

The Story of St. Gaspar del Bufalo

The story of St. Gaspar del Bufalo took place in a particular historical time and place. He was born in the late 18th century, in the Papal States, long before the unification of Italy. In 1799, the “Little French Tyrant,” Napoleon Bonaparte, was at the height of his reckless career. With lightning speed he had invaded the territories around France, and then turned his military machine toward Southern Italy. His offensive onslaught was trained on the Pope’s defenseless residence; he forced the Holy Father out of Rome. Within the year Pius VI passed away. “That’s the end of the Church,” shouted Napoleon. “I won’t be bothered by a Pope again!”

But you know, Our Lord predicted that His Church would last until the end of the world, and not even the guns and soldiers of a hated dictator could destroy it. The Cardinals of the Church, under the protection of the allies, soon met near the city of Venice and elected Pius VII as the new head of the Church. When the new Pope tried to take possession of his residence in Rome, he was thrown into prison, humiliated and mistreated. The situation was no better for the priests and lay people who remained faithful to the Holy Father. 1810, was the worst year. With unrelenting fury, the soldiers burned down sacred places and stole valuable treasures, terrorizing every corner of the Eternal City. In response to his excommunication by the Holy Father Napoleon became more determined than ever to wipe out every trace of loyalty to the Church.

All priests, young and old, were dragged into the French Magistrate’s office, where they were ordered to take an oath of allegiance to the invaders. One young priest arrested was Father Gaspar del Bufalo, who had been ordained only two years earlier.

The Magistrate figured that he had easy prey before him. The Magistrate was a kind old gentleman who did everything to minimize the event, downplaying it, reducing everything to a mere formality, a harmless bureaucratic exercise. The important thing was that Gaspar be put at ease, that he should not realize the seriousness of the choice to which he was being called. After all, many priests had already acquiesced and signed the oath of allegiance. But Gaspar was not listening to the magistrate. He was thinking of the blood which Napoleon had already caused to be shed, the imprisonment of the Holy Father, and the violation of liberty and the suppression of independence for the church.

His response to the prefect was clear and decisive: “I would rather die than take such an oath! I cannot, I must not, I will not!” After further attempts to punish and threats failed, the Magistrate told the guards to take Gaspar out of his office and wrote alongside his name: “Immediate Deportation.” The following day the loyal priest and three of his closest friends,

Fathers Albertini, Marchetti and Gambini, were ordered to get into a coach and they were driven into exile in Northern Italy.

What an impression Gaspar must have made on the civil authorities of the time. "Who is this young priest who showed so much courage and loyalty to the Holy Father, choosing the torture of exile rather than breaking his allegiance to the 'Church'?" If we look closely at the events of Gaspar's life up to this point, we can see where he gained his courage and strength and how he was able to stand up so unflinchingly to his enemies.

Gaspar was born on January 6, 1786, in the city of Rome. Shortly after his birth, his parents, Antonio and Annunziata, were frightened to learn that their child was in danger of losing his sight from an attack of measles.

In desperation, his mother brought her child to the church, where there was a relic of the famous Jesuit Missionary, St. Francis Xavier. Annunziata pleaded to Francis for his intercession before God. Gaspar's cure was swift and striking. In later years, he never forgot this great favor, looking upon St. Francis as his special protector in all of his endeavors.

At the age of two, Gaspar again became very ill. Thinking that he would not recover from a high fever, his parents asked that the Sacrament of Confirmation be conferred upon their sick child. Through the grace of this Sacrament, Gaspar was miraculously cured. From these two remarkable events, we can see that something extraordinary lay ahead for him in God's plan.

One humorous incident in the early life of Gaspar occurred when he was about six years old. One day, he and some other children were listening to a missionary talking about people in the world who did not know Christ. "How unfortunate, for example, are the Mohammedans in Turkey," he said, "who do not have anyone to preach to them." These words touched Gaspar and his little friend, Maria. Secretly they came up with a "sure-proof" scheme which would enable them to run off and become missionaries in far-away Turkey. But there was a little snag. "I'm a girl," explained Maria, "They will never let me go!" Together they figured out a way. She would borrow her brother's trousers and in this disguise no one would ever suspect that she was a girl. Shortly before they were to leave, Maria's mother impatiently called her brother: "Orlando, why don't you bring me your trousers so that I can press them?" "But, Mother, I can't find them anywhere!" An item like that couldn't remain lost for very long, the trousers were soon found under Maria's bed. After some questioning by her stern father, the girl told her parents about their grand plan to run off to Turkey and convert the people there. Gaspar's parents were informed about it and the "missionary trip" ended there.

