

Memorial -----Address

at

Translation Services of the Remains of

Seventeen Sisters of Loretto held

in St. Paul, Kansas on September 15th, 1930.

J. M. Fox C.P.

Text.

"Behold these shall come from afar and behold these from the north and from the sea, and these from the south country.-----Lift up thy eyes round about, and see all these are gathered together, they are come to thee; as I live, saith the Lord, thou shalt be clothed with all these as with an ornament, and as a bride thou shalt put them about thee.

--Is. XLIX . 12/18.

To shed a tear on the tomb of departed worth, to recall to our minds, and propose to our imitation the generous sacrifices, the noble struggles and the heroic virtues of those distinguished friends and benefactors of mankind, who have "finished their course" and kept the faith" and disappeared from this world's busy theatre is a feeling grateful to the heart of every priest of Jesus Christ, and one highly befitting his sacred ministry.

Moreover, on such an occasion and at such a ceremony as we are present, this morning, this task should be especially grateful to the best feelings of my heart as a Passionist because they of whom I am to speak were members of an order of Sisters whose spirit, rule and devotion are so kindred to that of my own that they have always been regarded as a Sister Society of the Sons of St. Paul of the Cross; and what is more, for over seventy five years there has been cemented such a friendship, or I should say, such a brother and sister-love between the two that I would have the greatest hesitancy, today, in stating which owes the other more lasting gratitude-the Passionists or the Loretines.

Yet, my Brethren, however grateful I should feel for the privilege of addressing you today, permit me to say that I accept the task with holy awe, and shrink with becoming diffidence from the presumption of coming forward as a panegyrist of those whom God Himself has already eulogized and crowned with the reward of everlasting life. To do justice to these seventeen whose revered memory we are now assem-

bled to pay the last and most sacred honors, would require the eloquence and the language of the Apostle of the Nations, as we see him on the eve of his mortal dissolution writing to his beloved disciple, Timothy, in those heaven-cheering dictates of a self-approving conscience: "I have fought the good fight" "I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, as for the rest there is laid up for me a crown of justice."

Once before, years ago, the remains of these noble heroines of God were brought to the chapel of old. St. Anne's across the way for burial service, but then singly. As I look out on this audience this morning, I can see a number of you here who sat there in that memorable chapel at the solemn obsequies of each of these seventeen Sisters; heard the mournful requiem of Mother Church over all that is mortal of men for that which is of them immortal: "Eternal rest grant unto her, O lord and let perpetual light shine upon her;" followed each in a slow-paced procession to the grave, and then turned away thinking sadly of the warm Christ-like heart that had ceased to beat, and that bright Christ-like smile which would greet you no more, and that never-fading Christ-like sympathy which henceforth you would invoke in vain.

Today, we are gathered around these saintly "Friends of Mary at the Foot of the Cross" not in sorrow or bereavement but in joy and triumph. Every word of the sacred liturgy and every rubric of the splendid ritual of Mother Church today speaks to us of victory; and each of those caskets has a voice calling to us of its own to come and kneel there as at an altar to praise God for the life which has left behind such a wealth of records, each a surviving love, and above all for that spirit of faith which still rests on the people of this community for whom "her step the path of duty trod."

This thought, my brethren, leads naturally to the further statement that there is a two-fold purpose connected with these services of Translation today, in which I find an

encouragement to preach where otherwise I would be reluctant to speak.

First of all, this ceremony is on our part one of reparation to these seventeen for our neglect over so many years, unintentional though it may have been, of failing to provide for their precious remains a more fitting resting place!

Today, we take them where they rightfully belong down among those other giants of God with whom they labored and pioneered so heroically when the ground on which we stand today was not yet a frontier of civilization; the noble sons of Loyola! Down among those for whom they first trudged their weary journey over that lonely trail of the King's highway, "seeking with their lives the living and with their death the crown which their Heavenly Spouse shall render to his faithful ambassadors that, home-returning, have for spoils the souls of the many who otherwise were lost, their beloved Indians. And may I not add too, down among your own dear and near ones who this day will welcome the re-consecration, the re-sanctification of God's Holy Acre by their now sacred remains.

