

RISKING THE FUTURE

Life and Spirituality of Fr. Félix de Jesús Rougier, M.Sp.S.

Ricardo Zimbrón Levy, M.Sp.S.

I consider myself very fortunate to have been called by the Lord to become a Missionary of the Holy Spirit. During my early days of discernment, I did not realize that the Lord was guiding my steps, but I look back and clearly understand that God was there. I remember asking my superiors what it meant to be a Missionary of the Holy Spirit, and they had many words for me to give a concrete and satisfactory answer. As I persisted in my questioning, their comforting reply was: "Let the Holy Spirit guide you and you will find the perfect answer." This was a very wise counsel.

Father Ricardo Zimbrón Levy has also followed the guidance of the Holy Spirit in writing this book: "Risking the Future." By profiling the life of Fr. Félix de Jesús Rougier, our beloved founder, he shows how the Holy Spirit touched Father Rougier, calling him to be a Missionary of the Holy Spirit. Through a study of Father Rougier's life, Father Zimbrón has found the best and most practical way to respond to our quest: What does it mean to be a Missionary of the Holy Spirit? He paints a remarkable portrait of Father Félix as spiritual giant of our time, with a depth of profound spiritual insight, and an extraordinary hero in the joyful and persistent fulfillment of what is ordinary. Father Zimbrón makes us deeply aware of this "well fulfilled vocation" by opening the jar which contains a precious perfume and allowing us to inhale the fragrance of Father Rougier's maturity as Missionary of the Holy Spirit.

To read this book has been a beautiful and refreshing experience for me. It brought fond memories of those moments when, as newly arrived seminarians, we were awed by the stories and remembrances told to us about "our Father," who has recently departed from this life. The impressive figure of the man and his engaging personality attracted, fascinated, and totally inspired us. From those who had known him personally and lived with him, he was made present among us. His spirit permeated our lives.

This little volume certainly presents Father Félix as a humble and generous man who unconditionally opened his soul to the action of the Holy Spirit, and who responded to His presence as did Mary of Nazareth: "Let it be done as you say..." All was to be done according to God's will. It was this irresistible attraction to fulfill the Heavenly Father's will that was Father Félix's constant desire. He realized that total abandonment of self into the Heavenly Father's hands is a blending of faith, hope and love in a single act of irreversible and joyful surrender. This is all Father Félix de Jesús wanted. The words of Jesus speak louder and clear: "My food is to fulfill my Father's will." In turn, the God of goodness assured Father Félix that even with the storms of human passion and conflict around him, he could live undisturbed knowing that the Lord had made His covenant with him.

All who read this book will be touched by its forceful expression, rich simplicity, and passionate message.

+ Joseph J. Madera, M.Sp.S.
Washington, D.C.
August 15, 1991

PREFACE

The Congregation of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit was founded by Father Félix de Jesús Rougier. He recruited the first members.

We will therefore begin by presenting Father Félix as he really was: a human being with limitations and failings. He was, however, a man who single-mindedly pursued his lifetime goal TO DO THE WILL OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER.

He did not grow angel's wings and soar over the rest of mankind. Rather, he pursued his ideal amid internal and external strife, in the darkness of a Faith put to the test, hoping against all hope, suffering from the misunderstandings of many of his brethren. At the same time, he earned the love of many by his gentleness and kindness.

His life was not characterized by extraordinary deeds, nor did he enjoy the privileges experienced by the mystics in prayer. He was "a very normal saint", that is to say, a model within the reach of everyone. Although the clay from which we were made weighs us down, we can all do the will of the Heavenly Father. And holiness is only this, nothing more.

We will also review the spirituality of Father Félix. It was simple and unifying: to follow Christ, Priest of the Heavenly Father, who offered Himself for the salvation of all. This spirituality is at the core of the Gospel. The concrete way in which Father Félix lived it constitutes an excellent model for all and a perfect one for the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit.

From the historical records, we will trace the roots of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit, their function in the Church, and the meaning of their consecrated life. Finally, we will present a summary of the rules which govern their life from the beginning of their formation.

This book was written for those who are interested in joining our Congregation, our friends and benefactors, our novices and religious and all those who wish to gain a better understanding of the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit.

PART ONE

THE BEGINNINGS

INTRODUCTION

A SURPRISING ENCOUNTER

February 4, 1903.

It was ten o'clock in the morning in Mexico City. Father Félix de Jesús Rougier, Superior of the Marist Fathers who staff our Lady of Lourdes Church, wanted to leave to take care of certain matters, but a strange force kept him inside.

It was not long before the sacristan advised him that a lady wanted him to hear her confession.

The woman entered the sacristy, made a brief confession and immediately proceeded to speak about an unexpected matter. Father Félix tells of the incident in a letter to his Superior General:

"She revealed to me all the nooks and crannies of my soul. She told me what my thoughts were; that I needed to shake off the spiritual lethargy which had involved me; that I needed to make a conscious effort to give myself to the service of God; that I should make a new start.

I was dumbfounded. I was moved and thanked God, whose call I had chosen not to hear so many times and who suddenly was lending me a hand".

In his "Memoirs", Father Félix relates this same incident and adds:

"This unknown lady spoke to me about personal matters which she could not possibly have known by natural means".

That strange penitent was Mrs. Concepción Cabrera de Armida, an extraordinarily charismatic woman and an extraordinary saint. Because her friends called her Conchita so will we, because we consider ourselves her friends.

She tells in her Journal that the morning of February 4th, while she was on her way to see her mother, she got off the trolley for some unknown reason, went to the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes and asked to have Father Félix, whom she did not know, hear her confession. Then she adds:

"As if moved by an extraordinary impulse, I began to speak to him about the Works of the Cross, and about his spiritual life. I felt that the words were not mine, because my speech was fiery and I spoke with ease, in a way that could only have been inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Not knowing how, I saw the impact my words made in the depths of the heart of Father Félix. I felt clearly that he was being transformed, enlightened, shown a way and given the strength to follow it".

Conchita continued talking about the Works of the Cross. When Father Félix heard her refer to the Sisters of the Cross of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a congregation of women, founded six years

earlier, and to their spirituality, he asked if there was a congregation of priests with the same spirit. Conchita's laconic answer was:

"No, but there will be".

Their meeting lasted two hours. In her Journal, Conchita reports that the dialogue ended like this:

-I must have tired, you, Father; I am leaving.

-I never tire of hearing about God.

Then Conchita promised to give Father Félix a book on the Apostleship of the Cross and left.

Father Félix commented in his journal:

"During this conversation my life was redirected towards new horizons.

One month later, on March 2nd, the Lord spoke to Conchita to tell her that it was His will that Father Félix found the new Congregation of the Religious of the Cross (later known as the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit).

But Conchita mentioned nothing about this to Father Félix. First, she consulted her spiritual director, Father Alberto Casco y Mir, S.J., who lived in Oaxaca.

It was not until April 9th that Conchita spoke with Father Félix about this delicate matter.

"And from that day on, I have never had the slightest doubt that God is calling me to this" (Letter from Father Félix to his Superior General).

On April 10th, the Lord again told Conchita:

"I want Father Félix to be the founder of the men's congregation. I want him for the Works of the Cross". (Journal).

However, life was not so simple for poor Father Félix. He had been a religious in the Society of Mary for 25 years and loved his Congregation very much. Should he ask for a dispensation from his vows and leave his community in order to found the new institute?

On April 13th, Father Félix and Conchita had a long conversation about these matters during which Conchita spoke the following prophetic words:

"When the time comes, you will see your Superior General. With his authorization and without leaving your Congregation, you will begin the work. In this way, you will not scandalize your brothers or anyone else. Later the separation can occur with little ado".

Things happened the way Conchita had predicted, but not as soon as she and Father Félix wanted. God's ways are sometimes disconcerting to us.

CHAPTER I

WHO FATHER FÉLIX WAS

When that unexpected meeting occurred, Father Félix was a 43 year old priest. He had been born in France, in the province of Auvergne, in the town of Meilhaud, the 17th of December 1859. His parents, Benedict Rougier and Luisa Olanier, were middle class peasants, hard working and very religious. Félix was the first of their children. When he finished grade school, they sent him as a boarder to a school in Le Puy. The school was known as "La Cartuja" because it was housed in a building that had formerly been a monastery of Carthusian monks. Félix studied there from 1874 to 1878. He was a mediocre student. He had friends who were good and not so good. And he committed adolescents' sins. In short, this is what he tells us in his Memoirs.

One day, towards the end of his last year at La Cartuja, all the students (there were about 400) were requested to come together in the main patio because a bishop wished to address them. The bishop was an old missionary who had lived in the Samoa Islands.

He told many stories about those primitive islands. He told of the pagan tribes, their constant warring and their cannibalism. He told of the many lepers who wandered around like wild beasts with no one to care for them. He also told them the following story:

"With great difficulty I built some sheds intending them to be a makeshift leprosarium. Then I gathered the priests at the mission and asked if any of them wanted to volunteer to care for the lepers. They all stood up as if moved by a spring, except two who were the most advanced in years. They were almost deaf and had not understood anything. When we explained to them what it was all about, they not only volunteered as the others had done, but they argued that since they had seniority, they had a right to be chosen first. And the two of them are there, evangelizing the lepers with their words and with their love, living in those sheds and hoping to become infected and to die as lepers among their brothers the lepers".

The old bishop told them about many heroic deeds and finished by saying to them:

"The harvest is great but the laborers are very few. I have come to knock at the door of your faith and generosity.

If there are any among you who would like to go with me to the missions in Oceania, let them raise their hand."

In his diary, Father Félix says:

"I looked around me. No one had raised his hand. Then I felt an irresistible internal urge to raise my hand. I decided on the spot to go with the missionary bishop. I was sure I was inspired by God to do this."

On September 21, 1878, eighteen-year-old Félix bade his parents' good-bye and on the 24th he entered the novitiate of the Congregation of the Marist Fathers who served in the Oceania missions.

The written reports (that his novice master (Father David) sent his superiors every three months still exist. Those, which refer to Brother Félix, indicate that he was good. The second trimester, however, the novice master observed that: "His health is good but he suffers from arthritis in the

right wrist." And in the reports of the third trimester we read: "We wonder about his vocation because of the arthritis." The reports of the last trimester indicate that: "His loyalty to the Society of Mary is not only sincere, but enthusiastic. However, his vocation is still in doubt due to his health."

Crippling arthritis attacked his right hand and arm. Brother Félix learned to write and eat with his left hand.

Despite his illness, the novice was admitted to first vows on September 24, 1879, and the 7th of October he entered the scholastic to study philosophy.

Two years went by. His arm was in very bad shape and his muscles had become atrophied. Operations and medicine were useless. Moreover, the illness also invaded his left leg. His vocation was in danger and this caused Brother Félix a great deal of pain.

Around that time, Don Bosco (now St. John Bosco), the founder of the Salesians Fathers, arrived in Toulon. His fame as a saint extended all over Europe. Brother Félix's mother was a supporter of the Salesians and it was at her behest that Don Bosco agreed to speak to the Marist student with the diseased arm. He laid his hands on the student's head and prayed for his health and for his vocation.

Father Félix was cured of arthritis in the leg in a few days. The arthritis in the arm stopped spreading immediately and, although it disappeared very slowly, it was no longer considered an obstacle to his vocation. After some time he was completely cured.

Father Félix was always grateful for this cure, and confidence in the intercession of Don Bosco never left him.

I will now recount an extraordinary event that took place many years later (on March 1, 1932). I will retell it exactly as I heard it from the lips of my father:

"When you were two weeks old, you contracted enterocolitis, and no medicine was able to stop the illness. Your condition worsened so that, when you were twenty days old you agonized and died. Dr. Escondria, who had been taking diligent care of you, went to see about the death certificate and Dr. Alejandro Velazco also confirmed that you had died.

Two hours later, Father Félix arrived to offer his condolences. I never knew who called him. He asked to pray for the child and we led him to the room where we had laid the small body on the bed, cold and purplish, awaiting its little white coffin.

Father Félix knelt down. He began to pray in silence. And he prayed so long that we grew tired and left the room one by one. Father Félix kept on praying, alone...

More than an hour went by and Father Félix was still praying... Suddenly, we could clearly hear the crying of a child coming from that room. We all rushed to the room and saw Father Félix visibly moved.

He was flushed with emotion and he was shouting: "I prayed to Don Bosco for him! I asked Don Bosco to protect him!"

He then took his hat and ran for the door. He only told us: "Feed that child!"

But let us continue with our story.

In 1882, when Brother Félix was 21 years old, he was sent to the Institute of St. Mary, a school the Marist Fathers had near Toulon. There he was made prefect of discipline the intermediate group.

The children nicknamed him "Pionbete", which roughly means idiot. Brother Félix wrote in his diary:

"I intensely dislike being prefect of the intermediate group. My appointment has been renewed for another year. I will not complain and I will always appear to be happy. Divine Providence has been so good to me that I cannot doubt that being prefect of discipline of the intermediate group is good for me, at least spiritually".

In the years that followed, Brother Félix finished his studies of philosophy and theology; and finally, on September 24, 1887, he was ordained a priest:

"Msgr. Gonindard, Archbishop of Rheims, ordained me a priest in the chapel of the Franciscan sisters. My father, mother and brother Stanislaus were present at my ordination" (Diary).

From that day on, Father Félix asked God for the grace to celebrate the Eucharist in a saintly manner. And every day of his life he celebrated the holy sacrifice with such devotion that all who saw him at the altar were impressed. One of the recommendations his superior made to him was: "Try not to spend so much time celebrating Mass."

The recently-ordained Father Félix was sent to teach Holy Scripture at the scholasticate in Barcelona, Spain, because the study of the Bible had fascinated him since he was a novice. He had learned Hebrew in order to read the Old Testament in the original, and had even published a Hebrew grammar.

In a letter addressed to his Superior General we read:

"I am especially attracted to the life of the major seminaries: a hidden life of prayer and study. I am giving myself over to the study of Scripture which I love so much, and which now more than ever gives me great joy."

For 8 years (1887 to 1895), he taught Sacred Scripture, Hebrew and Church history. He had always yearned to go to the Oceania missions, but as always, he saw the will of God in the orders of his superiors and he obeyed joyfully.

A strong personality trait of Father Félix was his joy and his constant good humor. In a letter from his Superior, we find this advice:

"You should not joke so much with your students. Be kind to them, but without so much familiarity."

In his Memoirs, years later, Father Félix wrote:

"I have always considered having been sent to teach Sacred Scripture for eight years to have been one of the greatest graces of my life. How many inspirations came to me as I prepared for this dear class! How many readings full of God! What graces of enlightenment for my soul! As I studied the Gospel in depth, I found the soul of Jesus there, His Heart, His thoughts, His love for the Father, His teachings, His spiritual life. How lucky I was to be able to dedicate all my time to meditate on these divine pages for such a long time!

All his life, Father Félix insisted on the need to study the Scriptures constantly.

"If you are careless about the reading of the Holy Scriptures, your religiosity will become superficial", he said frequently.

One day he confided to his novices that: "Since the time of my Biblical studies I have engraved in my heart a constant remembrance of Jesus."

When the 1895 school year ended, Father Félix received a letter from his General Superior with the command to go to Colombia in order to found two schools in the province of Tolima, one in the town of Neiva, and the other in Ibagué. He wrote in his Diary:

"I was delighted with this hidden life but the command confused me for although one is a religious, one cannot become immediately detached and keep from feeling uprooted when one has lived for a long time among very dear brothers and students and among well-beloved books.

I went downstairs to the chapel, and at prayer I was completely flooded with happiness. To Colombia! The missionary dream which had been born in me eighteen years before, and which had filled me with enthusiasm during the novitiate, was going to become a reality... I was about to leave for a new country, 12,000 kilometers away from my loved ones and... perhaps forever. I felt that this was a great and undeserved grace, and this moved me deeply." Father Félix made a one-week spiritual retreat and a general confession. And after finishing the preparations for the journey and saying many loving good-byes, he embarked at Burdeos the 26th of October, 1895, together with two other priests, Fathers Joseph Gauven and Francis Gandy.

