

**Introduction**

*The commission named by Bishop Reilly has completed its first phase of investigation of the extraordinary claims resulting from occurrences surrounding Audrey Santo, a young girl who has been in her family's care since an accidental near drowning eleven years ago. After developing a systematic method for investigation, the commission in this phase had as its objective the analysis of existing documents and materials as well as first hand witnessing of some of the "other than normal" experiences which were occurring at the home.*

**What was the focus of the commission?**

The commission was responsible for developing a methodology for investigation consistent with Catholic teaching on these matters. It included the following four areas:

(1) Explanation of "paranormal" occurrences in the Santo home, namely the emitting of oils from statues and other religious objects and the presence of red stains which some say look like blood on four consecrated hosts.

(2) The ability of Audrey to communicate, at least to recognize the presence of others around her and to comprehend what is being said to her.

(3) The response of the family as it deals with this demanding situation regarding their youngest child, the paranormal activities occurring in the house and the requests by increasingly larger numbers of outsiders to visit Audrey.

Specifically,

Is the family or someone else causing the paranormal activities to occur through some form of chicanery?

What is the quality of the family's general care and concern for their daughter?

Does the family attempt to exploit interest in their situation for financial gain?

Does the family seek notoriety from the situation?

Does the family in any way seek to manipulate those who visit in order to direct their interpretation of the situation?

(4) The basis for the theological interpretations surrounding the claims, including

Are there miracles occurring that can be attributed directly to Audrey?

Is Audrey capable of being a victim soul, a title attributed to her by some people?

Are the claims being made in keeping with Catholic teaching?

Are the daily religious rituals and practices being performed according to approved liturgical practice?

Are the Catholic faithful at risk from anything when they visit the home or read materials from the Apostolate, which reports on Audrey, or view videotapes about Audrey? Is there the potential of a "cult" forming outside the control of the family or the Apostolate?

***How does the Church explain the appearance of oils, blood, and other paranormal activities?***

Although we can't explain why oils and claims of blood are appearing on religious articles in the home, there is no obvious evidence of chicanery. There is the need to have controlled tests performed involving some of the religious articles and lab analysis of resulting oils or other secretions since no two reports from past tests have come back with the same results.

***Is the presence of this "mysterious" oil significant?***

The presence of oil is not proof, direct or indirect, of the miraculous. Paranormal activities in and of themselves, according

to the perspective and practice of the Catholic Church, do not provide a basis for proving the miraculous. This has been the Church's confirmed directive for hundreds of years since Pope Benedict XIV. (1740 – 1758)

When one applies fundamental rules of logic to the situation, even if the presence of the oil cannot be explained, one cannot presume that the inability to explain something automatically makes it miraculous. It certainly calls for scientific research and we will continue to do so.

We must be careful not to identify this oil as "holy oil," which could be used to anoint a person. The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, which can only be celebrated by a priest or bishop, uses oil blessed by the bishop at the Mass of Chrism, and is given to those who are seriously ill. This oil is properly called "oil of the sick." Additionally, an anointing by a priest or a bishop may be celebrated as part of a Eucharistic Liturgy for those who are ill, using oil blessed following the Rite of Anointing and Pastoral Care of the Sick.

The Church is responsible for determining the essential elements for the celebration of sacraments and how they are to be administered. Church law calls for pure olive oil or other plant oil to be used in the celebration of the sacrament. Consequently, the Church maintains that this "mysterious oil" should not be used in anointing a person who is ill.

#### *Can Audrey communicate?*

While family members claim that Audrey is able to communicate, there is no data to corroborate that claim from the available documentation of the medical professionals who have been involved in her care. With the family's cooperation, there is the need to perform specific testing using professionally accepted methods to determine brainwave activity when

subjected to various external stimuli, for example the arrival and departure of family members from her room

#### *How has the family been responding, from the Church's perspective?*

The family's constant love and devotion to their daughter is a miracle in the broad sense of the word. They have always recognized the human dignity of their daughter, despite the circumstances. And, they never cease to open up the door to their home as well as their hearts to the needs of the suffering who write to them and call upon them each day.

