

SON OF FRANZ THUENTE

THEODORE
CLEMENT

FATHER THUENTE

CATHERINE GIESING
DAUGHTER OF JOSEPH
SISTER OF OUR THEODORE

First day of May -- I beg the Queen of May to help me to know how she brought me to Christ, the High Priest, Who called me to be his priest.

Festina: -- I was born like the Saviour in a little Bethlehem, a little stone house in the midst of a new wild territory of the state of Iowa. When Father Cretin, later he was first Bishop of St. Paul, said the first Mass in a log chapel on the banks of the Little Turkey River for the Catholic Indians, many of them converted by Father Ma , Father Cretin dedicated the country to "Mary, the Queen of the Wilderness".

We were about forty miles from the nearest railroad station, McGregor, on the banks of the Mississippi. My father used eight oxen to transform hundreds of acres of the wilderness into fertile fields. His life of sacrifice may be judged by the fact that he had to take the wheat with his oxen to McGregor, a trip that took five days going and returning, making the trip seven times one season.

Fortunately, the first pioneers were good Catholics, claiming the land from the government and selling it to Catholics only, to organize a Catholic colony.

My home was Catholic. The first fact I remember is: kneeling with my mother on the steps of the Church (I was too noisy to be in church), seeing my mother praying while the priest celebrated Mass. With pleasure I remember how we never ate a meal without saying prayers. How often, especially every evening in Lent, we knelt down and said the Rosary, adding a decade for the souls in Purgatory and the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We never missed Mass on Sunday if it was in any way possible to make the trip of two miles in a heavy lumber wagon.

Fortunately, just at about the time I began to go to school, the Sisters of St. Francis came from La Crosse to teach us. What an impression they made on me!!

In the parochial school I in no way distinguished myself. I was poor in reading, spelling, and playing; good in arithmetic and religion. The Good priest called me a few times a Doctor of Theology.

The most memorable thing that happened in my school days was an accident. We, about six or seven children, climbed on a wagon (hayrack) and I fell and the wheel went over my chest. The driver was alarmed, but I got up feeling nothing. The driver stopped again a little later and said "Oh you must be hurt, tell me" --I laughed and said, "I don't suffer."

HIS MOTHER DIED IN 1878.

He was 11.

The one great end of our parochial school was learning First Holy Communion. We received it late. I was I believe, twelve or thirteen years old, but well prepared. The day was for the parish a big feast. First Communion meant for very many the end of school--I continued one or two winter seasons.

Then came a great event. It was in September, 1882. I was fifteen years old. Father Becker, S. J., the Rector of the Sacred Heart College, Prairie de Chein, came to Festina--a few boys had attended college (High School and College --6 year course), just for a few months a winter. In my heart there was a desire to go. I went to Holy Communion Sunday and prayed What shall I do? --my good father, after services, said at the table: "If any of you boys wish to go, tell me." No one said a word. Monday morning, I was plowing when I saw my sister, Christina, ^{- BECAME A UN} come to me smiling and saying, "Father Sauter, the pastor sends me to tell you that he desires to see you at once." Why? I went and met the pastor and the Rector and they advised me to go to college. I felt it an answer to my prayers. My father, Sister Agnes, and all were much pleased when I returned and said "I am willing to go." I went in November. My first trip in a train; the first time I crossed the boundaries of the state.

When eleven years old, I suffered a great loss in the death of my good mother. I believe she went to heaven and asked the Blessed Mother to take care of her seven little children. Agnes, the oldest, took charge. The pastor called her an "angel". My father imitated St. Joseph in many respects.

I feel the Blessed Mother took me to the school--to the "Sacred Heart" College.

Arriving at the Sacred Heart College, timid, homesick, knowing no one, never having spent a night away from home, I felt lost. But help came. The first serious question I was asked by a Perfect of Studies. "Will you take the commercial or classic Latin course?" I answered positively, "Commercial", but the Rector who was present answered positively, "Classic. That question I settled with your pastor." Thank God for that answer!