After a 23-day sea voyage, they disembarked at Port Colombia. From there they went to Barranquilla where they boarded a small steamship which moved goods and people up and down the busy Magdalena River.

Father Félix had to travel more than once in these dilapidated steamboats. In his diary, he wrote down not too pleasant memories, but we can see that he kept his sense of humor.

"Disorder reigned: there were mountains of wood for the engines, stacks of suitcases, animals, the crew and the passengers. The food was terrible. It was hard enough to be hungry, but a great deal of will power was necessary not to go by the kitchen... The boats had innumerable leaks. During the first rainstorm it was necessary to leave one's cabin to look for a dry corner, unless one believed strongly in hydrotherapy. When the rains continued for long periods, those who did not sleep with their face under a leak could consider themselves lucky. The muddy river water was all that was drunk on board. If we were lucky, they filtered it."

Father Félix and his companions were so enthusiastic about their missionary work that in a short time they were overdoing it. In a letter dated May 25, 1897, the Assistant General of the Society of Mary wrote to Father Félix, who was the superior of the small community:

"... you have gone ahead and made decisions, without waiting for things to happen. But I do not know how you could stand such weariness and attend to so many occupations and concerns, and moreover, give retreats. Take care of yourself, dear Father. Because excessive efforts, if they are constant, break down the healthiest constitutions. The work with which you have been charged must not be imperiled by these exhausting efforts which can take you to heaven before your time. Please, save your strength". (P. Leterrier, Assistant General).

Father Félix answered this letter as follows:

"... And I thank you very much for your paternal advice, which offers guidelines for one so inexperienced. I am very well, better than ever. So is Father Halliet. But we both understand that you are right, and that even though we have not become sick, we are both very tired. I promise that I will work a bit less."

On April 24, 1899, Father Félix received a letter from his Superior General telling him that his mother had passed away on the 12th of that month. Father Félix answered that letter thus:

"... Oh, Father, what a terrible blow! How full of pain these days have been!! I think there is no greater pain than having one's mother die. When I started thinking about the many sweet memories of my mother, I fell into a great depression.

It is now twelve days since I received the news and I am still so nervous that the sound of the bell makes me jump. Physically and morally this test has been a very difficult one."

The night of October 18th of that year, 1899, civil war broke out in Colombia and continued for three years. The schools became barracks and hospitals. The Marist Fathers devoted themselves to help the wounded, not only in hospitals but also in the battlefields. Father Félix was named military chaplain of the First Division of Tolima and later administrator and chaplain of the military hospital of Ibagué, with the salary and rank of colonel.

The prisons were full. Father Félix made great efforts to improve the prisoners' situation. He spoke to the Governor on their behalf and constantly tried to obtain medicines, clothing and food for those unfortunate people.

The war became more intense. The life of the missionaries was always in danger, and therefore the Superior General of the Society of Mary decided to recall all his personnel from Colombia. On November 30, 1900, the order to abandon the mission arrived. One by one, the Marist Fathers left for other assignments. Father Félix was the last to leave. The financial difficulties to pay for his trip and the dangers of the war did not allow him to leave until February 1, 1902. On that day, he took a boat for Panama, which then belonged to Colombia, with Mexico as his final destination. He had lived for six years as a missionary in that land and had become attached to it. He was sorry to leave everything he had sown in these fields:

"I did not enter my cabin until very late at night, so that I could see a bit more of my dear Colombia."(Diary)

Father Félix was named superior and pastor of the Church of our Lady of Lourdes, staffed by Marist Fathers in Mexico City. He arrived on February 17, 1902.

"Father Lejeune welcomed me. He was one of the members of that community and while he showed me the house he made bold to tell me something which bothered him:

-Father Félix...we have heard that you are very strict.

-You will see that is not so, I said.

Once more I extended my hand in greeting to him..."

That church was designated for the French immigrants who lived in Mexico City. At that time they numbered some six thousand.

With his characteristic enthusiasm, Father Félix began organizing this new area of work in the best way possible. He visited the French families to obtain a complete census and then organized the

religious instruction, without overlooking maids and employees. He visited the sick at the French Hospital. He founded the associations of Bread for the Poor and Daughters of Mary, and organized a group of altar boys and a choir, he then began to print a one page parish bulletin which was a very helpful tool to inform and bring the parishioners together. Later he brought the Sisters of St. Joseph from Lyon to open a school, especially for the daughters of the French families and he took the first steps to found the school for boys staffed by the Marist Fathers, but it did not open for three years. Father Félix also served as confessor of the Marist brothers and their pupils.

When all this was taking place, Father Félix was 43 years old. He was full of strength and experience and was an excellent priest with a missionary soul. He had many human qualities and solid Christian virtues, but he was not yet what you would call a saint.

In his diary he recounts the need for a profound change in his life, for a greater surrender in God. To this end, in early February he began a novena to the Holy Spirit asking "that He might call him to a way of greater perfection."

As in answer from God to this desire and this prayer, the surprise encounter with Mrs. Conchita Cabrera took place on February 4, 1903. From this day forward he began a new stage of spiritual development, moving towards sanctity with giant steps.

CHAPTER II

FEATURING CONCHITA CABRERA

Conchita Cabrera had a jovial personality; she was unpretentious and accessible. Her personality was the result of a life lived both in the countryside and in the city.

She was born in San Luis Potosi, Mexico, on December 8th, 1862. She did not have much schooling because she spent her childhood on the family ranch. She studied the equivalent of third grade in grammar school, took piano lessons and learned embroidery. Her mother taught her the rest: cooking, sewing, horseback riding, milking the cows, making cheese, teaching catechism to the daughters of the hired hands...

Her adolescence was simple and commonplace, but she felt a strong interior call to a life of prayer. In her Journal we read:

"During the time I was 16 to 20 years old, I lived a period of dances, theater parties, trips, vanity and the wish to please, although only Pancho (her boyfriend), because the others did not matter.

But in the midst of this sea of vanity and parties, my soul felt a vehement desire to know how to pray."

At 22 she married her only boyfriend (Francisco Armida) and had nine children, 7 boys and 2 girls.

When she had been married for a short time, there was an amazing change in her spiritual life. She tells us about it in her Journal: "When I had been married only a year and a half, the Lord started to call me very forcefully to perfection. Extraordinary things started to happen from then on."

We can distinguish two kinds of extraordinary graces in Conchita's life: some were the graces that effected her personal sanctification; they were graces of purification, illumination and very intimate union with God. The other extraordinary graces were those that made of Conchita an instrument of God to accomplish certain external works in His church. These graces are related to the charism of "prophecy". This charism does not always consist in the announcement of things to come, but rather in receiving messages from God by means of words or visions. These messages were given to enrich the Church with sublime teachings regarding the mysteries of God, the ways of prayer and the Christian virtues. The purpose of the other message was to make it possible for five new institutions called "the Five Works of the Cross" to be established in the Church.

When Conchita was 24 years old, she wrote in her Journal:

"Today I don't know what to write. I don't know how to express what my soul experiences. Oh, my God, you have taken hold of me! You fill me completely. I don't know what you will ask of me, but I am ready for anything." (Journal)

Regarding her prophetic charism, Conchita explains it thus:

"Sometimes I do not wish to hear, and I hear; I don't wish to understand, and I understand; I don't want to turn in the direction of the Lord so as not to become committed and He comes to meet me and reproaches me.

Sometimes He dictates phrases or words. Other times, He imprints within me a torrent of things at once.

Sometimes He is very laconic, but He leaves me with a clear grasp of what He wants me to understand.

My senses as well as my memory and imagination quiet down as if responding to a signal from the Lord, and I remain like a clean sheet of paper, somehow empty of myself. And without my coordinating the ideas, there comes to me a sequence of words or thoughts already formed, or paragraphs which I understand all of a sudden.

I interrupt this interior talking with questions or with emotions, and then the dialogue takes place, because the Lord deigns to explain the message to me. I do not hear His voice with the ears of the body; this has only happened a few times.

Sometimes there arise within me temptations as to whether I invent, or deceive; but when I am at peace, I cannot doubt that these things are of God. And besides, I verify that if the Lord does not give this to me, even if I spent many hours in prayer, I cannot produce even a line by myself; I could not invent things, even if I try.

Sometimes months go by without the Lord talking to me. However, there are times when I do not have time to write everything He tells me.

Another way in which the Lord communicates with me is by means of writing. I hear His voice which tells me "Write". At first, I resisted, but then I began to obey and the moment I took the pencil in hand, the Lord started dictating pages and pages, sometimes of very involved things, that I could not possibly invent." (Journal)

Eight years after the Lord "started to call her very forcefully", that is to say, when Conchita was 32, God granted her the grace of what theologians call "spiritual marriage." This is a mystical grace, which means the person does not bring it about, but rather it is God who unites one to Himself in a special and intimate way which only the saints experience. Conchita describes this extraordinary grace in this way:

January 23 (1894). "I was immersed in contemplation, without moving, understanding many things in great depth in the words Jesus was saying to me. He did everything. He put His hand on my head. His glance enveloped me. And all I could do was cry and keep still. What was I to tell him, if I could think of nothing except to humble myself? Jesus said:

-Now you are my bride, and you are beautiful in my eyes, with the veil of innocence and the robe of penance. I love you very much, and beg you to call me Spouse.

-No, Jesus, not that, because I am ashamed.

-But, is it not true? Don't you know that nothing is impossible for Me? You have no idea how I rejoice in you because you are bedecked with my favors. I contemplate my own image within your soul. Never blur it, my spouse.

-Jesus, I promise to love you always, with all my strength.

-Ask me whatever you want. Today I can deny you nothing. -I ask to do your will always and to save many souls."

Three months later, on April 18, Conchita drew up the statutes of the first of the Works of the Cross which was called "The Apostleship of the Cross":

"I took the statutes of the Apostleship to Jesus, for him to bless and give them life. And after communion he told me: The purpose of this Apostleship is to offer up suffering lovingly in order to obtain the salvation of many souls."

In the statutes we are told that: "The Apostleship of the Cross is a group of Christians who, moved by the Holy Spirit, take it upon themselves to offer Jesus to the Heavenly Father, and to offer themselves together with Him, as victims for the salvation of all. In this way they make an effort to participate intimately in the priesthood of Christ, offering themselves with Him on "the cross of every day." Matthew 10:38

This Work is open to all Christians who seek to live their baptismal priesthood and, in this way, respond to the universal vocation to holiness.

Later we will explain the apostolic and social ramifications of this Work.

On February 9, 1897, Conchita received another extraordinary grace which the mystics call "the transforming union", which is one of the highest peaks to which God leads His elect. After receiving this gift, Conchita tries to describe it to her spiritual director:

"Last night, since one o'clock, the call to pray was very strong. From the time the Lord awakened me, I felt full of Him; not in the usual sense, but rather in a special and complete manner. Without knowing why, I felt the weight of the divine majesty. It surprised me to find that when I awoke I was repeating these words, as if they flowed naturally from my heart: 'Most Holy Trinity, have mercy on us. You who are one God!' And I could not interrupt these praises.

Jesus told me:

-Arise. Here are the Father and the Spirit. They have come because I want to introduce them to your soul as my Spouse.

I threw myself down and with my forehead touching the ground, I humbled myself and felt confused. And why shouldn't I be, since I felt the real presence of the Three Divine Persons!

The fire in my soul lasted for two hours without diminishing until I felt something like a swoon produced by the impact which my spirit experienced.

My soul continued to be filled with fervor. And there has also remained an effect which I continue to experience: a constant growth in love, respect and intimate knowledge, no longer obscure, of the Most Holy Trinity. Oh my God, three and one, blessed be you forever, forever and ever."

Three months later, on May 3rd, through the intervention of Conchita, the second of the Works of the Cross was founded, that is to say, the first convent of the Sisters of the Cross of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The Lord had told her:

"You will be the foundation of this work. The foundations are invisible but the building rests on them."

In the Constitutions of this Congregation we read:

"God has called the Sisters of the Cross of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to follow Jesus Christ, Priest and Victim, very closely. Therefore, guided by the Holy Spirit, they have come to live united with Christ and in His likeness, becoming a permanent offering to the Father, on behalf of the Church and the world.

They will seek God in a life of contemplation, solitude and silence, of humble and simple work, and in order to participate in the redemptive oblation of Christ Jesus, they will unite themselves to Him in the Sacrifice of the Mass, and will adore Him constantly in the Holy Eucharist."

In the following years, the Lord talked to Conchita several times about a religious congregation of men with the same spirituality. She was anxious for the hour to arrive for this new foundation to occur.

Meanwhile, the Lord continued to prepare this handmaid with even greater gifts, for the central grace of her life: the mystical incarnation.

And so we come to 1903, and to the 4th of February, when Conchita had that providential encounter with Father Félix Rougier.

She was 41 then, a widow, caring for and educating her nine children, and without their knowing it, practicing rigorous penances, praying three hours daily, constantly writing pages inspired by God and advancing in an incredible way in the mystical life.

When Conchita Cabrera met Father Félix, she was already extraordinarily holy.

For a saint to emerge, two conditions are necessary: On the part of God, special graces, which go beyond the common level of those all good Christians receive (and which, by the way, are enormous). But besides this, on the part of the person, there is needed an extraordinary fidelity to the graces received, an uncommon generosity and surrender to God. And it is in this that the saints are models for us all; not in the exceptional gifts they receive, but in the exceptional generosity with which they give themselves to God.

Conchita's case is out of the ordinary on both counts, even when dealing with the privileged level of the saints. To know her well, I once more suggest that those interested read my book "Priestly People" (this book has not been translated into English yet) which I describe in detail, not only the external happenings of her life, but especially the stages of her spiritual development.

CHAPTER III

TOWARDS NEW HORIZONS

Let us remember these words written by Father Félix:

"She (Mrs. Cabrera) told me that it was necessary for me to shake the spiritual lethargy which invaded me; that I needed to surrender myself to God seriously, and that I should start a new life".
(Letter to his General Superior)

"During this conversation, my life moved towards new horizons." (Diary)

In a letter to his brother Manuel, he writes:

"From that day on, a change has taken place in me: my future is now of another color. My heart has become inflamed with love for the Cross of Christ which now appears to me to be more desirable and bright."

In another letter to the General Superior he says:

"Since that conversation with Mrs. Cabrera I felt changed and I resolved to live henceforth as a perfect religious."

To Conchita he wrote:

"Since you spoke to me for the first time until now, I have changed completely. I love our Lord and think of Him constantly." (April 4, 1903)

In his diary he says that he made God a total gift of himself and renewed his religious vows with special fervor. Moreover, he increased his penances considerably: he slept on boards and used a piece of wood for a pillow. Every day he gave himself 200 blows with the cord scourge and 300 with the "bloody one" made of barbed wire. He used the hair shirt day and night, He branded the initials JHS on his chest. Every night he rose to pray for an hour, putting a crown of thorns on his head.

We are horrified by these kinds of penances and moreover, we see no need to do such things to progress in the spiritual life. But during the last century and the beginning of this one, these practices were recommended by the ascetic masters in order to "subdue the evil passions..." What is important in the case of Father Félix is the generosity and surrender which the undertaking of these penitential practices implies.

In a letter, Father Thrill comments that he and the other Marist Fathers who lived then with Father Félix noted a decided change in him:

"He was no longer the same. He spent much time in front of the Blessed Sacrament; during recess he was not so full of fun, he seemed to be in another world." (Letter to Father J. Padilla, M.Sp.S.)