The second and main purpose of today's celebration, my dear brethren, is something that concerns, or should concern yourselves. This day should be an occasion of an universal thanksgiving for the parish in general for that precious legacy of faith and devotion which these dear Sisters bequeathed by word and example to your mothers and fathers, and they in turn to you. It should be an occasion of deepest thought and remembrance to each member of the parish in particular as to what the toils and sacrifices of these noble women brought to this community in the way of catholic education for over three-quarters of a century.

If your souls, this morning, my friends, are only noble enough and spiritual enough to realize all that God has done for you and yours through the ministrations of these whose cherished remains we now upon; if your gratitude is in any poor way proportionate to the worth of that priceless

heritage which the Daughters of Loretto have left to your keeping, no grateful cry of the human heart can this day equal in depth and intensity your act of thanksgiving; "What shall I render unto the Lord, for all the things that He has rendered unto me?"

There is a flavor of sacrifice and devotion and faith, peculiarly its own, my dear friend, in the story of Osage Mission and that Community which boasts itself the first approved religious congregation of purely American origin in the Catholic Church. To catch that flavor it is necessary that we travel 'back over a century to the birth-place of Loretto, to the Kentucky of an hundred and eighteen years ago, and there become at least passingly acquainted with the robust faith, the noble enthusiasm, the self-sacrifice, the high resolve which mark the records of the vital Catholicity of that State which so many of us here, today, still know and love as our own cradle-land.

The Church in America owes much, indeed, to old Kentucky. She received with welcoming arms the first Apostolic labors of the first priest ordained in this country, the saintly Theodore Badin; and in turn gave to Catholic America its first ordained clergyman, the brilliant and eloquent, Robert Abell. From the faculty of her first theological seminary, Rome chose no less than twelve Bishops and six Archbishops for the various Sees of the American Church. She gave to the Sons and Daughters of St. Dominic, to the Trappists, to the Nuns of the Good Shepherd, to the Xaverian Brothers their first home in America; and in the same year that Loretto sprang into existence, she presented for Papal Approval the second religious Congregation rounded in this country, the Order of Nazareth, a Sisterhood now numbering over eleven hundred members, and to whose rule of life no form of Christian education or of Christian charity is foreign.

But the fairest and brightest hour that ever dawned for Kentucky and the West was that which saw the establishment of the foundation of the Sisters of Loretto at the foot of the Cross.

We would like to feel, today especially, that Loretto's saintly Founder, Father Nerinckx, in his day of bitter travail a century ago saw in prophetic vision what was to be when the grain of mustard seed he planted in the wilds of Kentucky should have grown and spread its mighty branches far beyond the spot of its planting.

Founded in 1812, making perpetual vows in 1813, recognized, approved and placed under the protection of the Propaganda by the Holy See in 1816, the Sisters of Mary at the Foot of the Cross, are today realizing one of that Kentucky pioneer priest's most cherished dreams. Yet how pitifully poor and humble the beginning all was! The little log-cabin mission-Church on the hill overlooking Hardin's Creek; the rustic congregation gathered to witness a sacrifice, the first of its kind ever offered in the Western country; the three simple Kentucky girls, Mary Rhodes, Nancy Havern and Christina Stuart in severely plain attire, gazing in rapt devotion at the beautiful statue of Mary, the one adornment of the altar of wood; the saintly priest, tears streaming down his rugged cheeks, as he receives the vows that mark the birth that day of a new society of religious in the church of God.

Does it seem possible, my brethren, that under such heroically inauspicious surroundings, it could have ever entered into the wildest imagination of those three Kentucky girls that such, as we see it today, would be the result of the generous self-sacrifice with which they inaugurated the work of Christian education away back in the first days of the nineteenth century? Yes, such seems to have been so. For when their Apostolic Founder proposed to have some nuns come from Europe to direct them properly in their new vocation, those independent Kentucky girls told him that they were Americans, and with the same indomitable spirit with which their fathers had moulded a young Republic, shaped the destinies of a State, and were making history in the war of that year, 1812, with that same spirit and with him alone

as their guide to spiritual perfection they could do as equally great things for God, Church and religion.