We must not imagine that everything was sweet and nice for young Gaspar. He had a hot temper and didn't like to be contradicted. In addition, he was naturally nervous and impatient. These character traits could have been a curse in his life but he turned them to his advantage

through self-control and prayer, channeling his energy and constant drive into higher directions.

SEMINARY DAYS

Gaspar began his studies for the priesthood when he was only eleven years old. He did not go off to a seminary away from his family, only visiting them on occasion. At that time, seminary training was much different than it is today. Gaspar's schedule can be compared to children attending Catholic schools today.

Every morning he went with his mother to the nearby church of the Gesu where he served Mass. The rest of the morning was spent at the seminary. Since there were no cafeterias or lunch programs, the young boy would go home to eat. The early afternoon was given to more studies and reading at the seminary. Gaspar's favorite reading was the "Imitation of Christ." During these years of training, his soul developed rapidly in a unique sense of love of God and neighbor. In the records of the Roman College, we can read this testimony of Father Francis Xavier Petrizi, the Prefect of Studies: "I testify that in our registers can be read the following: Gaspar del Bufalo: 1802, the grade of maximum praise in oratory; good grade in poetry; 1803, good grade in Logic and Metaphysics; 1804, in physics-chemistry a good grade with praise; in physics-mathematics, a good grade; 1806, in Moral Theology he won first place."

After school hours, Gaspar would make visits to the Blessed Sacrament in many churches of Rome. While on his daily jaunts through the area, he liked to visit the sick and the poor, bringing them some of his lunch, usually the sweets. "Let's study the miseries of people," he would say, "let's comfort those poor, so that they will be patient and resigned." When he was reprimanded for giving away most of his lunch, he would answer, "These people are hungrier than I."

PRECIOUS BLOOD DEVOTION

Another factor in Gaspar's early life which contributed to his great loyalty to the Church was his personal devotion to the Precious Blood of Jesus. He would often go to the Basilica of the Santa Croce to adore Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament. There he spent time with his uncle, Don Eugenio Pechio, who was later Abbot of the Cistercian monastery at Santa Croce. "A man of profound interior life;" he was the man St. Gaspar chose as his confessor when he was a young child. With his uncle he would talk about Our Lord's suffering and death. The chapel at Santa Croce contains the instruments of the Crucifixion which were covered with the stains of the Precious Blood.

The greatest joy of his childhood was the day of his First Holy Communion, when he received the Sacred Body and Blood of Jesus. Gaspar was especially drawn to the Precious Blood shed by

Christ in the Garden of Olives. "The other times," he said, "Jesus' shedding had been caused by the executioners and instruments of torture. But in Gethsemane, Jesus' sufferings and sweating of blood were caused by tire intensity of His love." This great love of the Precious Blood of Christ was the keynote of his entire life. He would say, "I wish that I had a thousand tongues to move all hearts toward the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ."

Another priest who greatly influenced Gaspar in this devotion was his close friend, Father Albertini. Together they were to found the Confraternity of the Most Precious Blood.

The church of Saint Nicholas in Carcere was reputed to have a relic of the Precious Blood and was the center where they would meet and hold meditations on the meaning and power of the Divine Blood of Jesus. Gaspar's father, Antonio, who spent most of his time playing cards, watching games and sitting around puffing smoke with his friends, was impressed by his son's devotion to the Precious Blood. And his mother, Annunziata, a woman of personal prayer and goodness, was not surprised by Gaspar's devotion since she had always guided him to Christ by her piety and example.