Conchita herself was in awe at the spiritual progress of Father Félix:

"I have the joy of verifying that Father Félix corresponds unceasingly to the grace of God. I see clearly how the Holy Spirit impels him, and how Father Félix takes advantage of this divine wind

that leads him towards the Cross. I understand the struggle within him. I have seen a vocation being born in him which grows like fire and I understand his inner distress, his aspirations are very high and he is called to very high perfection." (Journal)

For his part, Father Félix wrote in his diary:

"I am aware of my worthlessness. I remember my abominable and innumerable mortal sins, my relapses, my little intelligence, my lack of knowledge. There is only a thin veneer over me which makes me seem like something, but it is not that way. Everything is superficial in me except for the thick coat of pride, my hasty judgments, and my disorder in all things. This is the instrument which the Lord has chosen to call to help Him... Oh, the mysteries of God!

But now, my beloved Jesus, make it possible for this wretchedness to correspond to your grace. You can change me radically." (Good Friday, April 10, 1903)

That same Good Friday, Father Félix wrote this prayer:

"Jesus Crucified, I want to crucify myself for you. I want to keep my body in line, treating it like firewood for a sacrifice. I wish to die to everything that is not you or leads to you. I am deeply grateful for your kindness and want to correspond as much as I can, given my weakness and great misery.

Yes, my Jesus, despite my imperfections, I am all yours, at all times and everywhere."
A month later, Conchita wrote to her spiritual director:

"What a forceful character and what a heart of fire Father Félix has! One has to hold him back so that he does not run so fast...

I see something extraordinary in the plans God has for this soul because I have experienced how the action of the Holy Spirit has transformed him. But, why with such unusual speed? Without a doubt this is due to the promptness with which Father Félix has corresponded (to the grace of God) and because God is preparing him for that end." [To be the founder of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit.] (Letter to Father Mir).

Two months later, on July 13, Conchita wrote to Father Félix:

"Once more I have caught a glimpse of the perfection that the Lord wants in your soul. Without your being worthy, God is filling you with gifts: those impulses towards recollection, that thirst to invoke the Holy Spirit, that need to surrender completely to Christ and to be with Him in the tabernacle, your progress in prayer, in penance, and that desire to know yourself well."

Since June 13 of that year (1903) Conchita had taken Father Félix as her spiritual director. This proved to be the cause of great spiritual advancement for both of them.

Father Félix had the opportunity to read Conchita's writings and learn her spirituality in depth, that is to say, the spirituality of the Cross, which consists of the following of Christ as priest and victim.

This situation lasted only a year and a month, for reasons we will explain later. Father Félix said that "it was his year of novitiate."

As the time passed, Father Félix became more and more certain that all of this was the work of God: the revelations to Mrs. Cabrera, his providential meeting with her, the Works of the Cross,

and his vocation to be the Founder of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit. This certainly, which came to be immovable, had a variety of sources: the principal one was the interior light which God communicated to him; but besides that, there was the sanctity of life which he had been able to verify in Conchita, the benefit of the foundation itself, that is to say, the spirit and the goals of the new congregation, and lastly, the notable progress of his own spiritual life since that meeting with Mrs. Cabrera and with the Works of the Cross.

All of this could not come from the spirit of evil or from anyone's fantasy. Everything had God's stamp on it.

On the other hand, Father Félix, with great humility and prudence had consulted about this with several bishops and priests and all of them gave him their enthusiastic approval.

He writes in his Memoirs:

"To tell the truth, I had no doubt that my calling was the work of the Lord, but I understood that, in order to avoid creating doubts in the minds of future members of that congregation, it was prudent to consult competent persons on this delicate matter."

But, above all, Father Félix considered that the only sure way to discover God's will was in obedience to his legitimate superiors. Therefore, as we will see later, he chose the decision of his Superior General as the ultimate criterion.

On April 17, Father Félix traveled to Oaxaca with two other Marist Fathers to make his spiritual exercises, since he had chosen Father Mir as preacher. Father Mir lived in Oaxaca and, as has been mentioned, had been Conchita's spiritual director for eleven years.

Father Félix told Father Mir everything that had happened to him since the 4th of February (1903). The two priests prayed a great deal, carefully weighed every aspect of Father Félix's new vocation and decided before God that undoubtedly the Lord was calling him to be the Founder of the "Religious (men) of the Cross".

Upon finishing that retreat, Father Félix wrote in his diary:

"Lord, I give myself to you completely, and I offer myself for the founding of that congregation, according to your divine will."

When he returned from Oaxaca, Father Félix wrote to his brother, Manuel:

"My dear brother Manuel: God's ways are so strange! They are mysterious ways, full of mercy, pardon and tenderness. I had not come to know Jesus, the beloved master, very well. I now feel I would give my life a thousand times for Him. I had abandoned Him: I was living in lukewarmness, an extreme lukewarmness, with occasional flashes of deep repentance that made me serve Jesus, but later I again drifted away from Him. I think that now this is indeed finished. I feel that I belong to Him forever. I want to do His will, all His will.

"I foresee that many things will be said against me; that I will be slandered and my intentions misunderstood, that people will think me crazy. But that does not frighten me; in fact, I look forward to it for the love of the Lord. I am so sorry I cannot explain things more clearly! Do not think that I am thinking about joining the Trappists. I have another dream. I have not sought it; Jesus has sought me out. Later you will know everything. I hope you will not be the first to consider me out of my mind.

I have started a great work linked in some way with everything I have told you: it is the work of the Apostleship of the Cross. It was established in our parish on Good Friday in the presence of our Father Provincial.

Pray that the will of God be fulfilled in me, that I correspond faithfully to it." (May 15, 1903)

In the months that followed, Father Félix dedicated himself to consolidate the Congregation of the Sisters of the Cross of the Sacred Heart of Jesus which underwent a deep crisis. He helped these religious women find God and he became their second founder.

So we come to the year 1904. On February 4th, Father Félix and Conchita began writing the constitutions of the men's order they wanted to found. They finished the latter part of April.

However, Father Félix took nothing for granted. He foresaw that this foundation would cause him many headaches.

In a letter to Conchita he writes:

"Jesus wants to use us for this beloved work; He wants to use you especially, and me as a hidden tool in your hands.

But I know I will be crowned with thorns. Those who now respect me, will make fun of me. Everyone, my Provincial Superior, the priests who live with me now and obey me, my brothers in Puebla, Oaxaca and Guadalajara.... they will all consider me a traitor to the Society of Mary.

Jesus, I understand that I am not worthy of carrying this crown of thorns, of being despised for obeying you, of being considered crazy for being faithful to you. But perhaps you will speak soon, you will let me know what the first step is to be on this road to Calvary which is known to you...

I am miserable and weak, but with your grace I will go, run, to do your will.

Make me completely yours, Jesus. Make me courageous always. Let me be able to smile when faced with pain and difficulties, and let me receive them with open arms, as messengers of your love.

Make me humble and obedient. Make me hungrier to do your will. Let me always remain hidden at the foot of your tabernacle, pressing you close to my heart, sacrificing myself for you and yours. Amen."

On Wednesday, March 30, most unexpectedly, Conchita warned Father Félix that he was going to receive "a very dangerous [prick with a] thorn".

Father Félix wrote in his diary:

"For a moment I felt frightened, but then I told myself: For the love of Jesus, let that thorn come. With His help, I will receive it with great joy.

I cannot even imagine what it could be: a death? A cruel illness? I don't know... Whatever you want, beloved Jesus, although I am unworthy to suffer for you." The morning of April 1st, Good Friday, Father Félix learned what the "thorn" was. Through Mrs. Cabrera, the Lord was asking him

to cleanse his heart from everything that belonged to this world, everything that was not Himself, renouncing also the idea of founding the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit.

Father Félix, kneeling before the tabernacle, wrote in his diary:

"That is all right, Lord. Certainly I am not worthy even of touching your Works. Your poor Félix thought himself called and he was happy. Now that he knows that it is not your will to use him, and that he must remain where he is, he offers you his heart as a holocaust.

"I will serve you always wherever I find myself and I will offer you all my life, in silence and darkness, for the sake of the Religious [men] of the Cross.

"May You be my all. May You be my only love. May you be the only object of my soul."

The masters of the spiritual life, especially St. John of the Cross, insist on the need for a total detachment from all creatures as an essential condition for intimate union with God. It is necessary to renounce the attachment we feel towards persons and things, although these things are very holy and good, such as the works of apostolate. The disposition of one's heart has to be this: Only what God wills...Only because God wills it...Only when God wills it.

Father Félix made great strides on this road of total detachment. His novices at that time remember that very spontaneously he would repeat: "God... God... God... only God."

Let us go back to that Good Friday morning. Father Félix renounced whole-heartedly becoming the founder of the fifth Work of the Cross, and his heart became ever more full of God. He was at peace. But that afternoon, Conchita spoke with him to say that the Lord was satisfied: that he had passed a test similar to that of Abraham and that he would indeed be the founder of the Religious [men] of the Cross. The time had come, therefore, to seek his Superior's permission.

That same Good Friday, after praying the office, Father Félix wrote the Superior General a brief letter:

"Very reverend Father: For several months now I have been intending to write to ask you permission to go to France and speak with you about two matters.

"One has to do with my family. My father wants to will his farm on Les Iles to my brother Stanislaus and he wants Manuel and me to be present and to make the arrangements.

"The other is a very serious matter concerning myself. I should like to make this trip as soon as possible."

The feelings and optimism of Father Félix are present in this letter which he wrote to Msgr. Ibarra, Archbishop of Puebla, about that time:

"I strongly believe that what I am about to do is the will of God. I will need to leave the Society of Mary, perhaps on the verge of being named Provincial or Vice-Provincial; this appointment is a sign that they appreciate me. But I will do it because I am sure that Jesus wishes it.

I know that humanly speaking, my Superior ought not to grant me the permission that I will request, but he will do it because it is the will of God that the Work is carried out. Afterwards I will go to Rome to ask for the blessing of the Representative of our Lord and I am sure I will be well received. Later I will seek vocations in France.

I do not have a cent to travel and less to bring ten or more vocations. Nor do I have money for other important expenses. But I am not worried, because knowing that it is the will of God that this happen, I am sure He will send me the necessary resources.

"I cannot take much credit for believing in so many things which humanly speaking are so difficult to carry out, because my faith rests on such a series of happenings that it is impossible for me to doubt. (April 30, 1904).

On May 11, Father Félix received the much awaited letter from his superior in France. It was dated April 24: "... If you have a real need to speak to me about very important personal matters, which cannot be dealt with in writing, you may come..."

CHAPTER IV

THE CROSS OF OBEDIENCE

While Father Félix was preparing his trip to France, an unfortunate incident occurred. He had written some letter to his brother Manuel, whom was a Marist priest working in the Oceania missions, telling him some of his thoughts.

Father Manuel became worried about the strange confidential information shared by his brother Félix because he felt Félix was falling prey to a dangerous deception. He therefore decided that the best thing to do was to send the letters to the Superior General indicating his fears.

Naturally, Father Manuel also wrote to his brother. Although the letter is dated April 26, Father Félix did not receive it until May 19th. Manuel said:

"My dear Félix: I have received your letters recently and now I understand enough to be able to speak openly with you, as brothers that we are.

"I have sent all your letters to our Superior General so he can have sufficient information on which to base his answer to this question which is of capital importance to you. I hope you will forgive me and see in my actions only my sincere desire to help you do what God want you to do.

"I have noticed that your judgment is influenced more by a vivid imagination than by common sense. I think you are going down the wrong path, acting under the influence of a mirage, as if hypnotized. Do not allow yourself to be deceived. Do not pay attention to visions, apparitions, holy religious women, etc... Do not change your path. Everything you have been doing in your parish in Mexico is admirable. You will never do more good than what you are doing now..." Father Félix noted in his diary:

"Today I received a letter from Manuel in which he treats me as if I were hallucinating, lie must think I am crazy.

"I offer this sorrow to Jesus and feel joy at having something to offer Him.

"Manuel tells me he sent my letters to the Rev. Father General. I wonder what he thought. I wonder what comments Manuel made.

"Oh, my brother, I forgive you with all my heart!" (Diary, May 19, 1904).

The next day, Father Félix wrote the following letter to his Superior General:

"Mexico, May 20, 1904. Reverend Father: Thank you for your letter of April 20th, in which you grant me permission to go to France. I do indeed have to speak with you at length about very important matters I cannot discuss in a letter. Manuel tells me that he has forwarded to you the letters I sent to him; and he treats me as if I were crazy. I trust your opinion will be very different. In any case, I will continue to walk, as always, down the royal path of obedience.

"If the work to which I wish to consecrate my life is of God, He will open the doors. But if after having heard me, you tell me that I am mistaken and send me to the most humble place, I will go without hesitation, joyfully, happy to obey. I will not start anything without your approval and will not do anything without the blessing of the Vicar of Christ."

The Provincial Superior also wrote to Father Félix:

"I have learned that among the reasons you have to go to France, the principal one is that you feel yourself called by God to a special work. I am very sorry it was not possible for me to go to Mexico to discuss this with you. I was not aware of the seriousness of your resolve. I thought your vocation as a Marist was stronger than the one you believe to have received by means of a new calling from God. I should have forbid you to direct those religious women. I am afraid that the excessive care given that community is responsible for your having neglected the principal work, the good direction of the parish entrusted to you. With sorrow, as I am sure you understand, I have written in this vein to the Rev. Father General." (P. Descreux, June 1, 1904). Father Félix wrote to his superior explaining his case and clarifying many points, his letter ends as follows:

"Finally, please let me clarify something you said regarding my vocation as a Marist. I am very devoted to my Marist vocation, but if my new calling is judged to be authentic, I am even more devoted to the will of God. In any case, if the Rev. Father General, after having listened to me tells me I am mistaken, that I am misguided, that I should never mention this again and he sends me to Oceania, I assure you that I will not hesitate for one second. I will see the will of God in the will of my Superior and I will happily go to die on any island lost in the ocean..."

Finally, the Superior General, having received the unfavorable reports of Father Manuel and Father Descreux (Provincial), immediately wrote also to Father Félix. This letter arrived in Mexico when Father Félix had already left for France. It was dated July 1st and one can see that several aspects of the question have been misinterpreted:

"I have heard that you are taking steps to ask Rome for a dispensation from your vows and you say that I do not object to this.

"Until you have indeed received that dispensation, I will continue to be your Superior and therefore, while I can, I have to do my duty on your behalf.

"I do not understand why you want to change your Marist vocation to that of a secular priest, since always before you had been devoted to your religious vocation. I think you are letting yourself be influenced by certain success or praises and so consider that the Marist ideal of living "ignored and hidden from the world" is no longer appropriate for you. But, is it really a light from above which makes you see things this way? Act honestly and ask the Blessed Virgin to let you find the true road that will lead you to heaven.

"I therefore command you, by virtue of holy obedience, that before you take any more steps to obtain the dispensation from your vows, you make spiritual exercises during nine days with the Trappists at Dambez or at Sept Fonts; and if after doing this you think God wants it so, and insist in asking Rome to be dispensed from your religious vows, I will not only not place any obstacles in your way, but rather I will help you all I can." (Father Antonio Martin, Superior General).

As mentioned above, Father Félix never received that letter, which is found in the archives of the Marist Fathers, because he left on July 15 by train to Veracruz. The next day he boarded the boat "Alfonso XIII" bound for France.

He landed in Santander. From there he went to Lourdes and arrived in Lyon on August 5th. That very day he spoke with Father Antonio Martin, Superior General of his Congregation.

The dialogue continued until the 9th of August. Father Félix was completely open with his superior and gave him the letters of recommendation he had obtained from the Apostolic Delegate, from the Archbishop of Mexico and from Leopoldo Ruiz, Bishop of León.

"I opened my soul to him with all the frankness of which I am capable, and I hid nothing, not even those things that I knew were going to cause a bad impression." (Letter of Father Félix to Bishop Ruiz, August 25, 1904.)