The Professor of the first latin class, a Scholastic, Father Brick, was kind and helpful. He gave me private lessons. At the end of the year, I passed my examination and at the end of the next year, I was the first in the Class.

A great spiritual blessing was Father Hagan, who later became the head astronomer of the Vatican in Rome. He was an ideal Religious teacher and director. He helped me to find my vocation. I received the Sacrament of Confirmation, the Light of the Holy Spirit made me hear the call of Christ-- become a priest--not a secular priest--not a Jesuit; a missionary priest--How? What order? "Wait" said Father Hagan. Go to Innsbruck. Study theology with religious of my orders. You will find your place.

I spend six happy years at the Sacred Heart College. The Professors were good, and good to me. Father Hagan made me Master of Ceremonies and the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary elected me Perfect. Thus I enjoyed a prominent place in the sanctuary. Thus I had the privilege of taking care of the alter of the Blessed Lady in the study hall, and often leading the prayers in the chapel. In playing ball and so forth, I was very poor and had little

interest. On the stage, I seemed to do well. I had leading parts in plays and was much encouraged making speeches on various occasions.

INNSBRUCK -- 1888

With two companions, Msgr. Hauer and Theodore Myerhofer, (who did not become a priest) I arrived in September. The mountains!! The Alps! They at once attracted my attention. I became a good mountain climber. All I saw in cities, in works of art, never captivated my mind as the rising of the sun, standing on a mountain peak. Such excursions made me happy and made me strong. Thank God, to the best of my memory, I never saw a doctor and never took any medicine in the three happy years at Innsbruck. Other American students spent weeks of vacation seeing the cities. I remained in the mountains. In 1890, I spent a happy week walking to Oberamergau, to see the famous Passion Play. It edified and instructed me.

At Innsbruck, I met excellent companions. Theologians from many countries. Religious of many orders. My first roommate was a Cistercian Hungarian. We lived together a year. He edified me. Michael Gallagher, later Bishop Gallagher, was my roommate the second year (or third) a good companion. Taking our walks every day after dinner, and two afternoons a week with companions assigned to us or meeting as we left the Chapel visiting the Blessed Sacrament after dinner, taught us well to get along in a pleasant, peaceful way with our companions of many nations, with religious of various orders. At times we spoke Latin, knowing no other language in common, and very often we spoke about our studies and thus learned a great deal. All were very polite, very gentle, and high class.

The Professors! A few of them had international reputations. Hurter, Noldin, Grisar. I enjoyed their lectures. No time was lost asking questions. They lectured and allowed great freedom. Come if you like my lectures. If you

do not attend--nothing said. We enjoyed in our community life and in our studies, the greatest liberty. "We do not force you." "Learn to take good care of yourself." "Leave us if you cannot comply willingly--cheerfully." A good system to develop manly characters--good points.

The one great event of the year was the Retreat. January 1 to 10. Absolute silence--very well kept. Excellent Jesuit Retreat Master. For me, the best of the three retreats was the one given by famous Professor Herter. His introduction, I could never forget. Zaccheus, anxious to see Jesus--he was small--climbed a tree. He saw Jesus. He heard Jesus calling me. Jesus entered and stayed with him in his house. Zaccheus received Jesus with delight. That is the object of a retreat. See Jesus and receive Jesus with delight. That is the end and object of the preparation of the priestly life. See Jesus--Receive Jesus with delight. Climb, ascend, wait in the tree watching, removing branches that are in the way. That is the end and object of Theology. Climb the tree. Get away from the distracting errors. Get along and above the multitudes: "See Jesus." "Hear his voice." "Receive him with delight." "Ask Him to remain in your house, your heart." (That was the first conference.)

That retreat confirmed my vocation, although I had never been tempted to doubt it. That retreat stirred up the great question: To what missionary order am I called? This retreat, like every retreat, made a few theologians join the Society of Jesus. What shall I do? I felt that is excellent but that is not my vocation.