SOCIAL ACTION

The last years of Gaspar's seminary studies afforded him the opportunity to reach out to help others once more in deeds of love and concern. At this time, the city of Rome was a study in contrasts. Amid huddles of dirty shacks, narrow and dimly lit streets, dilapidated walks, there were also stately palaces and beautiful works of architecture that looked down almost in disdain on the squalor around them. Even though most Romans were carefree, looking for pleasures in colorful festivities and undisturbed leisure, this was not the case with Gaspar and some of his friends. Their hearts went out to the jobless people and the peasants who came into the city to sell their meager wares, looking for shelter anywhere they could find it, sleeping in shacks or on the streets. They sat around in smoke-filled taverns or spent their time gambling away the mere pittance they earned from their produce, cursing their state of life. No one seemed to be interested in them. It wasn't long until Gaspar formed a group of teenagers to offer them hope and aid. His young group brought food, clothing and medicine and spent many hours talking with these unfortunate people, trying to make them understand that they were really important persons. Later, Gaspar set up a Nightly Oratory in an old abandoned church, "Santa Maria in Vincis." There, he would pray together with them and offer them counseling. The results were dramatic. A new hope had arisen for these lonely and lost souls.

Most of us wouldn't have the nerve to take up "street-preaching." After receiving Minor Orders in 1801, Gaspar became a Saturday morning "street- preacher." With the permission of his superiors, he went to various parts of the city, stood on street corners and began speaking on timely topics of some religious truths. Soon, one or the other curiosity seeker would stop to see

who this young man was and why he was speaking with such energy and enthusiasm, trying so hard to get people's attention. Some remarked: "Keep your eye on that young cleric; he will be a great orator." Gaspar did touch the hearts of many. Along with his preaching, he would distribute medals and holy pictures as reminders of everyone's religious duties.

Besides his regular studies and preaching, Gaspar found time to visit houses of correction for teenagers who had been arrested for serious crimes. Since Gaspar always believed that there was strength in working in groups instead of going it alone, he joined Pious Unions such as that of the Holy Name of Mary, enrolled in Confraternities, like the one for the promotion of Christian Doctrine, and founded a group of laymen and clerics, with headquarters at Santa Galla, to give retreats and organize almsgiving for the needy. But "all work and no play" caught up with the young man. Doctors feared that he would catch tuberculosis and so they ordered him to leave the city for a needed change and rest. In a short time he returned to his apostolic works.

ORDINATION

The last two years of Gaspar's priestly formation passed by quickly. He was ordained on July 31, 1808. While the young priest was busy working in his first assignment for the good of souls in Rome, Pope Pius VII, as we saw in the beginning of this story, was locked up in the Quirinal Palace, a prisoner of the little Dictator. By September, 1809, the Pope was exiled, first to Grenoble, and then to Savona on the Riviera. It was June 13, 1810, when Gaspar was summoned to the Magistrate's office to take the oath of allegiance to Napoleon.

This, then, is the background of the young priest, Father Gaspar, who stood firm before the threats of the French and defied them in no uncertain terms. Even his father, Antonio, who had led a carefree life up to this point, refused to influence his son to take the oath to Napoleon: "Citizen," he said, "shoot me first and then my son, but don't tell me to do a thing like that."

The following day, Gaspar was torn away from his home and his priestly activities. As the wagon with the guards pulled up, Gaspar's mother tearfully said: "I am very proud of you. I shall not see you again until we meet in heaven." With the crack of the whip the wagon and prisoners disappeared into the far away hills. It would be four long and hard years before he would return to Rome and launch his missionary career.

EXILE

Over bumpy roads and through muddy streams the prisoners and armed guards arrived at Piacenza, a town located between the Po and Trebbia rivers in Northern Italy. The place was known for its damp and foggy climate which proved too much for Gaspar's frail frame. In his letters he often referred to the place as "dispiacenza (displeasing)" By September, because he

was so weak from not being able to 'take food, Gaspar was not expected to live. The doctors even began to predict the day and the hour of his death. As the sick priest lay almost lifeless, his friend Father Albertini, decided to tell him of a secret prophecy which a saintly Sister Mary Agnes had made concerning a certain zealous young priest. Father Albertini bent over the dying priest: "Can you hear me Father?" Gaspar signaled weakly that he did hear his voice. "A day after I had told Sister Agnes that I was to be exiled, she said to me: 'During your exile you will meet a young priest. The special sign of this man will be his devotion to St. Francis Xavier. He is destined to become an Apostolic Missionary, and a new Community of missionary priests under the banner of His Precious Blood will be founded by him. Also, he will be the founder of a Sisters' Order. Finally, he will be the messenger of devotion to the Precious Blood, for the purpose, of conquering sinners and enemies of the Church.'"