In addition to the personal interviews, Father Félix handed Father Martin a document entitled "Brief Summary". It states:

"1. WHY THIS FOUNDATION. Only because our Lord has asked Mrs. Concepción Cabrera repeatedly for it. And because of the admirable fruits that the Works of the Cross have yielded through both institutions: the Sisters of the Cross of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Apostleship of the Cross, already approved by the Holy See.

2. WHENCE HAS THIS NEW VOCATION COME TO ME? I have never experienced temptations against my vocation as a Marist: I have always been firm. But I had always felt in me a desire for greater perfection which I was not able to satisfy until I came to know the Works of the Cross. But I do not pretend to implement this ideal outside the Society of Mary, which I love and will serve as much as I can and with my whole soul. It is our Lord who has clearly manifested His will to me in a variety of ways which I have mentioned to you. I am ready to suffer any kind of martyrdom rather than not respond to God's call.

However, I solemnly declare that I will not take another step without your approval and I will never stray from the royal path of holy obedience.

3. WHY I BELIEVE IN MRS. CABRERA: Because I have personally verified and confirmed the authenticity of her mission. Because I have consulted the persons who know her best: the Archbishop of Mexico, the Archbishop of Puebla, the Apostolic Delegate, the Bishop of León, and the priest who was her confessor for ten years. And every one of them has told me enthusiastically and without hesitation to go ahead because this is God's work. They know the marvelous graces this woman has received from God, about which I will speak to you in detail later.

Another proof is the authenticity of her virtues: her admirable humility, her constant wish to be ignored, her unwavering obedience, the holiness of her life, her penances which are so extraordinary that they would be impossible if God were not supernaturally sustaining her; and the special favors which God has granted her, which we cannot doubt.

4. DOCTRINE AND SPIRITUALITY OF THE WORK. Mrs. Cabrera has written a great deal, and her writings carry the seal of God. They touch the heart, and are full of theology even though she has never studied it. The Archbishop of Mexico had the best theologians of this capital city examine her writings and they were in admiration at their depth and accuracy.

WHAT I INTEND TO DO

1. Obtain your full consent and approval in order that it may be known, now and also later, that the Work was begun in perfect obedience.

2. If you refuse me the permission, I will obey willingly and happily because I know that to obey you is to obey God, and I do not have in mind to do anything else than the holy will of God.

3. If you give me permission, I will go to Rome immediately, I will talk my project over with Cardinal Vives so that he can speak on my behalf with the Holy Father and I will ask the Vicar of Christ to bless me and give me the habit of the Religious [Men] of the Cross.

4. I will start looking for vocations immediately and will take the men to Mexico to begin the novitiate, under the auspices of the Archbishop of Mexico City.

Father Antonio Martin asked Father Félix to give him time to consult about the matter with the General Council, and asked him meanwhile to go visit his family. For this reason the decisive interview did not take place until the 19th.

On that day Father Martin received Father Félix cordially, asked him to sit down and said:

"I am going to read you this paper. I wrote it down to be sure of what I am going to say, and so you can keep it and remember my orders better and accept faithfully the will of God."

The paper said the following:

"My dear Father Félix, after having prayed and reflected, and consulted my council, and counting on your promise to obey my decision regarding the mission to found a new religious congregation, I order you to comply with the following:

"1. Not to have anything to do with the founding of the new Congregation.

"2. Not to communicate with Mrs. Cabrera by letter or by any other means, be it direct or indirect.

"3. Regarding your penances, confessions and spiritual direction, follow the directives given in the rule of the Society of Mary in Article III of our Constitutions."

After Father Martin read these orders and gave them to Father Félix, he said:

"Now, if you have no objection, I will send you to Spain to our house in Barcelona where Father Gauven will be your superior."

Father Félix answered:

"I will gladly go, because I am sure I am doing the will of God and I want nothing else." (Diary)

Mrs. Cabrera received the last letter from Father Félix the 11th of September. And she did not communicate with him again. On the 14th, she wrote the following to the Superior General:

"I received a letter from Father Félix in which he informs me he has been transferred to Barcelona and that he has been forbidden to write to me. Very well, Reverend Father, do not be afraid that I will contradict your will in any way. It is your duty to do what you think is best. But I hope the Lord will make the truth of his wish known to you." (Mexico City, September 14, 1904)

For ten years Father Félix remained in Europe without communicating at all with Mexico, in silence and obedience; praying and concerned with fulfilling faithfully the will of God.

I have no doubt that these ten years of hidden life and heroic obedience were the most fruitful in terms of purification and spiritual progress for this man whom God had elected to be one of those we call "saints".

The same day in which he received the painful negative answer from his superior, Father Félix wrote in his diary:

"Now I am isolated. Alone with Jesus... It is here, Lord, the hour I feared, the hour of trial. My Superior's words are yours, and as such I will obey them joyfully, all my life, if this is Your Will, although my heart is already suffering martyrdom..." (August 19, 1904)

CHAPTER V

ANALYZING THE FACTS

Now that time has passed and the life of Father Félix belongs to history, we can analyze these happenings objectively.

We can ask ourselves: Was what Father Félix chose to do, the best thing?

This question is valid because ecclesiastical law foresees the case of the religious who, having made vows in any congregation, later discovers that he/she has another vocation and sincerely believes that the will of God for him/her is to follow the other path. In this situation, the religious has the right to ask for a dispensation from his/her vows and incurs in no fault, rather, he or she is seeking to be faithful to the will of God through legitimate channels.

In fact, Father Félix's General Superior tells him as much in his letter July 1st, 1904:

"If after having completed nine days of spiritual exercises in the monastery of the Trappists, you believe it is the will of God that you ask for a dispensation from your religious vows, I will not put obstacles in your way, but rather I will do all I can to help you."

On the other hand, we know that Father Félix often said that he "had not the slightest doubt regarding his new vocation," and that "he is absolutely sure that his calling is from God." Moreover, in order not to depend on his own judgment, Father Félix consulted with several bishops and other "very competent" priests. And he received their unanimous, enthusiastic approbation.

Under the circumstances, I believe it was a mistake for Father Félix to condition the projected foundation on the decision of his superiors who lived in France and who, because of the distance, could not have either the information or the necessary criteria to evaluate this case correctly. For example, they lacked direct and sufficient knowledge of Mrs. Cabrera, of her charisma, her spirituality, her writings, of the two Works of the Cross already approved, of the intelligence and importance of the bishops and theologians who supported the idea of the foundation, and of the gradual process which Father Félix had lived the last fifteen months.

It was natural that Father Martin, and especially his Council, would deny Father Félix the permission to found a Congregation based on the supposed revelations of a certain Mexican lady...

But the Superior General himself points to the real cause of the impasse in a letter addressed to Bishop Leopoldo Ruiz, of León:

"In order to found that Congregation, Father Félix would have to leave the Society of Mary and ask Rome for a dispensation from his religious vows. However, it is Father Félix's decision not to ask for this dispensation until I am fully in agreement and will give my unconditional consent. But I cannot do this as long as my Council is against it" (December 1, 1904).

The problem could not be solved due to Father Félix's posture. My personal opinion is that Father Félix ought to have asked for a dispensation from his vows, based on his own conviction and that of the Mexican bishops and theologians. Since at that time the bishops could establish new congregations without Rome's approval, Father Félix could have started the foundation that very year, under the auspices of the Archbishop of Mexico City. The Congregation would have been "of diocesan right" for a time and later, as is normal, would have become "of pontifical right".

Father Félix's dispensation would have been processed without difficulty, with the support of the Superior General himself. In this way our founder would have saved ten years and ten tons of health since he suffered considerably due to the constant stress of the psychological wear and scar produced by the tension of strong opposing forces when they have taken over our life.

But Father Félix judged things from another point of view. He was sure that the Lord wanted him to establish the fifth Work of the Cross, but he wanted to know if the hour chosen by God was at hand. And he believed that God would give his superiors enough light to discern His will. That is why he decided to obey regardless of the cost.

His obedience was heroic. It was terribly difficult for him to give up an ideal upon which he had centered all his enthusiasm, derived from a strong and impetuous temperament. But he gave it up; for the time his Superiors saw fit, or even forever...

Nothing sanctifies a person more than to give up his own wishes in an effort to submit to the will of God. Nothing purifies a person as much as this because then the heart is empty of everything, of the self, and totally available to God. That is why I am sure that after these ten years, Father Félix was a real saint. What for some of us seemed to be a mistake, was the road to sanctity for Father Félix. Sometimes God leads His elect by paths we don't understand. He himself tells us so in Isaiah: "My paths are not your paths, or my ways your ways." (Is. 55: 8)

And what did Father Félix do in Barcelona? If we consider his experience and human caliber, we would say he wasted his time. But if we see things with the eyes of faith, we must say that he was dedicating himself to becoming a saint.

The first task Father Gauven assigned to him was to seek alms for the support of the French Chapel which the Marist Fathers had in Barcelona. Father Félix writes in his diary:

"Yesterday I made five calls for alms. I find it so very trying. But I do it with great pleasure, because that is what God wants of me."

He was also assigned to teach a small group of children ages 5 to 12:

"I am teaching my little students, teaching them to spell. The youngest is five. In the beginning I found this very difficult, but not anymore. As long as I am doing the will of God, what difference does it make to do this or that?"

His superior ordered him to visit several convents of women religious and offer his services as confessor, but he did not have much luck.

"They all consider me a poor, jobless worker. Sometimes I blush before I enter the house, but holy obedience gives me courage and when I offer it all to Jesus I even feel joy in the midst of my shame."

Later he was put in charge of the association of governesses and domestics and he accepted it "with great pleasure."

In the first months of his "exile," as he characterized this period, he wrote frequently to the Superior General, insisting with filial respect that his case be reconsidered and always giving new reasons to do so. The answer he received included the following paragraph:

"You wrote to me a short time ago, and your writing every month is excessive. Moreover, it is useless, because my resolution, which is also the Council's, will not be changed either by pleading or by the passage of time, be it days or months. Be calm, waiting for God's time to arrive, if it is to do so. But if you feel compelled to write to me once in a while with the same request, I may not respond, since I will have nothing new to say. But be assured of my paternal affection for you, and of the ardent desire I have that you grow in sanctity and that you do all the good that God expects of you."

On March 25, 1905, Father Martin died and Father Raffin was elected Superior General of the Society of Mary. Father Félix wrote him a memorandum, asking him as new Superior General to please review his case. His long letter ends thus:

"But should you feel that the time has not yet come, I will remain calm and resigned in our dear 'Nazareth' and will continue to wait and to obey, until God's time comes.

"I will not deny that I will do this while experiencing a most cruel desolation; but the desire I have to obey faithfully and till the end, will enable me to accept this most heavy cross with special joy."

The answer of the now Superior was the same:

"The unanimous opinion of the Council is that you should not be given permission to make that foundation. But, if to implement the mission that you think God has entrusted to you, you wish to ask for a dispensation from your vows, we will not stand in the way."

Father Félix answered this negative answer thanking Father Ruffin and the Council for having reconsidered his case. He would continue to wait until God willed something different. He ended with the following paragraph:

"Humanly everything seems ended since I was counting especially on your help; but in the midst of the sacrifice I make by obeying you, I feel such confidence in the promises of God it seems to me that I will be starting his Work very soon."

I believe that given this answer, Father Raffin started to esteem and admire Father Félix, not only for his obedience, but also for the steadfastness of his ideal.

Three years went by in this fashion. And in February of 1908 Father Félix health broke. He wrote in his Diary:

"I have reached a state of weakness such as I had never experienced before, and I have a chronic bronchitis."

The doctor was afraid for his life and ordered complete rest. His opinion was that the Barcelona climate was mortal for the patient, and advised that he should go to France. His superiors sent him to the baths at Bourbule to recuperate. Father Félix wrote:

"I pray to God for patience and that He grants me the grace never to complain. I have offered God my sickness in reparation for my innumerable sins."

It happened that about this time, Father Ruffin also had to go to the same resort to recuperate, and without Father Félix bringing it up, Father Ruffin asked him to explain in detail everything referring to his new ideal. Father Félix recounts in his Dairy the result of these conversations:

"I opened my soul to him with great ease and presented the reasons that could persuade him in favor of my petition. The Father General seemed very pleased with my absolute obedience during

these past years, and during our last trek to the mountains together he told me: 'In the beginning, I not only did not believe in your new vocation, but I felt that your projects were inconsistent, and I even made fun of them in the presence of the Fathers. But now, because of all you have told me, I believe that our Lord is calling you to make that foundation, and we will give you the permission you wish if the Holy See is willing.'

Father Félix returned to Barcelona with new hope and his health improved noticeably. The following year Father Raffin visited the Barcelona community and spoke again with Father Félix. The latter told him that he was tormented by a doubt: since he was so sure that God was calling him to begin the foundation, should he continue to wait indefinitely without doing anything about it? The Father General gave him the following answer in writing:

"Leave everything in God's hands. Let Him be the one who decides the time. Continue to obey as you have until now because this is the safest and quickest means to obtain our permission to start the foundation you long to establish."

Moreover, he gave Father Félix permission to write to Mrs. Armida "once or twice a year, but without mentioning the foundation."

However, Father Raffin had told Father Félix several times that should he wish to obtain a dispensation from his vows, he would not be opposed. For this reason, during 1906 Father Félix consulted with various persons regarding his obtaining a dispensation. These persons included: Cardinal Casanas of Barcelona; Archbishop Ibarra, of Puebla; Father Alejandro Cepeda and Father Salustiano Carrera. They all hesitated to recommend a radical change in the life of Father Félix and suggested that it would be better to keep on waiting, enjoying the security offered by obedience.

Father Félix commented:

"Let's be confident! Jesus has said it and His word will be fulfilled despite all obstacles. While that happy day arrives, I will apply myself to be more faithful in everything; giving myself to the Lord without taking me back; letting Him do with me what He will; filling me ever more with the spirit of the Works of the Cross, and preparing myself with the grace of God, to be the first male Religious of the Cross." (Diary)

By the month of August of that year (1909), Father Félix' health was again very poor. The doctor insisted that the Barcelona climate was very bad for him, and he was therefore sent to the Marist Fathers' school in Saint Chamond. This was a small town of 13,000 who lived from mining coal and working in iron and steel factories. The Marist school was the best in the region. It had 35 teachers and more than 500 students, almost all of them boarders.

Father Félix wrote in his Diary:

"They have given me very little work because of my poor health.

"I can hear the whistle of the locomotives from my room; and I make believe it is the train that will take me to Mexico..."

For five more years Father Félix stayed in Saint Chamond, obeying and waiting for the dream train...

When his health was normal, he taught 12 hours of class a week, prepared his lessons, corrected notebooks and was in charge of disciplining the students. He did not like this, but he felt happy:

"My current occupations are opposed to my natural tastes, but I feel happy because I see clearly that Jesus wants me here. And what else can I wish for, but to do His will? Every day I thank the Lord for bringing me to this town, to this silence, to this solitude where I know nobody except my brothers and my students. I feel called to this life, away from the world, with time to pray and to fulfill my daily tasks."

But despite the apparent tranquility, at the beginning of the 1910 school year, he wrote the following note in his diary:

"I have noticed that I have become very nervous, and cannot stand anything against the rules. I make an effort to be patient, but it is very difficult. What is happening is that there are one or two people here more nervous than myself... but with no malice.

"Jesus, I want to be patient."

CHAPTER VI

THE LONG ROAD

Let us leave Father Félix for now in the school of the town of Saint Chamond, very nervous, but asking Jesus for more and more patience.

Let us see what Conchita Cabrera and a few good friends who believed in her were doing.

First they wrote letters to France, trying to persuade Father Félix' superiors to allow him to return to Mexico and take charge of the foundation.