More than anything else, those who visit the family make note of the excellent care the family gives to their daughter. This has manifested itself in her physical condition, for example, she has not apparently had bedsores in the eleven years she has been confined to her bed.

#### *Does the family seek financial gain from the situation?*

There is no evidence that the family has sought financial gain for themselves. On the contrary, they have not sold the oil which appears in their home and request only nominal donations for videotapes and other materials about Audrey in order to assist in providing for the care of their daughter.

Notoriety is of some concern. The family does not seek it for themselves but they certainly do so for Audrey. This has led some people to expect intercessions from Audrey and /or miracles long before anyone has had a chance to evaluate these claims more thoroughly. It has also put the family in a more awkward position of having far more demand for personal visits than it can ever accommodate, while continuing to offer excellent care for their daughter.

***Are visitors manipulated in order to experience certain things?***

Staged or planned manipulation of the visitors to the house is not apparent. The general attitude in the house is friendly, warm and inviting without any sanctimony or undue reverence. However, it must be pointed out that the groups arriving together as they do, often tend to share certain characteristics in facing terminal illness (their own or that of a loved one) or, at least, tend to be far from skeptical regarding the possibility of experiencing a miracle.

***Is the Church ready to say one way or another if miracles attributed to Audrey are occurring?***

It will take significant time and resources to determine if miracles are directly attributable to Audrey. Many of the cases cited publicly concerning Audrey's intercession have had medical opinions, which did not rule out the potential for normal recovery (in whole or in part.) Before any objective investigation can be done directly on this question, issues such as Audrey's level of consciousness and ability to communicate need to be corroborated (see above request for further testing.) There will also be the need to set up a clearing-house involving medical authorities to review specific claims of physical cures.

***Is Audrey a Victim Soul?***

The term "victim soul" is not an official term in the Church. It was used in some circles in the 18th and 19th century when there was a fascination with suffering and death, in an attempt to offer the possibility that one person could suffer for another. Christians believe that Jesus is the sacrificial lamb, the victim for our sins. His suffering and death redeemed humanity from sin and eternal death.

Through baptism we share in Christ's death with the hope that we will share in his resurrection, his glory. To begin to consider this notion of "victim soul" with regards to Audrey, one would have to establish a corroborated understanding of Audrey's cognitive abilities. This has yet to be done. Beyond that, one would have to determine that Audrey, at the age of three was, and presently is, capable of making a free choice to accept the suffering of others.

***Are there practices at the family's home which are contrary to acceptable Catholic rituals?***

Fidelity to the sacraments and to approved liturgical rituals has been noted. Specific areas of concern, such that they should be discontinued regardless of the outcome of this investigation, are as follows:

1. One should only pray for Audrey. Our faith teaches us to pray to God and to pray for the intercession of the saints. Therefore, the distribution of a "Prayer to Audrey" should cease immediately.
2. Whether or not claims of blood are proven to be present on the consecrated Eucharist in the tabernacle in the home, it must be presented in the context that the transubstantiation we witness at every celebration of the Eucharist is the same. There should be no implications that hosts consecrated at Mass in the Santo home are "better" or even unique. When used in Benediction or Exposition, only one consecrated host should be used, in keeping with approved liturgical practice.

***Are there any priests officially assigned as chaplains or spiritual directors to Audrey?***

No. Priests who are involved with the family are acting on their own behalf in personally working with the family.

Audrey and her family are members of Christ the King parish. The pastor of Christ the King is responsive to and available for their spiritual needs.

***Is the investigation over?***

The first phase of the investigation, which was to compare existing reports for possible corroboration, is complete. Additional quantifiable study is needed, as cited above in this document, in order to attempt to define the composition of the oil and to verify other claims, as well as to determine Audrey's ability to recognize and respond to outside stimuli. Those tests need to be done before determining whether further theological investigation is warranted.