Father Albertini continued: "I sincerely believe you are the young priest Sister Agnes spoke of. He then urged Gaspar to place himself under the protection of St. Aloysius and to offer the Heavenly Father the Precious Blood of Jesus for his recovery. The prayer was heard. Gaspar improved, was able to eat properly and the fever went away. Within a few days he was strong enough to leave the house for short walks.

If you have a dread of mice and vermin, you can get some idea of the fright and aversion that Gaspar and his friends experienced in their jail. During the dark hours of the night, which was the most feared time, you may be horrified just to picture how they had to chase these unwelcomed creatures from their beds and keep them from chewing up the hard slices of black bread and drinking the stale water which was afforded them by their captors. Gaspar suffered the most from all this since he always had a terrible fear of rodents, and since he had always been so painstakingly careful in regard to cleanliness. Between being sick and living in such filth, it's a wonder that he made it through these first months. His faith and prayer brought him the needed courage.

By the end of 1810, Gaspar and the other priests were moved to Bologna. At first, they were able to stay with the Oratorian Fathers. In their monastery, the priests had time for prayer and study. With the help of Father Albertini, Gaspar began to lay the groundwork for his new Community of Brothers and Priests which he had dreamed about establishing. They decided to name the Society after the Blood of the Immaculate Lamb. Finally, everything seemed to be going well. Napoleon had apparently forgotten about the exiled priests. But it was just the calm before the storm. Suddenly, a new command went forth to force the clergy who had remained loyal to the Church to take the oath of allegiance to the French. All prisoners were deprived of food and other needs. Fortunately Gaspar and Father Albertini received some help from Countess Bentivoglio and her daughter who had heard of their plight. They were given

sanctuary in her family home. Gaspar even had the chance to give some retreats and tutor several of the children.

However, just as things seemed to be going better for Gaspar, he received sad news from home; his dear mother had passed away. When Father Albertini told him about her sudden death, Gaspar remained silent for a few moments. The news was especially bitter for Gaspar, because he had not been able to be with her in those final hours, whereas, she had always been with her son in every moment of his trials, sorrows and hopes.

As though the sad news of his mother's death wasn't enough, Gaspar was to endure more personal anguish when his spiritual director, Father Albertini, was transferred to another prison on the island of Corsica. The French government was upset because many of the younger priests refused to take the oath. "The old priests have too much influence on them," they surmised. "By getting rid of them, we will win over the young ones." In a short time the police furiously broke into the Countess's home where Gaspar was staying and seized him as if he were a dangerous criminal. They took him away, and before it all ended Gaspar would be moved to three more prisons. The prison at the Fortress of Lugo was terrible. All the priests were herded into one cell. To make matters worse, the jailer was a priest-hater who took personal delight in making life miserable for them, even forbidding them to say Mass. In these trying days Gaspar found peace in his deep faith in God. "You must remember just three simple things," he would say, "and no one can take away your peace: be conscious of God's presence and always do his will; perform each act as if it alone and nothing else were to be done; and do each action of your life as if it were to be your last. In other words, let all things be for you stepping stones to heaven."

Gaspar led his fellow prisoners into a way of life in these jails. They kept the daily regime of a religious house with the Divine Office, time for meditation, study and prayer. They would sing and pray the psalms together; when bread and wine were available they would celebrate Mass. The jailers eventually referred to them as the "gaudentes," the joyful ones.

"What does the Pope think that he is going to accomplish with his prayers?" Napoleon once asked in ridicule. "Make the guns drop from my soldiers' hands?" That's exactly what happened. As the French troops laid siege to Russia, the winter turned bitter cold. Food and provisions began to run short for the army. The order was given for retreat. As the miserable soldiers made their way through the ice and snow, many of them could no longer hold on to their guns. The guns slid to the hard ground from their frost-bitten hands with almost a silent thud. Napoleon's far flung empire was about to shatter. In the confusion the priests were able to escape, finding safety with friends. It all ended in 1814 when the French General ordered the priests to be freed. Napoleon was defeated by the allies and got his own taste of exile, when he was banished to the little island of Elba.