These letters were written by the Most Reverend Leopoldo Ruiz (Bishop of León), Msgr. Emeterio Valverde (Canon of the Cathedral in Mexico City), the Most Reverend Ramón Ibarra, Archbishop of Puebla, and Conchita herself, who wrote two letters. It would take too much space to transcribe them in full, but the main ideas presented in these letters include the following:

a) Mrs. Cabrera has been examined by several bishops and theologians, and they all agree that her spirit is of God, that she is not suffering from delusions. Therefore, the petition of the Lord that Father Félix found the Congregation of the Religious of the Cross is real and authentic.

b) The Archbishop of Mexico has already given his approval for this foundation. We are therefore within the legal norms established by ecclesiastical law.

c) It seems to us that Father Félix has all the qualifications required of the founder and teacher of the new religious.

d) We propose that, putting aside Mrs. Cabrera's revelations, the idea of the foundation be studied in itself as to the benefits that would accrue from it and its usefulness and convenience to the Church.

c) The fact that a member of a religious community should found another religious family is not new in the Church; on the contrary, who better than an experienced religious to form new religious.

Conchita's second letter to Father Martin includes other elements. We therefore transcribe the relevant paragraphs:

"I know that you have no reason to believe me, and that you may well consider me a victim of delusions. But, what am I to do, if I feel that the Lord urges me on and I am acting in obedience to my spiritual director?"

"If when you give Father Félix permission to come, you wish to forbid him to see me again, I am in agreement. I do not want to be in the way of the realization of God's plan. I know very well that I am the source of the problem. But, what am I to do, Father Martin, if the Lord impels me to continue struggling for his cause although I make a fool of myself?"

"For me, the evidence that this is of God is as follows:

1. That I did not even know Father Félix, and it was the Lord who providentially led me to him. He has told me many times that He has chosen Father Félix to found the Religious of the Cross.

2. That I never acted based on my own judgment, but rather I opened my soul to wise and saintly priests and they have all told me that this is of God.
3. That since Father Félix became acquainted with the Works of the Cross, the Holy Spirit has wrought admirable changes in him.
4. That the Church has already approved the Apostleship of the Cross and the Sisters of the Cross of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.
5. That both Father Félix and I have chosen the path of holy obedience.
6. That the perfection and end of the Work we are trying to implement is for the glory of God and the good of many souls."

Of course the Superior General of the Marists and his Council also had their reasons to deny the permission time and again. In all their answers they repeated the same reasons:

- a) We have no proof that the revelations to Mrs. Cabrera are authentic.
- b) Therefore, we have no assurance that it be the will of God that Father Félix establishes that congregation.
- c) Moreover, we think that Father Félix lacks the necessary qualities to be the founder of anything, because when he becomes enthusiastic he loses sight of the just mean of prudence.
- d) We think Father Félix is too much under the influence of Mrs. Cabrera, and that he would be no more than her instrument.
- e) Father Félix' departure would not be a good example for the other Marists, and would set a negative precedent.
- f) We need Father Félix because we are short handed.
- g) If Father Félix would wish to ask to be dispensed from his vows to start the foundation, we would not oppose it, but it is he who does not wish to do it without our total approval; but we cannot support his project because of the reasons mentioned above.

This summarizes the reasons given by the French superiors. As we can see, it is true that not two persons think alike.

And so, days, months and years passed with reasons going back and forth. Father Félix continued to hold to two convictions which seemed to be ever more contradictory: on the one hand, his decision to obey faithfully till the end; and on the other, the firm conviction that the promise God had made to him through Conchita would be fulfilled, like Abraham: "he believed God and hoped against all hope."

By his letters we know that his health had its ups and downs during these years and that his work increased because Father Félix had a lot of initiative and could not remain still for long. His diary also reveals to us his most intimate feelings.

The following letter to Father Naval summarizes them well:

"...So you see, Father, that I have nothing in my favor to be a founder, neither science, nor virtue, nor degrees of prayer, nor revelations from God, because I have never seen anything, or heard anything. I see nothing in myself that would make me worthy of such a mission. All that I have, and Jesus has given me that, is the wish to do nothing of my own will, but rather to be a completely docile instrument of God by means of holy obedience.

"Since the novitiate I have loved obedience, happy and prompt, and if this foundation is to be implemented, I want it to be by means of the most perfect obedience.

"Since I decided to undertake this Work, I have spoken to my superiors with childlike simplicity. I made perfectly clear everything related to Mrs. Cabrera: so many words of our Lord, so many revelations, so many direct orders, so many promises for the future, so many supernatural things... I said everything clearly, although I knew what the consequences would be. And they thought that Mrs. Cabrera was very good but perhaps deluded, and that I acted in good faith, but that my mission was doubtful. So they prudently separated me from Mexico and decided to wait. Had I been in their place I might have done the same. They have always been very good to me. But they say that they cannot and ought not to grant me the permission I requested.

"However, my faith in this foundation has only grown. My heart wishes violently that we begin, but I do not want to be in a hurry, because I know that Jesus has His own hour and time.

"These years of separation, of reflection, of obedience, of humiliation and unwavering hope in the word of Jesus have been a precious time for me. I have understood better than ever my incompetence, and that I must not expect anything of myself, but that what will be done, will be done by Jesus, despite so much opposition, and despite the worthlessness of the instrument He has chosen, so that it will be seen more clearly that it is the work of God and that He Himself has done it all."

In his diary he writes:

"It now seems that nothing favors the foundation of the Religious of the Cross. I think the Lord has wanted everything to come tumbling down and that everyone gives his back to us, to show without a doubt that it is all His work. He wants to do it and will indeed carry it out. Sometimes I am tempted to despair, but I react right away. Jesus has said it and He always keeps His word, if we are faithful to Him. Obstacles are not important. Jesus has said it, and I have so much evidence that this is so, that I could not ask for more."

On July 16, 1916, Pope Pius X had issued a decree withdrawing from the bishops the authority to establish new religious congregations without the permission of the Holy See. Therefore, they not only needed a founder, but also the authorization of the Pope.

So towards the end of 1909, after many fruitless letters, Archbishop Ibarra decided to go to Rome, where he arrived in early January of 1910.

He was very well received by Cardinal Vives, Prefect of the Congregation for Religious. The Cardinal promised him that he would not return to Mexico without obtaining his wish. He likewise agreed to be the protector of the Apostleship of the Cross and obtained the papal approval for the Sisters of the Cross of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (February 17). He also obtained numerous indulgences for the Covenant of Love, which was the third Work of the Cross, founded in Mexico with the approval of Archbishop Ibarra on February 30, 1909. He also examined the constitutions of the Religious of the Cross, prior to negotiating their approval by the Pope.

On February 26, Msgr. Caroli, who was in charge of the religious communities of men, informed Archbishop Ibarra that the permission for the foundation had been granted.

Archbishop Ibarra immediately sent a cable to Conchita Cabrera and she in turn immediately informed Bishop Ruiz, Bishop Valverde and the Sisters of the Cross of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Everybody rejoiced.

But something very unexpected happened. The 1st of March, Pope Pius X ordered that the permission for the foundation remain pending and that all the writings of Mrs. Cabrera related to the Religious of the Cross be sent to Cardinal Vives to be examined in detail. Archbishop Ibarra was dismayed by this news...

He wrote both to Cardinal Vives and to the Pope, begging them to study the matter of the foundation of the Religious of the Cross completely apart from the writings and revelations of Mrs. Cabrera, considering the work in itself, as they would any other congregation. But he received a negative answer.

The Pope himself (now Saint Pius X), wrote Archbishop Ibarra the following letter in his own hand:

"Venerable brother: I have read your letter, in which you lament the fact that the permission to found the Congregation of the Priests of the Cross has been postponed. I beg you to forgive me as well as the Congregation for Religious, if in such an important matter we have felt we should proceed with great caution before giving permission. But I assure you that this matter will soon be turned over to the Sacred Congregation for its study, and God willing, will be resolved according to your wishes and those of your brothers.

"I have confidence, because a work which is pleasing to God, although it meet many obstacles, will overcome them all. And with this hope, Venerable Brother, I extend to you my heartfelt apostolic blessing. Pope Pius X, Rome, March 2, 1910."

Archbishop Ibarra shared all this with his friends in Mexico. In his letter to Conchita he details everything, transcribes the Pope's letter, and ends by saying:

"I do not tire of reading this letter time and time again. And I feel a great deal of peace in my heart and an indescribable joy, because I have tried, with all my strength, to do God's will."

Archbishop Ibarra returned to Mexico with a great deal of peace in his heart, but without the desired permission...

Conchita's writings regarding the Religious of the Cross were sent to Rome according to the Pope's instructions.

A year and a half went by.... No answer.

On August 3, 1911, Bishop Ruiz sent the Pope another petition, signed by the five Mexican Archbishops then living in Mexico and two bishops.

Msgr. Caroli answered this letter as follows:

"Today I received the letter in which you bring to my attention the matter of the foundation of the Priests of the Cross. It is something that concerns me directly because I am in charge of matters referring to institutes of men in the Sacred Congregation for Religious.

The persons who support this application are above all praise and encomium. However, given our past experience, I foresee that success will not be forthcoming, at least in the near future. Believe me, I shall do all I can to obtain what you wish." (August 17, 1911)

The "past experience" to which Msgr. Caroli referred was the inevitable relationship which existed between Conchita's revelations and this foundation: its origin, its spirituality, its goals, its founder, and even its constitutions; everything flowed from the affirmations and writings of this Mexican woman... and from God. Taking into consideration the strictness of the Roman criteria, "the past experience" couldn't be worse...

More than a year went by and nothing arrived from Rome. No answer, no news, good or bad...

Then Archbishop Ibarra wrote to Msgr. Caroli:

"Considerable time has passed since the experts named to examine the writings of Mrs. Concepción Cabrera submitted their reports to the Sacred Congregation for Religious. But until now, no decision has been made. I think the time has come for you to please move on this matter, so that the permission be granted at once for the foundation of the Priests of the Cross." (February 1, 1913)

Msgr. Caroli answered:

"...Regarding the matter of the Priests of the Cross, I believe the foundation will not be authorized. The writings you know are still being examined, but, from what I can conclude from the things that I know, it is not possible to talk about a foundation. That is the truth, at least for now. Therefore, there is nothing I can do." (February 22, 1913)

CHAPTER VII

IN GOD'S GOOD TIME

Archbishop Ibarra was firmly convinced of the authenticity of the revelations to Conchita, and that God willed the foundation of the Religious [Men] of the Cross-. This conviction moved him to plan another trip to Rome, but this time taking the "black eye", that is to say, Conchita, with him. To this end, Archbishop Ibarra organized a pilgrimage to Rome and Palestine. Circumstances were unfavorable because Mexico was in the midst of a revolution since 1910. Although there was poverty and trips were dangerous, 123 persons signed up. That is the way Mexicans are! Conchita and two of her sons were part of the group.

Archbishop Ibarra wanted Conchita to be known and examined in person in Rome. Moreover, he had with him two very authorized opinions about her and her writings: that of Msgr. Maximino Ruiz, who had been Conchita's spiritual director for 7 years and that of Father Poulain, a well-known Jesuit who had written a "Treatise of Mystical Theology". Both opinions were very favorable.

The pilgrims left Mexico on August 26, 1913 and arrived in Rome on November 13, after visiting the Holy Land.

Bad news awaited Archbishop Ibarra in Rome: Cardinal Vives had died the 7th of September and Msgr. Caroli had been named Bishop of Ceneda on October 19th. These two men were the principal sources of support Archbishop Ibarra had in the Sacred Congregation for Religious and both had left...

Those who had examined Conchita's writings by order of Cardinal Vives had rendered an unfavorable opinion. In their judgment, everything seemed to be due to an exaggerated sensitivity and to an exalted imagination.

Moreover, false accusations had reached Rome to the effect that the said Mrs. Cabrera, against the wishes of the Holy See, directed the Sisters of the Cross of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

In short, at the Sacred Congregation for Religious everything related to the Works of the Cross and to Mrs. Cabrera had lost prestige. Therefore, all the petitions related to the matter of the Religious of the Cross were sent to "the basement file."

However, Archbishop Ibarra requested an audience with the Pope for himself and Mrs. Cabrera which was granted for November 17.

In the few days that preceded the audience, Archbishop Ibarra visited all the members of the Sacred Congregation for Religious who had anything to do with the foundation and tried to dissipate prejudices, clarify doubts, explain situations and remedy misunderstandings. He delivered the new reports from Msgr. Maximino Ruiz and Father Poulain. He wrote several letters to important Vatican figures and, above all, he prayed a great deal, together with Mrs. Cabrera and all the Mexican pilgrims.

On the day of the audience, Archbishop Ibarra entered the Pope's office first and spoke with him alone; then they called Conchita. In her diary she recounts the meeting with Saint Pius X:

"The Pope was seated behind his desk and Archbishop Ibarra was in front of him.

"I knelt down and, crying, kissed his feet. Finally I regained my composure. He stretched out his hand and asked me what I wanted:

-That your Holiness approves the Priests of the Cross, I said without letting go his hand.

They are approved, he answered and before this year is over, this whole matter will be settled.

-Most Holy Father, I do not wish to stand in the way of the Works of the Cross, and I beg you to leave me out, do not take me into account, forget all about me, so they can continue.

I already spoke with Archbishop Ibarra about this, and everything will be settled this year. Do you wish anything else?

-A special blessing for the Sisters of the Cross of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Works and my children.

Yes, and for you too, in a special way.

He looked into my eyes with a penetrating and sweet glance, and I felt I was at the feet of our Lord Jesus Christ. He blessed me several times and said:

Prega, prega per me. (Pray, pray for me.)

Then he spoke for a long time with Archbishop Ibarra. Finally I heard the Pope telling Msgr. Ibarra to see the doctor and take care of his health, under obedience."

Archbishop Ibarra and Conchita were delighted with the audience.

They were surprised that so many obstacles had been overcome, and did not tire of thanking God.

Humanly speaking, and given the state of things, the Pope's approval did not seem to be forthcoming, since he himself had canceled the permission in 1910. Therefore, what was to be expected was rather that he would have ordered that everything be studied in depth; this would have been the most tactful way to say no.

How could one then explain his approval and promise that within the year everything would be favorably completed? The only explanation is that God's good time had arrived.

Fearing that new difficulties would arise because of the relationship between the new foundation and Conchita's writings, Archbishop Ibarra wrote to Msgr. Sbarreti proposing that the name of the future congregation be changed from Religious of the Cross to Missionaries of the Holy Spirit. This would make it easier to separate it from Conchita's revelations and writings. Msgr. Sbarreti answered that he would bring the matter up at his next audience with the Pope which was scheduled for September 16, and the Pope would decide.

Finally the day of the decision arrived. Archbishop Ibarra and Conchita spent the day in prayer, awaiting the final and official decision of the Holy Father.

Not until the next day did Archbishop Ibarra learn about the Pope's answer: he had granted the permission for the foundation.

On the 18th he received officially and in writing the decision of Pius X. The letter was written by Msgr. Sbarreti and said:

"I hasten to communicate to you that the Holy Father, at the audience granted the Cardinal Prefect on the 16th of this month, has graciously consented to the request you and the Archbishops of Mexico and Michoacán have presented for authorization to found a new congregation of men religious: especially in light of the fact that you have declared that the said institute will be completely unrelated to the supposed revelations of Mrs. Cabrera de Armida.

However, the Holy Father has set the following conditions:

1. That the new institute be called "Missionaries of the Holy Spirit".
2. That neither Father Alberto Cuscó y Mir nor Father Félix Rougier, both former spiritual directors of the above-mentioned Mrs. Cabrera, ever belong to the institute."

The hour of God was at hand, but a problem had arisen... The Pope himself was commanding that Father Félix not be a part of the institute.

