles - one in the church and the other in the choir - which peacefully shine before the tabernacle, for the souls in the world who remember God too seldom on the one hand, and for the souls belonging to Jesus who see the symbol of themselves in that small perpetual flame.

They pray, jolting at every cry that is louder and closer. And when one, who is surely a lay sister, comes back in, yelling unabashedly, 'Mother, they are at the door!' the Poor Clares double over, as if already stricken dead.

Sister Clare does not. On the contrary, she stands up and proceeds right into the middle of the choir and says, 'Do not be afraid. They are men and they are outside. We are here, inside, with Jesus. Remember his words, "Not a hair will be taken from you." We are his doves. He will not allow the sparrow hawks to profane them.'

Outside the wave of tumult is getting louder, giving the lie to her words. But she does not get upset. On seeing that the Poor Clares are too terrified to overcome doubt and dread, she addresses God. 'My sweet Jesus, forgive your poor Clare's daring to set her hands in the place where only a priest can set them. But here there is only You and us. One of us must thus say, "Come" to You. My hands are washed by tears. They may touch your throne.' And she resolutely goes to the tabernacle, opens it, and takes out not the monstrance, as it called, but a case resembling a pyx; it is not made of precious metal, but ivory or mother-of-pearl, I think, at least on the outside, insofar as the scanty light enables me to see. She takes it out and holds it as reverently as she would hold the Child Jesus. She fearlessly walks down the few steps and proceeds towards the convent door, singing psalms, and the sisters follow her, trembling and subdued.

'Open the door, daughter.'

'But they are outside! Do you hear the cries and blows?'

'Open the door, daughter.'

'But they will burst in here!'

'Open the door. For the sake of obedience!' And Clare, previously gentle and persuasive, takes on an imperious

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tone which will not tolerate delay. She is the former landowner accustomed to giving orders and the great Abbess calling for obedience.

The Poor Clare opens, with a moan and shudder slowing down the operation, and the others, behind the Abbess, are also trembling. They cross themselves, closing their eyes, ready for martyrdom, and lower their veils so as to die with their faces covered.

The door is finally half open. The shouting of those attacking, turns into a cry of victory, and, ceasing to use their weapons, they plunge towards the opening door on a run.

Clare, her face as white as the case she is holding high up as the only veil over her cloistered visage, takes two, three, five steps beyond the threshold. I do not know if she sees those in front of her or her land or her enemies. I don't think so. Her eyes do nothing but adore the Eucharist she is carrying. Tall, very thin, and consumed as she is, as white as a lily, slow in her steps, she looks like an angel or a ghost. To me she looks like an angel; to the others she must look like a ghost. Their boldness crumbles, comes to a halt, and, on seeing her take another step forward, turn around in disorderly flight.

It is then that Clare staggers and, bending over as if about to fall, hastens to go back in beyond the threshold. 'They have fled. Blessed be the Lord! Now ... now hold up your mother so that I can take Him back to his altar. Sing, daughters, and hold me up. Your mother is very tired now!' Indeed, her face is that of a dying person, as if she had used up all her strength. But her smile is also very sweet, and her waxen hands are very strong in clasping the case!

They go back into the choir, and Clare, singing the *Te Deum*, places the case in the tabernacle; she then remains lying on her back on the two steps of the altar as if dead while the Poor Clares continue the hymn of thanksgiving.

This is what I see. And for me, there is this alone: a few words from Saint Clare in her heavenly robe, not as a Poor Clare:

'With this', and she points to the Most Holy Sacrament, 'everything is overcome. It will be the great strength of Paradise and the earth as long as there are earthly needs. Through the infinite merits of the Most Holy Body annihilated for your sake, we saints in Heaven obtain graces for you, and through it, you obtain victory. May the Eucharistic Lamb be praised! May the Lord give you peace and blessing.' **(Notebooks 1945-50, pp. 90-3)**

Saint Martina

(Maria says:) It is 8 p.m. I am invaded by a supernatural joy which is so intense that it already tastes like ecstasy. I don't know what it comes from because there is no reason. I am weary, filled with pain, and dazed because I have had to speak a lot and also listen to things which are anything but a cause for joy: the ruin of spirits.... Just imagine how I suffered. And yet this very intense joy comes ... very intense.

And then a place with stonework appears to me: thick, dark walls, damp. I think, the colour of very light coffee or very dark mud. The place is like a rotunda from which corridors extend out in this shape:. I say corridors because the sky is not visible. There is a high, dark ceiling

like the walls and big square stones like the ones at the Tullianum [prison].

Right at the centre of the rotunda, a child appears to me, not much older than a little girl. She must be twelve-years-old at most, and her body is even less developed than Saint Agnes', from whom she also differs because, in addition to being smaller, her hair is brown and her skin is a brownish white. She has two big, very sweet black eyes, a bit sad, as if tired, as if they have suffered a lot, or belong to one who has suffered *very much*. Her robe is completely white, made of linen, very loose without a belt, elbow-length sleeves from which two very shapely fore arms emerge, ending in two little brownish hands crossed over her chest. The figure is luminous, but not excessively. It is not the radiant figure of a saint. It is a humble apparition, and yet it is luminous, with starlight within a light veil of mist. But it attracts me because it is light with a pure softness bestowing peace and joy. The contrast to the dark walls is very sharp. She looks at me and smiles.

Behind her, [...] some men in short yellow-grey robes are running off. Four are heading north, towards a barely visible, far-off light, as if the high corridor ended in an open place. The others are heading south in a deeper darkness to the point where I cannot tell exactly how many there are. I understand, however, that the girl is a martyr, for she is clasping a small palm to her breast in her folded arms, a white palm, I dare to say spiritualized, as is the linen of the tunic, which is more immaterial and magnificent than even the most beautiful linen.

But I do not know who she is and ask, 'Who are you?'

She answers, 'Martina'. And this is the place where I suffered greatly. One of the places, for I have suffered greatly. So many martyrdoms before the sword. And those who are fleeing are the ones who tormented me. The ones heading towards the light are those I saved with my pain and baptized with my blood. The others are those who did not want to convert to Jesus. But now I am happy. There is no more pain. To come to glory, one must suffer everything. Remember: I am Martina ... and I am also particularly called upon in the invocations of the Church. Oh, for Jesus is good! And for a little pain, He grants so much joy and so much power! Good-bye. I am your friend. You do not remember me. And yet you knew me and loved me when you were a girl my age. I have always loved you, though, together with Agnes. May the light of Paradise always shine in you and help you to bear the Light to so many souls. Good-bye. Receive this. I will sprinkle you with my balms.'

And she shakes the palm towards me and then folds her arms over her chest again and disappears from my sight with a soft, immaterial, unrepeatable song, and everything sparkles in the dismal place while she goes off, leaving as a memento only a tremendous indescribable fragrance.

I take up the Missal: four lines on St. Martina for January 30. I look at an old prayer book. She is not even mentioned. I search through my memory - nothing. Complete historical darkness. There remain, though, her friendship, her gaze, her smile, and the scent of her balms. And the previous joy lasts and takes me high up, very high up....

(Notebooks 1945-50, pp. 119-121)