A little later, a member of our St. Thomas Society, Rev. Huyn, a good friend of mine, a _____, Dr. of Philosophy, studying to become a Doctor of Theology, gave us members of that Society, a conference of St. Thomas. That captivated me and made the tears flow. It was not the doctrine of St. Thomas, not his hymns, but his angelic life, his great sacrifices, his preserverances, his complete surrender of self to Christ. That admiration and devotion

continued to live in my mind and in my heart. I consulted my confessor. He advised: "If you feel that way, praying and waiting to join the Dominicans, feeling it is the will of God." I wrote my former confessor, good Father Hagan. His answer was: "Strange!! but follow the call." I said nothing to my professors and fellow students about it and at the end of the scholastic year of 1890, received the minor orders, visited Oberammergau, and spent happy weeks in a little village the highest in Tyrol, a place of pilgrimage. Climbed the mountains, called 100 miles crossing the Brenner Pass--all alone, never lonely--and returned to Innsbruck to continue my studies.

I made a Novena to the Blessed Mother, visited the chapel daily to learn from her what to do. On the ninth day, having said my prayers, I returned to my room and my roommate said smiling; "Oh you missed it. Bishop G of was here to bid us goodbye. He left a picture for you. Here it is, the picture of St. Dominic." He laughed but I felt: It is the voice, the messenger of the Blessed Mother. She has heard my Novena prayers. That answer settled the great question forever. I never since that minute doubted my vocation.

But the way to the family of St. Dominic seemed long and difficult. Leave the Jesuits with whom I had spent nine happy years as a boarder--join the Dominicans of whom I knew no one, had seen no one. It seemed difficult but the Blessed Mother graciously prepared the way.

Soon I learned that a young Dominican Father had come to Freiburg, Switzerland, to teach philosophy at the University, Dr. Joseph Kennedy. I wrote him a letter introducing myself and explaining my situation, and asking him for information and help. He was kind and answered encouragingly. My good father at home was satisfied having been told by the pastor, Father Sauter, that the Order of St. Dominic was great and good, the Order of the Holy Rosary. My father gave a nice picture of St. Dominic and the Rosary to the chapel in the church. I felt that I had to go soon, to break my studies up, postpone the

reception of the major orders since before receiving the order of Subdeaconate, I had to vow to remain in the Diocese. That vow I could not take. (It made me wait three years longer for ordination.)

I received a letter from Father Kennedy, stating in September the Provincial, Father Spencer and his companion, Father Higgins, will pass here on their way to Lyons, to elect a new Master General. Come meet us there and D. V. we shall receive you into our Order. Good news!!

I left dear Innsbruck, telling my secret to Father Huyn, whose uncle was Dominican in Austria, only, spent a few happy weeks--vacation--in Switzerland--going to Freiburg and meeting the three venerable Fathers and seeing the white habit for the first time. Father Kennedy gave me the room of the famous Albert Weiss, O. P. whose works I had enjoyed much. I was received graciously into the order and being asked "Have you any favor to ask?" answered, "Please let me make my Novitiate and finish my studies in Europe." "Very well," answered Father Spencer, the Provincial. "We shall send you to LaSarte, Belgium, to make your Novitiate and to Louvain to finish your studies." I was happy.

On my way to LaSarte, I spent a happy day at Trier where the Holy Coat was exposed for public for veneration. The devotion of the pilgrims 20 - 30,000 daily all summer, coming in procession, praying and singing, was inspiring. Trier is a venerable Catholic city. At Luxemborg, I stopped to visit a shrine of the Blessed Mother. At Louvain, I was received kindly by the community and met four American Dominican students, McShane, Waldron, McMahon and Volz. Father McShane took me to LaSarte and introduced me to the Prior and Novice Master. It was the Feast of St. Louis Bertrand, the Dominican Patron of Novice Masters and Novitiates.