After Gaspar's return to Rome, he once again took up his apostolic work for the salvation of souls. The huge lines in front of his confessional attested to his popularity as a spiritual guide. This popularity was due to his treating each person as if he or she were the most important individual in the whole world, counseling each one with love and understanding. All over the city of Rome there was a great demand for his sermons and retreats. It didn't take long for Gaspar's preaching and counseling to reach the Holy Father's attention. Gaspar was offered positions of dignity and honors, such as a diplomatic career and the headship of one of the Roman Congregations, but he declined all except the request of the Pope to devote himself entirely to the work of giving missions and retreats.

Gaspar set up headquarters in the town of Giano, situated in the mountains some distance from Rome. There he took over an abandoned monastery and the ancient church of San Felice. With a lot of hard work and sweat the place was turned into a practical and beautiful spot.

A little community began to form at San Felice. Impressed by Gaspar's efforts, his zeal and extraordinary results, other priests joined him in his apostolic works. From there they went forth, preaching missions, directing retreats, and opening mission houses in the nearby towns. This was actually the beginning of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood. Gaspar directed the priests to wear regular cassocks with the sash of the diocesan clergy, but, as a distinctive mark, they were to wear the mission crucifix and chain. The members, united by the bond of charity under a superior, were to promote above all devotion to the Precious Blood of Jesus. To be effective in spreading devotion to the Divine Blood of Christ, Gaspar and his priests spent long hours studying the Bible and searching the ancient works of the Fathers of the Church for references about the Precious Blood. Through these efforts they succeeded in laying a solid foundation for this devotion in the hearts and minds of many people who came to the missions looking for divine help to change their ways of life.

GREAT PREACHER

Have you ever been nearly shaken out of your shoes by the sudden violence of an earthquake or a tornado? The physical experience of being "shook up" usually changes one's whole outlook on the terrible forces of nature. It's much the same in the spiritual order. Gaspar's retreats and missions were often described as "spiritual earthquakes" in the souls of his listeners, causing them to experience a new and personal outlook on the powers of grace and conversion. For example, towns held huge football-like rallies with bonfires when Gaspar spoke on the evil influence of bad literature on the youth. People cleared their homes of all books, leaflets and other readings which tended to corrupt the minds of the young. They threw them on a high stack, setting fire to the pile. Gaspar's "spiritual earthquakes" were so tremendous that, on one occasion at the town of San Severino, fifty priests had to be called in

to hear all the confessions. People were so impressed that, when the missions ended, they insisted on escorting the priests from the city with lighted candles, accompanied by brass bands.

FOUNDING OF THE SOCIETY

Ever since their prison days in exile, Gaspar and Father Albertini had been working on a special rule for the new Society which they dreamed of founding. That dream became a reality on the feast of Mary's Assumption in 1815. It was the last day of a three-day mission in her honor preached at San Felice. It was not surprising that Gaspar placed his group under the protection of Mary, Mother of Jesus, since he always publicly displayed an image of her under the title: "Our Lady of the Precious Blood," on each of his missions. The official date of the founding of the Society of the Precious Blood is August 15, 1815. That is why you will see many solemn celebrations commemorating this event in all parts of the Community today.

From this humble beginning, the Society of the Precious Blood began to flourish in many sections of Italy as new mission houses were opened at Albano, Rimini, Vallecorsa and in other towns near the Papal States. From these focal points the priests and Brothers fanned out to villages, big and small, bringing the message of salvation through the Precious Blood of Christ. If Gaspar could have opened his eyes in this century, he would see how his Society has spread to Austria, Germany, Poland, and Spain in Europe; to the United States and Canada in North America; to Chile, Peru, Brazil and Guatemala in Latin and South America; and to India and Tanzania. He would see that the thrust of his missionaries remains the same -- telling people that Jesus shed His Most Precious Blood to the last drop for love of all people; making everyone realize that we were not redeemed by corruptible things like gold or silver, but by the Most Precious Blood of Jesus; urging souls to repent, to do penance in return for this tremendous love.

TERRORISM

Now let us return to our story of Gaspar. We quickly see that the next part of his struggle against evil reminds us of the gangs in today's news, and the terrorism of our time. In and around the Papal States, entire towns were under the grasp of outlaws. Everyone lived in terror, as robbers, murderers and kidnapers of all sorts intercepted carriages and victimized the passengers, taking off into the hills with their loot. The bandits used to hide out in the little town of Sonnino, which became known as "Robbers' Roost." There, the notorious bandit, Casperone, had his headquarters. Since the government felt almost helpless in chasing down these outlaws in the rugged hills and narrow valleys, it decided in desperation to set fire to the town of Sonnino and plow up the ground where it stood. But that plan was abandoned as cooler heads prevailed; they realized that many innocent people would be caught in the middle.