What to do now? Look for another founder? But...who? Who else was so imbued with the spirit of the Cross? Who else was so enthusiastic about the work? Who else but Father Félix was worthy of having the work entrusted to him, since he had waited ten years for the permission? Moreover, what about the Lord's promises?

Archbishop Ibarra thought through the wording of Msgr. Sbarreti's letter: it said that Father Félix was not to be a part of the institute, that is to say, that he was forbidden to join it as a Missionary of the Holy Spirit, but it did not say that he was forbidden to be in charge of the foundation and formation of the first Missionaries, remaining himself a Marist. Maybe the solution lay in some arrangement along these lines....

So as not to make a mistake, Archbishop Ibarra decided to express his doubts to the Pope himself. So it was that on December 22, in a last audience which he had requested to say good-bye and thank Pius X, he asked the Pope about it. The Pope answered that his intention was that Father Félix not leave his congregation to enter that of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit, but rather, that with the permission of his Superior General, Father Félix would be responsible for forming the new priests until they could rule themselves.

The Pope's answer calmed Archbishop Ibarra's concerns; its mission in Rome was over. Now all he had to do was to fetch the founder. With this goal in mind, Archbishop Ibarra left for Lyon, France, with the company of a small entourage which included Conchita and her sons.

They arrived in Lyon on the afternoon of the 3rd of April. Right away, Archbishop Ibarra send a letter to Father John Raffin, Superior General of the Marists, in which he requested an interview and in which he explained the reason for his trip to Lyon. The next day, after consulting his Council, Father Raffin went to the hotel where Archbishop Ibarra was staying and told him that he was very sorry, but the Council had decided that due to the shortage of priests, it was impossible to grant Father Félix permission to go to Mexico to be in charge of the foundation. He explained that the shortage of priests was so acute that the school in Mexico was on the verge of closing because France could no longer send teachers.

Archbishop Ibarra and Mrs. Cabrera, most sorrowful, and considering the case hopeless, left for Mexico. They arrived in Paris on the 9th of January and the next day Conchita received an

unexpected visitor: Mr. George Gréville, an Englishman in the diplomatic service and his wife, Elizabeth. Father Félix was the couple's spiritual director, and they also had known Conchita since the time Mr. Gréville had worked in Mexico as plenipotentiary minister of Great Britain. That is why they knew so much about the works of the Cross.

At home in London they learned that Conchita was going to go through Paris and they went to greet her. She and Archbishop Ibarra told them the story of Father Félix and the Grévilles offered to go to Lyon to try once more to obtain the desired permission because they were good friends of Father John Raffin, and like good diplomats, they expected to be successful.

Father Raffin was happy to see his friends, Mr. and Mrs. Gréville and explained to them that the only reason why he could not lend Father Félix was lack of personnel. Then Mrs. Gréville had an idea. She made a proposal in the name of Archbishop Ibarra: if Father Raffin would lend Father Félix for the foundation, Archbishop Ibarra would provide three priests for the Marist school in Mexico to keep it from closing.

After consulting with his Council, Father Raffin accepted the proposal. Archbishop Ibarra also accepted it, and a formal contract was drawn up including the following clauses:

"1. The Superior General of the Marists agrees to lend Father Félix Rangier for at least two years, to work to establish the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit.

2. Father Félix will go to Mexico after the school year ends at Saint-Chamond.

3. Archbishop Ibarra agrees to:

a) Supply three teachers/priests to the Marist school in Mexico City during the time that Father Félix is lent to work on the above mentioned foundation.

b) He will pay a thousand francs to the teacher who will take Father Félix's place at the school of Saint-Chamond.

c) He will cover Father Félix's travel costs to go to Mexico."

Once more, and when from a human point of view there was no hope, the obstacles were overcome, the doors opened and the way was clear. Truly, it was God's time and God had acted.

In her diary, Conchita reflected as follows:

"How faithful the Lord is in the fulfillment of his promises".

As soon as the school year was over, Father Félix traveled by boat to New York and from there to Cuba. There he received alarming news: because of the Mexican civil war, the ship lines had temporarily stopped their travels to Mexico. But thanks to the efforts of some influential businessmen, Father Félix was able to get to Veracruz. There he met his Excellency Francisco Orozco, Archbishop of Guadalajara who, because of the religious persecution, was on his way to Havana. Father Félix shared his plans with the bishop who answered:

- Father Félix, it is not the time to found anything in Mexico. We cannot even minister to the people. All the bishops have had to go underground. Go back to Havana with me and I will help you do anything.

Thank you, Archbishop, but I have waited ten years to be able to return to Mexico, and from the beginning I had been warned that I would establish this community "in the midst of the agony of the country".

-You are out of your mind! But if God wills it, go in peace, because the country is in real agony..."

Father Félix took the train to Puebla while the revolutionary army of General Obregón entered triumphantly into Mexico City.

At the Conferences of Torreón (July 8, 1914), the revolutionary heads had agreed, among other things "to correct, punish and demand the proper responsibilities from the Roman Catholic clergy". And Francisco Villa, in his September 1914 manifesto exhorted to the fulfillment of these dispositions "because of the just resentment of the Constitutional Party against the members of the Catholic clergy who had a role in supporting the dictatorship". These were the excuses used by many liberals and masons who joined the ranks of the revolution to persecute the Church, confiscate its possessions, shoot many priests, close the seminaries and Catholic schools as well as the convents and churches.

And under these circumstances Father Félix came to found a religious congregation of men...!

He arrived in Puebla looking for Archbishop Ibarra, but its Excellency was in hiding in Mexico City because of the persecution. Father Félix himself had to remain in hiding in Puebla, in a house, together with his Marist brothers who worked in a school in that city. It was not until October 24th that he received a message from Archbishop Ibarra and at that time he went to the capital taking all due precautions.

That same day Father Félix went to Conchita's house. For ten years they had no communication at all. Father Félix shook her hand and said simply:

-I still feel the same way about the Works of the Cross.

CHAPTER VIII

WORDS OF THE LORD

Several times we have referred to the writings of Conchita Cabrera, fruit of her charism of prophecy, authenticated by excellent theologians. We have mentioned already that this charism consists of transmitting messages sent by God. In this chapter we will select some of what Conchita wrote about the Religious of the Cross, who were later known as Missionaries of the Holy Spirit.

The principal sources of these texts are: "History of the Foundation of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit", written by Conchita, and her "Account of Conscience", her spiritual journal.

"When the Lord spoke to me about the Congregation of the Religious of the Cross, in February of 1804, He said:

-There will also be a congregation of men, when the women's congregation has been approved. But I will speak about this when the time comes." (History of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit p.1.)

"The promises of the Lord to this chosen group were very great. He said it would multiply like the stars in the sky and that it would give glory to the Christian religion, martyrs and saints to His Church." (Ibid.)

"Once in a while, among the 10 year period, He alluded to this promise, especially when He complained about the sins of some priests; and he referred to the future apostles of the Cross as to a place where He could rest."(Ibid.)

The Lord said:

"I want these priests to be perfect, full of love for the Holy Spirit and the Cross, and I want them to set the world on fire with the divine fire which I long to see burning in all souls.

"I want them to be men of prayer; who find their delight at the foot of my tabernacle and take from it that fire which they are to communicate in their ministry." (Ibid).

"Look, my daughter," the Lord told me one night, "I suffer a great deal because of bad priests, especially when they consecrate the Eucharistic bread and receive me in Communion with an impure soul. Many of those that world believes are mine really are not.

I want the priests of the Cross to really love me and belong to me.

And I multiplied my prayers and sacrifices to hasten the advent of this Congregation of pure and sacrificial men." (Ibid.)

"Ten years had gone by since the Lord had made the announcement referring to the Priests of the Cross, and my anxiety grew regarding the fulfillment of those promises.

I endured great sufferings, mortal sicknesses, and widowhood... And finally I put that idea aside, placing everything in the hand of Jesus. Then came the year of 1903, when on the 4th of February, the Lord led me to Father Félix Rougier, of the Society of Mary in a providential manner." (Ibid).

April 29, 1903. "Today, after going to Communion, the idea came to me that it would be impossible to establish the foundation for men because there would be a great deal of difficulty. But I heard a voice that said to me: --What is mine is carried out infallibly. What do you fear? What is man's passes away, but my promises will not pass away." (Journal)

"On June 19th, the Lord told me:

-A host of holy priests will appear. They will set the world on fire with the fire of the Cross.

I asked him:

-Will these priests belong to the Congregation you have told me about, my Jesus?

-Yes. They will be formed with singular perfection with the doctrine I have given to you, which is the essence of the Gospel. You will be the spiritual mother of many, but it will cost you a thousand martyrdoms. Be true to me and do my will." (Journal, June 1903).

April 14, 1904. "Today I finished writing the Constitutions for the Congregation of men. The only thing lacking is the chapter on the Course of Studies, because I don't know anything about that. But I understood that it is the will of the Lord that instead of having much human science, they have the science of the Cross of Christ, and that at all times they consider the spirit first. Because it would not do any good for them to be wise if they are not holy. The Lord is tired of priests conceited about their own talent, who seek applause and glory for themselves and not for God."

"The virtues which will characterize the Religious of the Cross will be modesty, purity and mortification. They ought to be a deep well of science, but of a science that makes them more and more aware of their nothingness. Of course they should have enough knowledge for spiritual direction, but what is important is that the paths and virtues they teach be paths they have walked and virtues they have practiced." (Journal)

"Msgr. Valverde told me that I should regard my sorrows as precious coins with which the Lord wills that I pay for the Works of the Cross. Oh, yes, yes! With all my heart I will offer up everything I can so that the longed for foundation of the priests of the Cross take place." (Journal May 8, 1904).

July 22, 1912. "Archbishop Ibarra came to Mexico City and we went over the points for the Directory that the Lord wants, which will be a spiritual treasure for the Priests of the Cross. It will be divided into four parts:

1. Their life as sons of God the Father.
2. Their relationship to the Incarnate Word by the fact of being priests.
3. Their relationship to the Holy Spirit because they are religious.
4. Their intimate affiliation with Mary." (Journal)

"Lord, when will I see the Religious of the Cross? I said.

And He answered me:

-They will come, my daughter, and you will see them. They will give me much glory and will be my chosen Congregation." (History p. 260).

"The Lord has said that unless they be saintly, spiritual and mortified, they will make noise, but they will not bear fruit for heaven". (Journal V.6 p.86).

"This work will be very helpful in the renewal of the world. Through it the Incarnate Word comes to renew the mystery of Redemption and to plant His Cross, not on the ground but in the hearts of many; and it will make souls burn with the fire of the Holy Spirit." (1911. Journal V.25 p. 44)

"Look, daughter, the Priests of the Cross will drink from this fountain, and they will be found all over the world. They will go, as did the Apostles, teaching Jesus and the reign of His Cross. The Holy Spirit will accomplish these marvels and they will glorify my Father. These religious will organize something like a new crusade throughout the world, they will do much good, and everywhere there will be a great renewal." (Journal 1913, October 17).

"Those religious will complement the Works of the Cross. They will offer themselves to the Father as victims with Me, and in this way will reach salvation and perfection for many souls and they will give Me much glory." (Journal V.25 p.25)

"I want them to offer themselves with me to the Father, saying as I do: "THIS IS MY BODY, AND THIS IS MY BLOOD." Only in this way will they be worthy of saying these words when they celebrate the Holy Sacrifice, transformed in ME by the faithful imitation of my life and my surrender.

"Oh, daughter, there are many priests who dare pronounce those most holy words without being in any way like Me...!" (Journal V.41 p. 319).

"The world collapses, and the Incarnate Word comes to save it once more. He comes to point out a new path, a new area of perfection, to sanctify souls through very easy and perfect means, to counteract the flood of vices.

"It is the task of the Priests of the Cross to accomplish this conquest. That is why they will live my life, they will imitate me in the purity of their bodies and the holiness of their souls and they will transform themselves in Me through loving sacrifice." (History V.1 p. 108)

"I promise you that many of the Priests of the Cross will reach very high degrees of perfection in the spiritual life, in the mystical life, where special manifestations of the Holy Trinity can occur. This kind of spiritual life has almost died out in the world today, because the souls which decide to embrace the Cross for love of Me are really very few.

"But this spiritual apathy, this world of the flesh, which has made its way even among religious will be destroyed. And this century, which indeed is a century of great sins and great natural disasters will also be one of spiritual reaction, a mystical resurrection, and an army of apostles will arise who will give glory to God.

-But, when will this be, my God?

-Very soon." (History V. I p. 108).

"This Work is important because it is mine. It is not man's, but God's. It is a plant that will grow and will be a flourishing tree in my Church. It will give many fruits of sanctity and will save many souls. But it needs the watering of the Cross, that is why those religions will constantly unite their sacrifices to mine. I will be with them, and those who belong to this Work or help to extend it, will receive a special reward.

"It is necessary that the Priests of the Cross be more concerned with their own personal sanctification than with the activities of their ministry; that they understand all this well and that they explore in depth my will regarding them. I do not wish external fanfare, but rather spiritual strength. I do not want them to twist my plans. Only if they should live an intense spiritual life will they have my blessings and fulfill my designs on earth. I am before all things.

"This Congregation has its particular ends, its special being, a divine character that it must preserve. This is very serious and they should be attentive to it if they do not wish to spoil my plans and risk a failure.

"If they love Me, and wish to preserve the genuine spirit of the Congregation, let them study what I have asked of it, that they be formed according to that spiritual plan and live in its totality the spirituality I have given them.

Then they will join Me and we will form as one soul and one will." (Journal V.25. p. 236.)

"I am the first Priest of the Cross and the model for those who are to come, because I am priest and victim. I will be the first among the members of that foundation, and all those who enter will follow only Me and will therefore be truly my brothers, I will be the one to govern those priests of the Cross, because I want them to be holy. I will pour over them my Holy Spirit in every special way, and it will kindle their minds and hearts. And my Father will have special regard for them and will pour his perfection into each heart that corresponds to the singular grace of serving Him in this Congregation." (History V. 1 p. 105. See Journal February 10, 1907).

"My only true Bride is the Church. I chose her from all eternity to make her the repository of all the riches of heaven. Don't you see/hat I live in her and delight in her?

"Well, the Religious of the Cross will form a choice part of my Church, I promise you, and they will provide important leverage for the salvation of the world. Those who give themselves wholly to the ideals of this Congregation will receive immense treasures of sanctity, to share them with my whole Church." (History V. 1. p. 107).

"This is my plan for the Priests of the Cross. That is why I want to be their elder brother, to guide them, to be their model at all times, to live with them, not only exteriorly in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, but especially in each heart, with the intimacy of a brother, of a spouse, of a friend, of everything." (History V. 1 p. 112).

"I will be the cloister of the true Religious of the Cross. The material cloister is only a means, but living in Me is its end. "I wish to fill the heart of these brothers of mine I have mentioned to you, of those chosen children, of those pure souls. I want them to drink the science of love and of the Cross from Me; this is the science of the true saints". (Hidden Manna. p.186)

When the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit read these things, we feel really concerned. We know that when God enters into a covenant, he makes great promises, but they are conditioned on the fidelity of man. God promised that this Congregation would be founded despite any opposition and He fulfilled his promise, because our founders were faithful to Him to a heroic degree. But He also promised that we would be very numerous, that there would be many saints among us and that we would be a powerful force for salvation in the Church.

However, the truth is that we are not very numerous, nor do we see many saints among us, nor do we do great things in this world of God...

What is happening to us? Has not the Lord been faithful in pouring in abundance His Spirit over us? Undoubtedly He has been faithful, and each of us is a witness to His love and boundless mercy. But we have not responded as generously. That is why we are only good.

It is always possible to change; to take seriously the love of God has for us, to choose new and just options, "to straighten the paths, so the salvation of God will come to us."

Be patient Lord! We are going to pay our debts to you....