LaSARTE

That evening, I began my ten days retreat preparing myself for the reception of the Holy Habit. It was easy to keep perfect silence. What a Solitude! What a sudden complete change! A university student having enjoyed great liberties and the good company, coming from a vacation in Switzerland. Now all alone in my cell, in a strange country. No one able to speak English or German, and I knowing only a few words in French. The Convent in solitude on a hill-top, near Liege. The observance of a Rule and customs all new to me--I felt it but did not feel discouraged. I made a good retreat. It consoled me and filled me with the desire to receive the beautifully holy Habit of a Friar Preacher. On the tenth day, October 20, I received the Habit. For me a holy, joyful hour. To be invested at the main altar, in the presence of the Community, 7 priests, 7 brothers, 7 Novices, with the Habit of St. Dominic, the Holy Father of Preaching, Friars, the Scapular of the Blessed Mother, promising protection and receive the Rosary. The "Sword of the Spirit," the Rule of the Life, and finally a new name Clemens Maria to which I gave the meaning Maria quae est Clemens--a most beautiful name. A brother cut my hair, a tonsure in the shape of a crown. It made me all new, at least in appearance, to begin a Novitiate year to make my heart all new; Dominican like unto the Sacred Heart of the Dominicans.

I was free from all external distractions--in perfect solitude--no visitors, no paper, no novels, no telegrams, no radio, only a few letters--My occupation. Divine office, Mass, serving a second Mass, The Office of the Blessed Virgin, The Rosary in the Novitiate chapel, work in the garden in silence, two hours a day reading in my cell, a little study--French, two hours of recreation--all French--I said little.

The Divine Office--Preparation, recitation, the celebration of the feasts, the study of the Dominican Saints, and their feats, entertained me well. It was a year of the Holy Church. It was L'Annio Dominican--It was a happy year.

The reading of some of the beautiful works of St. Thomas, St. Vincent Ferrer, St. Catherine of Siena, helped much to know, venerate, love these saints. We missed much the works of St. Dominic. But our devotion to him grew when we reflected some of the titles: "Father Fratrum Praedicatorium". We desired to become a "Praedicator" and therefore tried to obtain the help of the "Pater Praedicator". St. Augustine, we learned to know and love--memorizing his Rule and reading his "Confessions". St. Dominic left us, His sons, no written work but he left us the Holy Rosary, teaching us more than any saint of the order. If only I had read the lives of the saints before I joined the Order. I studied Theology but neglected to study the lives of those who excelled to live it. I studied Church History but spent more time to learn the enemies of the Church than the friends and benefactors of the Church.

PROFESSION

When the blessed day of Profession was near, I made my Retreat and making the Retreat, I filled a little notebook trying to express the sentiments that filled my soul. I have still the notes, 52 years old, all in Latin; and reading them consoles me. The last words are: Jesus Christ , Confidens in misericordia tua et asisientia martris tuae, matris meae. St. Domonic et omnium Sanctorum Fratrum et Sororum dico Ego Obediens usque ad mortem.

Inspiring is the question the Provincial asked me prostrated in the sanctuary before th Blessed Sacrament--Quid--quaens--Misericordiam Dei, ... et Habitum St. Patris Dominic. It is all the gift of the mericful Lord. All to preach as a preaching Friar the words to his "Word of God."

LOUVAIN

The day after my Profession, I left for Louvain to live and study as a professed Novice for three years. The "Summa" of St. Thomas was the great

occupation, lessons given by the well known Father Dummerunth and his saintly assistant, Father Rolin, ten hours a week. I enjoyed it. It helped me but I missed the food for the young, loving heart preparing to be a Friar Preacher. Fortunately, I knew French and the French works Didon's Life of Christ, Conferences, Lacordaire's Mary Magdalene, etc. etc., helped me very much to pray, to prepare me for my mission. In Innsbruck, the German works made me think. In Louvain, French works taught me to pray and to preach.

The three years passed quietly and peacefully. I made no great impression on professors or fellow students, but passed my examination "valde Bene".