Thus the epic began. Other women came to join them. House after house was established, often only floorless cabins of logs, the Sisters frequently without food, even without shoes; their household accommodations of the poorest, and then the long Journeys for new foundations. And it is singularly enough how many of their houses in those early days, as our own St. Anne's, were the prey of the trail of fire which seemed to pursue them.

But such losses only added new courage, and each year their homes and schools kept a steady pace with the transformation and civilization of the western wilderness, until now, we see their splendid institutions of learning dotting the various dioceses along the old overland trails as so many sentinels on the highway of the King still guarding that Church and that faith which their love for souls first brought to the savage children of the plains.

Today, if we would follow the Daughters of Loretto to their journey's end we must travel far out beyond the rim of the Western world into the Empire of China. There again we see the spiritual children of the saintly Nerinckx; there too we see as their co-laborers of Christ, their "brothers at the Foot of the Cross", the Passionists, and there on any day in their tiny chapel at Han Yang, at the mystical hour of three we may still hear that sweet, century-old, alternate chant: "O Suffering Jesus! O Sorrowful Mary!"

Among all of Loretto's earlier foundations, none is held in sweeter benediction by the people of Kansas than that of St. Genevieve, Missouri; for it was from its hallowed sanctuary came those first four whose memory, I now ask you to recall with me in accents of prayer, reverence and thanksgiving, Mother Concordia, Sister Petronilla, Sister Vincentia, and she, whose name for the past eighty years has been a household word in the homes of Bishops, priests, lai-

ty, Catholic and non-Catholic, throughout all these broad regions of the Southwest, Mother Bridget.

Well, indeed, has one annalist of Loretto remarked in reference to the foundation at Osage Mission "Had St. Genevieve no other gem in her crown, this were enough."

As we look back in fancy, this morning, my dear brethren, to the establishment of that first home of the Sisters of Loretto in Kansas, how inspiring the memories we gather into our souls! We see that Apostle of the Plains, Father Schoenmakers, journeying to St. Louis, Knocking at the doors of convents seeking for a Sisterhood to bestow upon the Indian girls the same blessings of Christian education which he and his brother Jesuits were giving the Indian boys of the mission. And we see him knocking in vein, until God put it into his apostolic heart to make a final plea to the Friends of Mary at the Foot of the Cross. Fired with the same zeal and longing for the souls of the Indians as her beloved Founder, Father Nerinckx, Loretto answered that appeal; and on September 20th, eighty three years ago, the four whose names I have just mentioned, left the Convent of St. Genevieve's to begin that memorable journey which was to bring to the Southwest the first robe of a Catholic Sisterhood.

The sacrifices, the trials, the loneliness, and with the memory of Indian savagery still so keen, the horrors, which that journey entailed were only equaled by the sufferings, the privations and disappointments that awaited them at their destined Osage Mission. All that has been written of Loretto and those early Kansas days, my dear brethren, would seem incredible were it not that even within the memory of the present generation, there have been living voices to attest the truth of what the eyes had seen. But what has been written and what has been told of these seventeen and their companions who labored in this community is now a story know by heart to every lover of Loretto, and to every student of American Catholic history. So, my friends, I shall make no effort in this sermon to fill in any of the details of the picture, or to diffuse over the whole the golden glory of Heaven

which alone can give that picture its fitting coloring. The task is beyond my reach. Much as I know of the Loretines and their work in this portion of the Lord's vineyard, God, only, knows them as they were.

Far from home and kindred, deprived for years even of the associations of those of their own race, and with all the poverty and misery of that first foundation on Hardin's Creek multiplied a thousand-fold, these delicate but valiant women met and overcame disappointments and hardships that would have conquered the souls of the strongest and most heroic of men. But determined not to fail in their God-given mission of being the first successful pioneers in the work of Christian education west of the Mississippi, they went forward like soldiers to their consecrated task, confident of the protection of Him for whom they had sacrificed every earthly comfort and gratification.