Then you will make us numerous as the stars in the sky to sanctify many in your church. Amen.

CHAPTER XIX

THE FOUNDING

With Archbishop Ibarra's help, Father Félix began looking for the first candidates to start a novitiate that would form the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit. Both had agreed on Christmas Day, 1914, as the official date to declare the foundation started and the novitiate open.

The times were so difficult that Father Félix could only find two novices to start: Moisés Lira, a seminarian from Puebla, and a priest from Mexico City, Father Domingo Martínez.

Given the religious persecution which happened concurrently with the Mexican Revolution, the founding took place behind closed doors and surrounded by secrecy, in a chapel located on top of the hill of Tepeyac called the Chapel of the Roses. It is believed that this was the place where roses glow in December of 1531 and Juan Diego cut them by order of Our Lady of Guadalupe

It was a very simple ceremony: the Veni Creator was sung and Archbishop Ibarra then celebrated the Holy Eucharist. The two novices occupied the front pew. Behind them were Conchita, two Sisters of the Cross of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, two Visitandines, and Mr. and Mrs. Alvarez Icaza, owners of the chapel.

After the Eucharist, Archbishop Ibarra read the pontifical decree authorizing the founding of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit and ended with these words:

"In virtue of the powers vested in me by the Holy See, I declare the Novitiate of the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit canonically open. Father Félix, here present, will be the Master of Novices. Respect, love, and obey him, dear novices. He will teach you the genuine gift of the Cross, and will make you good religious. May Jesus bless you, as I do now."

Then, kneeling before the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Father Félix and the two novices said the following prayer:

"Most holy Mother, we place in your hands this humble Congregation, born on the same day that the Church commemorates the birth of your Son, Jesus. Accept it as your own and help it to grow and develop".

Archbishop Ibarra returned to his hiding place. Father Félix wrote the following in his diary:

"We all left that beloved chapel very moved and thanking God. We were very careful so as not to compromise the owners."

Conchita also wrote in her diary:

"I do not know how to express the joy and gratitude my soul experienced. Blessed be you, My Lord! How true it is that those who believe in You will not be disappointed!

"Father Félix was beside himself with joy and Father Domingo and Brother Moisés were also very happy. That afternoon I paid Archbishop Ibarra a visit and he was radiant with joy."

Archbishop Ibarra had bought a little house on Av. Tepeyac No. 14 to lodge the poor pilgrims from his archdiocese who came to visit Our Lady of Guadalupe. He was happy to lend it to the fledgling

Congregation as its novitiate. Father Félix and Brother Moisés went there after leaving the chapel. Father Domingo could not join them until a week later.

The little house was empty. Father Félix and the novice went to find something to eat. Upon returning to the house, the Novice Master gave Moisés a paper with the schedule they would follow and a bell he should ring to signal the changes of activity. Moisés very obediently looked at his paper and rang the bell for "the community", that is, Father Félix, to respond.

In the evening, the Novice Master sent the novice out to buy something for supper. Moisés brought two loaves of bread and some cheese. He spread out a newspaper as a tablecloth; on an empty crate he put a bottle holding a candle. Then he rang the bell. When "the community" came, he had to sit on the floor. (I heard Father Moisés Lira tell this story many times).

Shortly after, Father Félix wrote to Archbishop Ibarra:

"The novitiate has been open for five days now. They have been five days of internal joy, peace and trust in God; five days of gratitude to God and to you, who are our father and our visible Providence. Both of us are happy here, with the same thoughts and the same desire for perfection." (December 29, 1914).

But the peace and happiness were short-lived. On January 2, when they had only been there nine days, a Mexican government official appeared and asked Father Félix many questions: if he was a citizen, how many religious lived there, what their occupations were, etc. Immediately, Father Félix went to speak with Don José Alvarez Icaza, the owner of the Chapel of the Roses, who in turn sent Father Félix and his novice to a house he owned in downtown Mexico City, on Sta. Teresa Street, No. 105 (now Guatemala). The Sisters of the Cross gave three beds for the two novices and the Novice Master. Father Félix wrote in his diary:

"I feel happy to be as poor as Jesus was. I have nothing. I have to accept everything."

Father Domingo Martínez finally arrived on January 8, and Father Félix told his Superior:

"I am happy because the number of novices has doubled, (we now have two). We follow the schedule as if there were thirty in the group, and this is paradise."

But "paradise" did not last long because in those days Carranza's troops launched a great offensive against Villa and Zapata. On January 27 General Obregón recovered Mexico City and the horrors of religious persecution began all over again. Because of this situation, Archbishop Ibarra ordered Father Félix and his novices to move to a safer place.

Msgr. Antonio Paredes lent Father Félix some rooms in a country home owned by the Archbishopric of Mexico City in the nearby town of Tacuba and the pilgrim novitiate sought refuge there.

In the Book of Chronicles started by Father Félix, on the page which corresponds to February 19, we read the following:

"Today, at 10 a.m., all priests in Mexico were asked to go to City Hall by order of Commander Cesáreo Castro "to receive instructions." They were treacherously imprisoned and a ransom of half a million pesos was demanded in exchange for their freedom."

Luckily, neither Father Domingo nor Father Félix responded to the "instructions" of the Commander.

The following day the French Minister told all French priests residing in Mexico that the Mexican Government had set February 22 as the deadline for them to leave the country. That same day Father Félix wrote to Archbishop Ibarra:

"...Happy are we who suffer because we are of Christ. This is an invaluable gift. But now, what do we do? I am willing to do whatever you tell me. Should I hide somewhere? Should I leave for Havana or some other place? My novices are ready to go with me wherever you say. They do not want to interrupt their novitiate for any reason whatsoever. I await your orders and will carry them out gladly and willingly."

Archbishop Ibarra decided that Father Félix should leave the novices in Tacuba and hide in a school run by Miss Clementina Bordes on Arenas No. 46.

A few days later Father Félix wrote to Archbishop Ibarra:

"My beloved father: Here I am, hiding in a place known to you. I am alone all day long, praying for my novices. I am making a kind of retreat, spending a great deal of time with the Holy Spirit. I have learned that the priests have not been freed. The Marist Fathers who ran the school for girls were exiled yesterday morning; the ones from San Lorenzo did not show up and are hiding; the priests from Veronica School obtained letters from Mr. Palavicini (Minister of Public Education) protecting them.

"I write to the novices daily. I am certain they will be very faithful in keeping their rule and doing the work I planned for them in great detail."

Luckily, it was possible to obtain a document from the French Consulate for Father Félix, which certified him as a teacher of the France-English School, (located on Veronica Street), which, as mentioned above, enjoyed the support of the Minister of Public Education whose sons and relatives studied there. As Bishop Martínez used to say: "In Mexico the prophets are more important than the law..." Father Félix returned to the novitiate on February 28, and everything remained "normal": the comings and goings of the soldiers, the shots of the followers of Carranza and Villa, and the generalized hunger which pervaded the city because of the interruption of transportation and the closing of many markets.

Father Félix greatest need was to find more vocations, He had thought it would be possible to make his work known in seminaries and Catholic schools, but the government had closed them down. Moreover, it was very dangerous for him as a foreigner to move about, for he could be deported to France together with his certification. Everything was possible in the midst of a chaotic revolution which unseated not only Ministers of Education, but also Presidents of the Mexican Republic...

On December 25, 1915, the fifth Work of the Cross was a year old. Father Félix wrote to his Superior General:

"The small novitiate is coming along, but we only have three novices. If we were not in the midst of such an uncomfortable state of things which makes it impossible for me to work, we would already have twenty excellent vocations. As far as I can see, when God grants us a much-desired peace, the Work will also progress. But in these times, it is necessary to exercise patience and hope."

In his reply to Father Félix, the Superior General commented on his "incurable optimism". And this was certainly true. The situation was so serious as to depress anyone, but not Father Félix. Quite

the contrary, his enthusiasm was renewed when Archbishop Ibarra informed him that he had negotiated with the Superior General of the Marists permission for him to remain in Mexico another two years.

Poor Father Félix! The threats of exile came not only from the Mexican Government, but also from the decision-makers in his Congregation, because the Superior and his Council were not of a mind to lend him for a long time.

When the first two years were almost up, Father Félix wrote an anguished letter to an Irish friend who later became a Missionary of the Holy Spirit:

"Please pray for this small novitiate. It is the seed hidden underground which is germinating slowly. It is good wheat which promises an abundant harvest later on. But I have been granted a very short and fleeting time to work for Jesus planting this tree of His, which is to bear much fruit. (Letter to young Tomás Fallon. August 2, 1916).

The "small seed" suffered an irreparable loss the 1st of February 1917: Archbishop Ibarra, the father, the protector and the "visible Providence" of the incipient community died. He had subsidized the novitiate with his own funds, so now Father Félix would also have to worry about the financial problems.

Nevertheless, the most pressing problem was still the lack of vocations. Two and a half years after its founding, the Congregation only had three members: the first two novices who had already made their vows and a new novice, who, as it turned out, did not persevere.

Under the circumstances, Father Félix had to go out looking for more novices in spite of the dangers posed by the civil war. During 1917 he made several trips to Puebla, Morelia, León and Guadalajara. He never lost his "incurable optimism"...

The seminarians in those cities had to gotten together in private homes to continue their studies without government interference. Father Félix could therefore speak with many of them and interest them in the new Congregation.

On August 27 bad news awaited him when he returned from one of his vocation-seeking tours: the Mexican government had decided to expropriate the house where he lived with the students because it belonged to the Archbishop.

Miss Dolores Sáinz offered him a house she had in Tlalpan and the itinerant novitiate moved there, to Calle de la Fama No. 18.

As soon as they were settled in their new home, Father Félix wrote to a friend in Morelia:

"We are living in a better house, in the quiet of Tlalpan.

"It is very silent here; it almost resembles the solitude of a desert. And Jesus is in our midst, in His humble tabernacle, with this group that loves Him and is willing to give their life for Him". (Letter to Fr. Treviño).

Father Félix hoped to find many vocations in Morelia. In his Memoirs he wrote:

"Morelia is a kind of "promised land" for me because of the excellent vocations I found there..."

He had in mind a good group of seminarians who decided to join the novitiate of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit. It happened that about that time, a strong epidemic of "Spanish fever" developed in Morelia. Many seminarians became ill. This led the vice-rector of the diocesan seminary, Bishop Martínez, to make the following comment:

"If things don't change, this poor seminary will be done in by the Spanish fever and the French fever."

Of course, the "French fever" referred to Father Félix.

On Christmas, 1917, the third anniversary of the foundation, seven young men joined the novitiate, making a total of eight, since one was there already. And henceforth the numbers grew. Father Félix had to dedicate every minute of his time to form these young men, so much so that he wrote the following to a benefactress of the seminary:

"Perhaps you thought I died because I have not been to see you. The truth is that I no longer make visits or perform exterior ministries. I have closed my doors and have not gone knocking on others, even to ask for a crumb when we were in need, because I have given myself in body and soul to the work the Lord has entrusted to me and for which some day I will have to answer." (June 1st, 1918).

He wrote as follows to his father:

"I will tell you about the blessings God has showered on this Work, which it was His will that I begin in Mexico. I think that now, after almost four years of honest effort, the Work is definitely moving ahead. The ten novices I have are so good that I would not change them for French vocations, unless these were very select ones. This house is a bit of heaven, where the ideal of the monastic life is realized: work, prayer, silence, modesty, charity, kindness, obedience, a great deal of meditation, punctuality at all times. Nothing is missing. How greatly has the Lord blessed this work. And to think that it has been implemented in the midst of this terrible religious persecution! When all communities were closing their novitiates, I was opening mine... And excellent people have come to us, and other very good ones will continue to come. I see the hand of God clearly in all of this" (August 16, 1918).

Another letter which Father Félix wrote on the 29th of April, 1918, to his Superior General, gives us a glimpse of the reality our founder was living:

"I received a letter from Archbishop Leopoldo Ruíz yesterday. He tells me that he has just written to you, with my approval, asking that you grant me two more years to continue working on this foundation. You know that I am wholly devoted to obedience and will do without hesitation whatever you say, because I wish to do nothing other than the will of God.

"However, it seems to me that the permission sought by the Mexican Bishops is very reasonable since currently there is no one who could take my place in the formation of novices and, humanly speaking, my leaving at this time would perhaps cause irreparable harm to this Work, which is still in the initial stages.

"Besides the formation of the novices, I have to look for housing for them, food, clothe and take care of them when they become sick, see to it that the newly-professed and the second-year novices work; and I have to work very hard to recruit new vocations, which is vital. I know that my efforts in the area of recruitment have to be very serious and careful, for I am setting the foundation for the future.

For all these reasons, I am ready to give myself totally to this Work, if you think it convenient to give an affirmative answer to the bishops' petition."

The Superior General of the Society of Mary answered this letter as well as that of the Bishops explaining, "he would lend Father Félix for two more years only and no longer, that is to say, until the month of July, 1920."

It must have been really uncomfortable for Father Félix to work for periods of two years at a time, without knowing if the permission would be renewed. Without a doubt, this situation favored his not becoming too attached to this Work and considers it his own. For a man who knows how to give himself with all enthusiasm to the realization of an ideal, it is easy for the work itself to fill his heart so much so that God is displaced. And God does not wish this. The holiest works lose their value if they are not done exclusively for Him, with him and in Him.

For Father Félix it was spiritually healthy to always feel he was there on a temporary basis, and always "in the hands of obedience", ready to leave everything if that should be God's will. More than a year went by... Father Félix continued working intensely and he felt time slipping through his fingers.

He was concerned about the spiritual progress of his novices, as well as his own. On the 4th of October, 1919 he wrote thus to his spiritual director, Father Valverde, as follows:

"I have been wanting to write a long letter to you, my dear Father, to bring you up to date about me and this Work, but I have found it very difficult to take the time because of so many urgent and diverse occupations, which require my attention..."

"I will write about me first; that way, the rest of the letter will concern interesting things.

"I am not progressing. I am still as disorganized as ever. I do not pray well. When I speak to the novices, I resemble fire, but I am really ice. However, I do not feel I'm a hypocrite because I really want to mean what I say and I am determined to implement it although I may not be able to carry it out. I am a man of good will who does nothing of what he ardently wishes to do. That is why I feel absolutely poor before God, and I beg you to feel sorry for me and pray to Jesus for me.

"Regarding the novitiate, we currently have 18. They all have the true spirit of the Cross and wish to acquire the Christian virtues in all their perfection: obedience, humility, charity, poverty, purity and perfect abnegation. Bless them and commend them to God."

CHAPTER X

TESTIMONIALS

In this chapter I intend to gather the testimonials of some of the persons who lived with Father Félix because through them we can get to know better the founder of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit. Many who knew him are still alive. They say that Father Félix was stocky, and almost six feet tall. He had a healthy shock of wavy, prematurely white hair. His eyes were dark blue and his eyebrows thick and black. He had a kind look which inspired peace and an always welcoming smile.

We have many black and white pictures of Father Félix and he was definitely not photogenic. Very few pictures of him are good.

Father Manuel Hernández, one of those Morelia seminarians who contracted the "French fever", gives us the following account:

"Father Félix was an extraordinarily active and hard-working person. I never saw him waste time. He was very responsible and his constant example help up before us novices the habits of work and responsibility. He was a natural leader. Without his trying, we all admired him and loved him and wished to be with him. During free time, (he called it "recreation" as it is called in French) he was the center of the small group of novices and he always created a cheerful atmosphere, told jokes and recounted interesting things. He taught us that during recreation no one had the right to be sad, for the good of the brethren. He used to tell us: "Recreation is re-creation."