The third year I got "homesick." My mind was on ordination and mission work. When I learned that Father Volz would return to America after examinations in July 1895, I asked permission to return with him. Permission was granted and we traveled together, stopping in Lourdes a short time, taking part in a Religious Procession, the first since the Reformation. I remained in New York City a few weeks and learned to see and know Dominican life in this country. It differed much from the observance in Louvain and very much from their work "ad Salutem animarum". Finally I reached St. Joseph's Convent, Somerset, Ohio, waiting, waiting, waiting for the day of my Solemn Profession and Ordination. It was a long retreat. I spent some time writing a few sermons and going in the pasture practicing preaching. Finally word came. Bishop Waterson will ordain you Subdeacon, Deacon, and Priest, in the Ember Week, before Christmas. Great joy for me and for my people in Festina, learning that I would celebrate my first Mass on Christmas, 1895. All went well. In Dubuque, if I mistake not, Sunday, December 22 or 23, I, at the door of the Franciscan Convent met my happy father, who came to meet me. In the convent, I met my Sister Christina, a novice and Sister Clotilda, whom I knew well in my boyhood days. Then I gave Benediction and gave a short instruction all for the first time. During the night, father and I traveled from Dubuque to Festina to spend there my happiest Christmas.

Home again after an absence of seven years. I was happy but how changed. My young brother and sister called to see me at the Rectory and I did not know them. The Pastor surprised me when he asked me to hear confession on December 24, having obtained faculties from the Archbishop. A great surprise at the High Mass when the Priest announced evening celebration, Benediction and Sermons by the newly ordained. Fortunately, I was prepared. A third great surprise when a venerable Frenchman, sick near death, long away from church asked me to administer to him the sacraments. He called me because he had learned that I could hear confessions in French. Thus I began my mission life in my little home parish, hearing my first confessions, celebrating my first Mass, preaching my first sermons, making my first sick call. I was happy and feeling happy returned to Somerset to learn that the Provincial assigned me to St. Vincent Ferrer, New York City, and I was happy.

ST. VINCENT FERRER'S

In the convent of St. Vincent Ferrer, I found some venerable Fathers. Father Higgins, the Provincial. Father Hortijan, both Clarkston and Father Michael Lilly, very old, prayerful, peaceful. Father Gaffney excelling in helping the poor. Father Hasenfuss very popular, especially with the members of the Holy Name Society. Father Slinger excelling in constructing and conducting the Parochial School and the Sunday School. Father, McKenna, Splinter, Dinahan, excellent missionaries.

I arrived on Friday and Saturday morning the Prior asked me to sing High Mass Sunday. High Mass was well attended in those days. I begged to be excused being a very poor singer. "Well," he said, "Will you preach the sermon?" Yes--I preached my sermon and was naturally anxious to know what an impression I had made and felt happy and consoled when the Prior said, "Please preach that sermon in St. Mary's, New Haven, next Sunday."

What a great mission field New York City appeared to be to a young missionary, who has never lived in a big city. The tenement districts on and near First Avenue--20 and 24 families in one house and nearby, Fifth Avenue, the palaces of the rich. Besides the ordinary duties of an assistant, sick calls, home calls, Sunday sermons, week day Masses, sent very often to the New York Foundling Asylum to say Mass, baptize many infants, help Sister Liquori to instruct and receive into the church a dozen unfortunate women, I took a special interest in visiting the tenement people going from door to door.

The people were, as a class, not bad. Poverty and hard work helped many to avoid sins of luxury. Poor people have faults and don't hide them. The rich know how to keep them under cover.

They all received me well. I was never insulted. Many told me, with the greatest of confidence, their spiritual troubles. One mother said: My two children are preparing for their first Holy Communion but they are not baptized. Another mother said: My children attend your school. We go to Mass every Sunday but, Father, my secret, I never made my First Communion. A third said: We occupy a front seat in Church. Pastor and people think I am a good Catholic--but, Father,--I am an Episcopalian. I would like to be a Catholic but am afraid to make my secret known. Thus visiting the people was my best consoling mission work. Thus visiting the tenement houses I learned that many children attended Protestant Churches and Sunday Schools, receiving tempting instructions.

ST. ROSE'S SETTLEMENT

I found good help. In the city we found the worst and the best members of the Church. I had charge of the Holy Name Society and Oh what fine men I learned to know. I met excellent women helping the poor. A Mrs. Wm. Arnold and

a Miss Marion Gurney, converts in their first holy fervor, enjoying great graces." Mrs. Arnold gave the money generously. Miss Gurney her experiences and work, having been the great head of a Protestant settlement. Father Hartigan gave his permission and blessing and the first Catholic Settlement was opened and dedicated to St. Rose. Good men and women came to work. "Catholic Action."