What next? It was Cardinal Cristaldi who came up with the answer to solve this mess. When he realized the reasons behind this banditry -- a lack of religious training and extreme poverty - he knew that it would take spiritual weapons, not guns, to overcome it. He formed a plan to set up mission houses in various parts of the terrorized region, with each house having several priests to go forth and reach these poor people. The priests' message would be the good news of Christ to heal their souls and they would bring food and medicine to care for their bodies. Cristaldi knew there was one man who could direct and carry out this mission - Father Gaspar del Bufalo. And he was right. Even the outlaws could not believe their eyes when they saw Gaspar come unarmed into their dens to search them out to deliver his message. Often he would show up hungry, drenched with rain and sweat, tired from travel, but still carrying the crucifix and some items for the sick and poor. When friends became worried about his coughing and weakness, he would say, "Show me a climate in which no one dies and I will go there." But his great efforts paid off; he won the trust of the people and slowly the region returned to sanity once more. Even the boss, Casperone, converted and did penance for his past actions of terrorism.

Something else of great importance happened at this time in the life of Gaspar. While he was preaching a mission at the town of Vallecorsa, he met a devout young lady named Marla de Mattias. She was in the audience listening intently to the words of Gaspar on the beautiful devotion to the Precious Blood of Christ. After the talk, she sought an interview with him. In the many discussions which followed she opened her soul to his direction, expressing her longing to enter a cloister in order that she could spend the rest of her life in adoration of the Precious Body and Blood of Jesus in reparation for all the sins committed against the goodness of God. However, Gaspar told her that it was not her calling to live a life apart from the world, but that God wanted her to be a Sister who would be active among people, especially among the youth. She followed Gaspar's advice. Her enthusiasm toward devotion to the Precious Blood was seen in the way she signed all her letters: "Mary of the Holy Cross." Maria opened her first school for youth at the town of Acuto. There, she also established her new Congregation of Sisters under the title of "Adorers of the Blood of Christ." She drew up the rule for the new group with the help of Father John Merlini whom Gaspar had assigned as her Spiritual Director. However, the rule was based on the plan proposed by Gaspar to Maria many times before.

The spirit of the Congregation is based on Maria's words: "How beautiful is the Cross when it is carried in the heart with love." Marla de Mattias was beatified by Pope Pius XII in the Holy Year of 1950. Today, the members of her Congregation still carry her spirit of devotion to the Precious Blood to many parts of the world.

ENEMIES

Putting it mildly, not everyone wanted to see Gaspar and his Society succeed: some out of jealousy, others out of dislike for being shown up, and still others out of loss of business in peddling evil literature and selling gambling devices. Government officers in Sonnino lost their double pay because they were no longer working in hazardous territory after Gaspar finished his work. In 1822, all of the criticisms and vicious lies of his enemies came to a head and really flared up in Rome. The big lie, which failed to stick, accused the Society of not obtaining permission from bishops in whose diocese they worked. It was soon proved that the Society was the victim of slander. Besides, the bishops were delighted to have such enthusiastic men working in their territories. When this tactic didn't work, his enemies next spread the rumor in the form of anonymous letters to Rome that the missionaries were ignorant, promoting new and dangerous doctrines. One enemy wrote: "The title of Most Precious Blood is irreverent and profane. It should not be used as the name of any Society." Of course, this too proved to be false.

If one throws mud often enough, some of it is bound to stick. All the lies and criticisms had some repercussion at the Vatican. The financial help extended to the missionaries was cut in half, forcing several mission houses to close. Pope Pius VII, who had always showed kindness and enthusiastic support for the Society and was one of Gaspar's biggest supporters, passed away. Gaspar was soon to feel his loss, since the newly-elected Pope, Leo XII, was not friendly toward the Society.