Put to death all day long by their soul-trying duties as mothers and nurses, as well as teachers of their Indian wards, and with the appalling silence of the plains, at night, broken only by the wild howls of prairie wolves, or the wilder howls of savages, their only thought was of that pledge which one day at the foot of God's altar in old Loretto, they gave to that Crucified Lover of Souls:

"Were the wealth at the world all mine,
That, indeed, were a present too small;
For love so excelling; so divine
Demand my life, my soul, my all."

Such, my friends, are only the broadest outlines of the picture whose memories, this morning, rise up before our souls. If the picture, therefore, fails in beauty and vividness of color, the fault lies not with the scenes or the facts, but with me who am unequal to the inspirations of the realities I would fain portray.

But that picture is painted--painted in all its details, in all its rapturous radiance, upon the pages of the Book of Life. And that Picture is seen by Him whose rewards are the gifts

of eternity, and seen also now, by each of these seventeen Sisters, who, freed from earth's labors and burdens, stands today, within the portals of Paradise and whispers to us the secret of her life's success, here and hereafter; "All was for God: now, all is with God."

The Catholic Church, my friends, is the visible kingdom of Christ, with mission to build up His invisible kingdom in the souls of men. How precious to her in this great spiritual work, is the co-operation of her sisterhoods--the potent influence of the example which they furnish and of the ideals which they hold up before the world: were her sisterhoods to disappear, there would be missed from the harvest fields of the Church, legions of workers, whose places could never be filled; there would be missed from the pages of the story of the Church, feats and triumphs of religion and charity that have won for her the love and admiration of the ages. Therefore, I have no hesitation in saying, this morning, that to delete Loretto from the pages of the history of the American church would be to tear the very heart from the story of our Western Christian civilization.

Sisters of Loretto: permit me to assure you, today, in the presence of the remains of these seventeen, that our gratitude is heartfelt and enduring, though we know that earth holds no recompense by which your lives can be measured. God, and God alone, can make adequate return. Heaven is your aim: Heaven is your reward!

Sisters of Loretto: this gratitude to you for all that you have meant for this community of Osage Mission, or St. Paul, is equaled only by the great joy that ever since the day Loretto first set foot on Kansas soil, their ranks have been constantly widened to make room for the daughters of our people whose deep faith has summoned them in such large numbers to the service of God and souls, as Friends of Mary at the Foot of the Cross. And our joy is all the greater that this love for the religious life which the Lorettoines first planted in the hearts of our children did not cease its blossoming of its fruitage when Providence saw fit to transfer

your spiritual labors further West. How happy we are today to see so many of our young women still leaving all for God, and helping us repay the debt we, now owe those other daughters of Christ, who for a quarter of a century, have tempered our spiritual atmosphere with their sweet piety and enriched it with their fragrance of the virtues of consecrated womanhood; the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Sisters of Loretto: That the deeds that are still to be recorded in your annals be not less worthy of honor than those we commemorate, this morning, let me assure you, as a memory of this day, that St. Paul and its people will ever make as their own that last prayer of Loretto's noble saintly founder:

"O Loretto Sisters: Let Loretto be Loretto forever: Loretto houses, Loretto customs, Loretto labors, Loretto hardships, Loretto food, Loretto furniture, Loretto Sisters, Loretto scholars; every house on the place a Loretto house. Cling to the tree that Mary planted there; cling to the Cross that Mary raised there; cling to the walls that Mary built there; cling to the dress that Mary gave there; Make use of the graces that Mary obtained there; love what she said; like what she arranged; do what she loved. O Friends of Mary at the Foot of the Cross! O sweet, O glorious title; Be not unworthy of it!

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Like him may we see that prayer accomplished on earth, and hear it rewarded in the company of the Friends of Mary in Heaven. Amen!