ST. CATHERINE'S CHURCH

The Provincial and the Prior realizing the need of a branch Church, built St. Catherine's Church--a school building to be used for a church and the good pastor having always a great confidence in poor me, asked me to devote all my time and attention to St. Catherine's in the tenement district. Every morning I walked to St. Catherine's to celebrate Mass. Every evening I walked to St. Catherine's to say the Rosary and often to meet poor people. Mrs. Arnold took care of the sacristy and helped generously. Sts. Catherine and Rose remained with us. Happy Days!! But I was not satisfied. In Lent, 1896 or 1897, Fathers McKenna, Splinter, Kerman, gave a mission in St. Vincent Ferrer's. I practically made the mission and helped a little. The sermons, especially the sermons of Father McKenna, filled my heart with a burning desire to go and give missions like him and with him. The fire kept burning and I received permission to go to the Midwest and do mission work. I left New York, dear St. Catherine's and dear St. Roses's Settlement, on the 15th of February, 1901.

HOLY ROSARY CONVENT -- MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

I was stationed at our Dominican convent, in Minneapolis and began my mission work under the direction of Father . Helped the Provincial, Father Keaney, to give a mission in the Cathedral of St. Paul, a good lesson for me. I enjoyed the smaller missions after all alone in the Dakotas. I liked

missions in the country parishes. The members of such parishes, especially, in the doors before the use and abuse of the radio, appreciated the sermons and remembered them well. But soon, too soon, I received the command to go to New Haven, as pastor of St. Mary's.

NEW HAVEN

St. Mary's was a very nice, good, large parish. The High Mass, on Sunday, was always very well attended. I found good Fathers in the Rectory. Fathers Linahan and McShane helped me very well. Besides the ordinary parish work, I visited each family in the parish, laid the foundation of a Parochial School, and organized the Holy Name Society in a few parishes of the Diocese. All went well. I got typhoid fever but recovered soon and completely. Then word came that I had been elected Prior of St. Vincent Ferrer's, New York.

I accepted the election and was received cordially by the Fathers. The community had changed much since 1901. Father McGovern took excellent care of all the books, financial, as well as community. Father Francis Lilly was a model in attending and reciting the Divine Office. Father Kent was a favorite with all the communities of Sisters under our care. Father Wilson was zealous helping the poor and the sick. But I was not a practical and prudent Prior and was very glad when the end of the term of Office came, when I was sent once again to the West as a missionary, first to Minneapolis and two years later Westward to San Francisco and a little later Westward to Honolulu. Then back to the Midwest and was made head of the Western Mission Band. Thank God all those years I enjoyed good health and enjoyed my mission work and enjoyed, I am confident, the special help of the Queen of the Holy Rosary. With her Rosary as my companion, I spent about 30 years "going about" never remaining in one place more than 4 weeks.

The nature of my work changed much. I gave more retreats. My retreats work began with the Dominican Sisters, Holy Rosary Convent, Second Street, New York, 1897 and St. Mary's of the Springs, 1898. For the Fathers of The Pious Missions, Mt. Carmel Rectory, 115th Street. When I was in California, I gave retreats to our Fathers, all Dominican Sisters and encouraged by the Provincial, Father McMahon, I gave a Retreat for the priests of the Portland, Oregon Diocese. Archbishop Christi was kind and recommended me to Bishops and Nuns. I had the privilege of giving retreats to the clergy of 53 Dioceses--15 of them Archdioceses. (In some cases one or two or three or four or five or six.) To very many Religious Fathers and Sisters, to some laymen and women. The Provincial Father, _____, was kind enough to make me, indeed, a Preacher General to accept invitations in any place from the Atlantic to the Pacific. A great Privilege.

*Fr. Worked alot with Helen Keller.
written about in the book "Sorrow Built
A Budget"*