It wasn't long before Gaspar was summoned to the Vatican. There, he was to answer questions about the title of the Society and to explain the accusations against his missionaries. The day of Gaspar's audience with Leo XII came. In private, the Pope mentioned the various charges made against him and his Community. In a clear and forthright way Gaspar answered the calumnies and defended his reasons why the title of Most Precious Blood should be kept for the Society. After the Holy Father examined the new rule, he was impressed by the loyalty and holiness of the Founder. He embraced him saying: "Now I know why you have so many enemies, but do not be afraid. Leo XII is with you." After Gaspar left the audience hall, the Pope turned to his secretary and remarked: "Father Gaspar del Bufalo is an angel."

The more vicious enemies of Gaspar were still determined to get him out of the picture. At first they tried to influence high Church authorities that Gaspar, because of his great success and loyalty should be "rewarded" with a diplomatic post in some foreign country such as Brazil. In his humility, Gaspar asked that the honor be given to another. Unselfishly he explained why he should remain with his Community and why he should be close to his elderly father who depended upon him for care and livelihood: "My father, too, is old and my relatives depend on what little I can do for them. Besides, I also fear a conspiracy to remove me from my

Community.” Leo XII was quick to see the trap set by Gaspar’s enemies, and so decided to let him continue his work of the missions and retreats. Next, some of Gaspar’s enemies went to extremes. They hired a gunman to enter his quarters and get rid of him once and for all. But, when the gangster came face to face with Gaspar, he was so shaken that he dropped his weapon and fearfully ran off into the darkness.

EXTRAORDINARY HAPPENINGS

Several extraordinary happenings in the life of Gaspar have been attributed to his power of prayer before the throne of God. One is referred to as the “Miracle of the Rain.” On a hot summer day, Gaspar was preaching to a huge crowd in an open field. Even the bishop of the area was in the audience. All at once, the sky became dark with heavy rain clouds and the downpour started. The crowd started to run for cover. When Gaspar signaled for them to stay, many hesitated to remain for fear of getting drenched and hit by lightning. As they turned their attention toward the missionary, they noticed his hands joined in prayer and his eyes fixed on the banner of Our Lady of the Precious Blood which had been placed in front of the crowd. Gaspar asked Mary to intercede for them and stop the rain. Suddenly, just as it had started, the torrent of rain stopped, allowing Gaspar to finish his sermon. After everyone had returned safely home, the rain storm came back again. Through Divine power the forces of nature can be controlled or limited. Another extraordinary phenomenon is said to have taken place. One day it was reported that Gaspar was in two places at the same time. In the lives of the saints this happening is called “the miracle of bi-location.” Also, on another day while hearing confessions he had a very long line of penitents. He came out of his confessional and beckoned an older man who could not stand in the long line to quickly come in so he could confess his sins. Very soon after confessing his sin, the man suddenly died.

MORE OPPOSITION

When it seemed that Gaspar had Pope Leo XII solidly on his side in support of his methods of missions and retreats, and that everything would be calm for a while, the Holy Father suddenly passed away. With the election of a new Pope more troubles were bound to be stirred up. When the successor, Pius VIII, began to rule, the enemies of Gaspar surfaced again, circulating reports designed to hurt him and his group. The new Pope was disturbed by these stories. He withdrew the monthly subsidy to the members of the Community and summoned Gaspar to the Vatican. In the Papal audience, Gaspar tried to explain the real facts, but the Pope still decided to cancel the special privileges of the Precious Blood priests. Although Gaspar was stunned, he felt no bitterness in his heart, realizing that Pius VIII was acting innocently in what he considered best for the Church.

Gaspar later sent a letter to the Holy Father containing the official papers of the previously granted privileges. After examining all the papers, Pius VIII regretted his curt treatment of the priest and at once restored all the privileges and permissions to the Society. 1831 was not a happy year for Gaspar. Pope Pius VIII suddenly passed away, and in the same year, Gaspar lost his father. Gaspar himself was in failing health; for ten years he had suffered from various sicknesses of the lungs, throat and mouth. Very concerned, his followers urged him to see the newly elected Holy Father, Gregory XVI, for approval of the rule of the Society. At the appointment with the Holy Father, it soon became clear that he did not seem to be in favor of the rule, stating that he did not wish to hear any more about it for the present time. Gaspar was crushed; it seemed that his whole work of twenty years would end in nothing. But Gaspar remained optimistic; time, he hoped, would change the mind of the Holy Father. However, Gaspar was not to see the final approval of his rule and his Community; it would not be given until several years following Gaspar's death, by the same Holy Father

LAST ACT OF CHARITY

In 1837, cholera broke out in Rome. Everywhere, the panic and fright among the people was even worse than the actual disease. When the Holy Father realized the terrible situation, he ordered the preaching of penance in the major churches of the city in an attempt to calm the citizens and urge them to turn to God for divine help. Gaspar was one of the priests chosen for this task, and even though his friends pleaded for him not to accept on account of his own ill health, he nonetheless, went to Rome, putting himself wholeheartedly into the work. "It is God's will," he would say, "that I go, and I am willing to sacrifice my life for the love of Christ." When he finished his talks in the churches, he could be seen dragging himself from house to house, seeking any sick person who needed personal help. He told the people to invoke the power of the Precious Blood of Jesus and no more of them would die of the disease. After that, no one else came down with the cholera. There was calmness once again.

PEACEFUL DEATH

With his strength almost completely sapped, Gaspar returned to his home, where he was soon forced to his bed. He still managed to say his breviary and to celebrate daily Mass. On December twenty-third, he became very sick. Then, on the twenty-eighth of the month, his close friends, Father John Merlini and Father Vincent Pallotti, came to pray with him in his final hours. In Father Pallotti's own words he tells of the death of Gaspar: "I went at once to the room and knelt a while in prayer before the sacred images near the bed. Then I turned to the sick man and noted that he was in great agony. Father John Merlini was near me. He offered the last services of the ministry to the dying man, who was perfectly calm. On his face there shone much sweetness and such signs of peace, that, considering everything in the light of faith, I must say and often have said, it awakened a desire of death. About a quarter of an hour

after my arrival, the servant of God, as if immersed in the joys of paradise, tranquilly and placidly passed away.”

SAINT OF THE CHURCH

Since that day, Gaspar has been presented as a beautiful example of a person who served God and his neighbor with his whole heart, with his whole mind and with his whole strength. On December 18, 1904, he was beatified by the Church. Fifty years later on June 11, 1954, He was declared to have practiced the Christian virtues to a heroic degree, being inscribed in the catalogue of the saints.

EXAMPLE FOR OUR TIMES

In 1960, Pope John XIII, before announcing the opening of the Second Vatican Council, went to pray at the tomb of St. Gaspar, calling upon this saint to intercede for its success. Pope John called devotion to the Precious Blood of Jesus the “Devotion of Our Times,” and referred to St. Gaspar as the greatest apostle of the Precious Blood devotion in modern days. The Holy Father echoed the words of St. Gaspar, pointing out that the entire history of the Church IS a history of devotion to the Precious Blood of Jesus. Wherever the sacraments are administered, there the Precious Blood is at work. They are the arteries carrying the Divine Life to all souls. As in the years of St. Gaspar, he stressed, the present generation is threatened by destruction and society itself seems to be turning more and more away from the truths of God. There is no other means of salvation for the world than turning to the fountains of divine grace, flowing from the sacred wounds of Jesus. All Christians have the responsibility of increasing their faith that they may be helpers for the Church of Christ in saving the world. This is the message of St. Gaspar for our times: people must realize that the answer to social problems is not in the blood shed by opponents, but in the Divine Blood shed by Jesus, which alone can cure all injustices. The world itself, as St. Gaspar always taught, can set itself right and always will be able to do so because the voice and Blood of Christ cry out for pity and mercy. And corresponding to this cry of pity and mercy, repeated constantly in the drops of Christ’s Blood, is the Divine Redeemer’s invitation to brothers and sisters to forgive each other and thus enjoy the true victory of justice, pardon and peace.

St. Gaspar would often pray to God, asking that God provide 1000 voices to proclaim the mysteries of the Most Precious Blood. St. Gaspar never lived to see it, but after his death many followers joined the mission band and traveled to many parts of the world to continue the same kind of preaching begun by St. Gaspar, calling people back to the ways of peace and devotion. Now there are nearly 600 Priests and Brothers, not counting the thousands of sisters and members of pious unions who continue the work begun by St. Gaspar in 19 countries:

Italy, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Poland, India, Tanzania, Guinea Bissau, Columbia, Brazil, Peru, Guatemala, Chile, Mexico, United States, Canada, Vietnam, Croatia.