"Although he spoke Spanish very well, he pronounced the "r" with a French accent. Sometimes, after he had been writing letters and notes in French, he confused words in Spanish. For example, one day he called me and another novice and said to us: 'When you go to downtown Mexico, you will buy me this medicine for the 'amibos'.' We looked at each other and burst into laughter. Our father laughed also and said 'I said it wrong, didn't I? Forgive me, I have been writing in French all morning."

"Sometimes he translated French expressions literally into Spanish. This was funny and made us laugh.... He adopted the word "Chorcha", which is a word used in Guadalajara to mean a get-together or fiesta. Every so often after supper he would say: "Now take your chairs and we will go to the living room because we are going to have a "chorchita" to celebrate... I remember that one 5th of May he organized a "chorchita" "because we defeated the French..." (On that day in 1862, the Mexican army defeated the French troops in the battle of Puebla, translation note). He had a sense of humor.

"What did these celebrations or "chorchitas" consist of? We would adjourn to the living room and place our chairs in a circle around our Father and He would bring from his room all the tidbits that had accumulated in his desk drawers. When our families came to visit us they brought many wonderful snacks, but to teach us religious poverty, our father told us we could dispose of nothing and should hand over everything to the superior to be enjoyed later by the community. At the "chorchas" Father Félix distributed all these things. He had the cook prepare cocoa or at least tea. And we novices would eat the snacks while our father talked to us about things as they came up: about the vocations he had found during his latest trip and who would soon be with us, about the churches that bishops had offered him, about some new foundation he planned to start... And we asked questions, made comments, laughed... that was the "chorchita"... for me the smile and fatherly kindness of Father Félix were the best party." (From a conference given by F. Manuel Hernández at the Apostolic School. April 18, 1947).

Father Ramón del Real says:

"I was particularly impressed by the simplicity and poverty of Father Félix, he was always clean but poor in his dress; I would say almost shabby.

"One day we were going out together to visit the Sisters of Perpetual Adoration and I pointed out to him that the right sleeve of his coat was worn and torn around the elbow. He told me: "It doesn't matter, son; everybody in Tlalpan knows who I am..." And it happened that two days later we were going to Mexico City to buy some books for the novitiate. Again I pointed out the state of his coat sleeve and he told me: "It doesn't matter, son, nobody in Mexico City knows who I am..."

"He was poor but very generous with the poor. He always gave alms to the poor. And he didn't just give them something, he would help them generously.

"One day we were walking down the street when a little old man approached him asking for alms. Father Félix put his hand in his pocket and took out a coin which he gave the beggar. I said:

-Father, that is gold "hidalgo"!

-Yes, he answered, the man also needs it.

And as he watched the man go on his way, our father shook his head and said:

"Poor people... poor people...Only God knows how much they have suffered!"....

"Another day I watched him embracing a little old lady who came to tell him her problems and ask for help.

"And when it was my turn to answer the door and telephone at the novitiate, the beggars would knock and I would go to the bursar who always gave me something for them. But the poor would ask:

"Isn't the father with white hair around? When can we see him?"

One day we went to the taxi stand and I started walking toward the newest car. Father Félix said: "Let's take this older car. Look how poor the driver looks. We can help him a little."

"When the children who sell chewing gum offered him their wares, he would always buy a few and then gave them away to some other child.

"Once he talked to us about the poor and about the love we owe them because they are beloved of the Father and because Christ is in them. And then he added:

-When a poor person knocks at our door, do not ever turn him away empty-handed; remember that we have made a vow of poverty, not of avarice. Give and God will give you more and more." (Father R. del Real. Talk to Novices. January 10, 1950).

Father Vicente Méndez was also one of those seminarians from Morelia whom Father Félix "captured" for his incipient congregation.

He had many recollections of the kind founder, told them wittily and even wrote some down.

The following is an excerpt from a talk Father Méndez gave to students of philosophy:

"I loved our father very much and he relied on me. He called Father Alvarez and myself "the 'cuatos'; he meant to say 'cuates' which means 'twins' because we were ordained at the same time.

"I will tell you something I remember of the time when he named Novice Master, when he had to go hide at Elenita Aceves' house because of the religious persecution.

"Sometimes he would leave his place of hiding at night to go briefly to the novitiate and see how things were going. He asked me many things about the novices, starting always with the same question: Are any of the boys sick?

"One day I told him: "Mon Père (I liked to call him "Mon Père" and even spoke to him in my terrible French), brother nurse has told me that several brothers are constipated for lack of exercise.

"Of course," he commented, "if they do not walk, a brick will form in their stomach."

"Then the supper bell rang and when we had finished eating, our father told the novices:

"The Novice Master has told me that several brothers are constipated. Please raise your hand if you have this problem so the nurse can take note."

"The novice who was next to me raised his hand and since I knew him well I said to him:

"Brother, did you understand what our father said? Well... I think he said that those of us who were distracted should raise our hand..."

"Father Félix directed the nurse to give them papaya for breakfast every day, but I asked for permission to buy baseball equipment and a football. Our father said:

"In France, religious men don't do such things but... if you believe that will keep the novices healthy, go ahead."

"A few days later, on a Wednesday, I invited our father to the first baseball game. He didn't know anything about it, but he agreed as a good father to be with his children for that special celebration. He watched with great wonderment the batting and the balls flying around, and after awhile he pointed to the catcher wearing a protective mask and told me in a serious tone:

"Buy all of them a protective mask before they break their nose."

"Another night our father and I talked until very late. All of a sudden he said:

-How the novices sleep?

-Very well, I suppose...

-You suppose? It is necessary to see them once in a while. Bring a flashlight and let's go see them.

"And we went to the dormitory.... He flashed the light on each bed. In one he just saw one mattress on top of the other. Our father got closer and slapped the mattress, saying in a low voice:

"Brother.... brother!" And Brother Pedro stuck his head out, turtle-like from under the bedspread...

"My God!" our father exclaimed, "why do you sleep like this, Brother?"

"I am very cold," the boy explained.

"All right," said Father Félix, "but all that weight is not good for you. The Novice Master will see that tomorrow you be given two woolen blankets."

Then he found another one wrapped up from head to toe, like a mummy.

"My God! And who is this?"

"It's Brother Juan, mon père.

"Oh, that's why he is so yellow...He does not inhale enough oxygen at night... You have to teach him to sleep with his head uncovered. Then he added jokingly, "or make a hole in the blanket so he can at least stick his nose out..."

Another time he told me:

"I don't think that boy has a vocation..."

"Why, mon père?"

"Because he resembles a fish... He never talks, just looks at us... "And his diagnosis was correct. The young man could not adapt to community life and asked to return to his family.

"It was customary in the novitiate for the brother who set the table to place a piece of bread on each plate. One day our father was making the rounds and he saw the brother distributing the bread as fast as he could. ! He got near and told him:

"Brother, the bread has a face; it should be put on the dish with the face up, like this, like this, like this..."

"Another day he arrived for supper and I said to him:

"A telegram has just arrived for Brother Isidro. His mother is very sick." Our father advised me: "Don't give it to him until tomorrow morning. Never give anyone bad news at night, because you deprive him of sleep, unless, of course, it is something very urgent... Let us pray for Isidro and his mother..."

"He was so fatherly and kind that even the animals were objects of his care and concern. We had a female cat in the novitiate and one day our father saw that she was in heat and mewed sadly... After a while he went to the phone and talked with Sister Paz Ular:

"Sister Paz, could you please lend us your cat? Ours is in such a state one feels sorry for her..."

"Father Félix had an inexhaustible sense of humor, and instead of getting upset, he looked for the amusing side of disagreeable things. One day he asked me to accompany him to visit a family and when we were close to our destination, he look out from his coat pocket new dentures which didn't fit, showed them to me and said:

"These dentures are only good for smiling..."

"He then put them in his mouth and smiled mischievously.

"I remember that on another occasion when I went with him to visit people, we arrived in the novitiate very late and I escorted him to the dining room.

"Let me see what they saved for us for supper," I said. I looked in the kitchen, and the refrigerator, in the pantry. Nothing!

-They didn't save anything for us, mon père!

-Well, they probably want us to sleep longer... let's go to bed right away.

"They say that when they told him that the government had confiscated the four houses of the Congregation, he remained silent for a moment, with his eyes closed as if talking to God, and then, to encourage the fathers, he smiled and said: "Well, let us thank God we didn't have five houses, because our loss would have been greater..."

"That is, how our father founder was: simple and kind, optimistic and saintly... It was so easy to love him!

"I remember so many things about him that if I should try to share them all with you we would be here all night. Some other day I will share some more of my recollections with you." (Father Vicente Méndez. Presentation. January 10, 1952).

CHAPTER XI

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STORM

Father Constantino Espinoza finished the novitiate on June 15, 1918. Now that there were two missionary priests, the first community outside the novitiate could be established. Therefore, Father Félix was happy to accept the offer for them to minister in the Church of the Holy Spirit in Mexico City (Colonia Escandón, Tacubaya).

He named Father Constantino superior and Father Domingo Martínez vicar and he detailed three postulants to help them. It was in this beautiful church that the first Missionaries of the Holy Spirit started exercising their ministry. According to the records, each one heard confessions three hours a day. The Blessed Sacrament was exposed every day and people took turns for adoration. Catechism classes were organized. The Missionaries established the Association of the Apostleship of the Cross and a constant and numerous streams of the faithful asked for the services of the priests. They became known and loved throughout the neighborhood, especially by the poor, whom they served with great charity.

The next year Father Félix decided to start an Apostolic School for the boys who were not old enough to enter the novitiate but who had already decided to be Missionaries of the Holy Spirit. In one of his trips to Guadalajara in search of vocations, he wrote to the novices:

"While here, I have felt that a thorn pierced me as I spoke with several boys who have an ardent desire to join our Congregation, but cannot be admitted because they are too young. I did not have the heart to discourage them. I felt so very sorry for them. So I told them that soon we would have an Apostolic School for them." (Guadalajara, May 1, 1919).

On December 8 of that same year, the first Apostolic School opened in a small house in Tlalpan (on Calle del Congreso No. 16) not far from the novitiate. There were only 12 students. The teachers were the second-year novices who finished the novitiate on the 25th of that month.

The next year (1920), there would be 27 students, and a year later, 45. Of course, they had to look for larger quarters.

In five years of effort and trust in God, with the "incurable optimism" which characterized him, Father Félix had consolidated the basic elements for the life and growth of the Congregation: a seeded of vocations (the Apostolic School), a novitiate to have them mature, and a church for the pastoral ministry of the first priests.

However, July 15, 1920 was the deadline given Father Félix to return to the Society of Mary. He knew that the Superior General would not agree to lend him for any more time and that caused him great anguish, he was aware that the Congregation he had founded was not sufficiently developed to move ahead without his support and experience. The bishops who backed him were of the same opinion. What to do? The only viable solution was for Father Félix to ask the Pope permission to leave the Society of Mary and make his religious vows as a Missionary of the Holy Spirit. That was the advice of Msgr. Valverde, his confessor and spiritual director.

On February 19, 1919, Father Félix signed a petition asking Pope Benedict XV's permission to transfer to another congregations. Four archbishops signed the document. But time passed and the Holy See did not come to a decision, because one of the conditions stipulated by Pius X when

he approved the foundation of the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit, was that neither Father Mir nor Father Félix would become members.

On the advice of the Most Reverend Mora y del Río, Archbishop of Mexico City, Father Félix sent a second petition to Rome on September 21, 1910. Archbishop Ruiz gathered letters of recommendation from 17 bishops which were sent to the Pope together with Father Félix' petition. But, despite the strong support of the Mexican bishops, Father Félix received the following letter from the Congregation for Religious:

"...After examining the motives which informed Pius X's decision, the Holy Father has thought it convenient not to change it. Therefore, you must continue to follow your holy vocation in the Society of Mary." (Msgr. Carreti, Rome, February 12, 1920).

Father Félix answered Msgr. Carreti as follows:

"I feared I would receive from the Sacred Congregation for Religious the negative answer you have conveyed to me. I am nevertheless ready to obey with all my heart the decision of the Holy See. "If from now to the 15th of next July, when my permission expires, nothing has changed, I will return to the Society of Mary, leaving in the hands of Divine Providence the incipient Congregation of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit, which I have worked to establish and nurture for the last six years, time which has seemed too short to me."

And he wrote to Archbishop Ruiz as follows:

... You see, my dear father, that Jesus wants to try me again and make me wait... But I have complete trust that the answer I have received is not final. I am at peace despite my internal sufferings. I do not feel frustrated, because I find it sweet to live trusting the holy will of God completely." (February 18, 1920).

In a letter to Conchita Cabrera, Father Félix said:

... And I am wholly confident that I will once again be engaged in this Work and that, according to the promise of Jesus, I will be a Missionary of the Holy Spirit. But I don't know when and I fear one or two more years of exile after July 15th... May God's will be done! I am happy to be able to offer Jesus something worthwhile; I offer it with great pain but with all my will. However, I confess that this hard trial is the most difficult I have had to bear thus far."

Lastly, this is a letter written to Father Domingo:

"We must have courage and trust. After all, there is something higher than being an apostle, and that is being a martyr. There is something higher than being successful, and that is suffering whatever Jesus wills. Blessed be God because I have had many sufferings to offer Him; more than I expected... But it is incredible how Jesus helps as more as the Cross becomes heavier. My fate has been to love and suffer, and it makes me happy." (March 15, 1920).

The Mexican bishops were not discouraged by the negative answer of Benedict XV. Msgr. Ruíz, then Archbishop of Morelia, wrote a new petition to the Holy See. It said in part:

"... In view of the aforementioned reasons, I humbly request His Holiness that, if he does not consider it convenient to grant his approval for Rev. Father Félix Rougier to transfer from the Society of Mary to the new Congregation of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit, he might at least

kindly allow him to continue at the head of the Work for another five years, which would be the minimum time necessary for the Work to become stronger."

Pope Benedict XV again consulted with Msgr. Carreti who had all the facts, and given the desire expressed by so many Mexican bishops, the Pope ordered that the Superior General of the Marists be advised that he granted Father Félix Rougier five more years to continue consolidating the Work for which he had been lent by the Society of Mary. Of course, Father Raffin could not object to an authorization by the Pope.

Father Félix wrote in his diary:

"Thank you, beloved Jesus, for this happy news! You have expressed your will through your vicar, and you have given five more years..."

I must hurry because time is of the essence and this work must be established on bedrock. All along it has seemed to me that hours pass as if they were seconds, days like minutes, and months like hours."

On the 29th of October, 1920, His Eminence, Leopoldo Ruíz, Archbishop of Morelia, gave the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit charge of the Church of the Cross in downtown Morelia. This church was the second area of apostolic work of the Congregation, and a source of numerous vocations.

The first issue of the magazine of spirituality entitled THE CROSS appeared in January of 1921. It was established by Father Félix to disseminate the spirituality of the Cross. Since that time, The Cross appears every month and is an excellent means of communication for the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit who enjoy the gift of writing.

Father Félix obtained good results during the five years granted by the Pope. An average of 10 novices entered every year, thanks to the Apostolic School and Father Félix recruitment efforts. By 1924, the Congregation already had 12 priests with perpetual vows.

But the five years were almost up and the questioning and anguish started again.

Once more Archbishop Ruíz, Father Félix' spiritual director, insisted that Father Félix' petition for a final change to the Congregation he had established.

Circumstances had changed: Benedict XV had died and so had Father Raffin. The new Pope was Pius XI and the new Superior General of the Marists was now Father Ernesto Rieu.

Father Félix presented a new petition on the 15th of May, 1914, supported by a letter from the Most Reverend Mora y del Río, Archbishop of Mexico City. And five months later, all the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit, priests and brothers, wrote the Pope, asking that their founder be left with them permanently. Five bishops supported this petition. Similar letters were also written to Father Rieu.

The new Superior General of the Marists answered as follows:

"...The very force of things and of happenings has convinced me that I must not continue to hold the attitude of opposition of my predecessors. Therefore, as far as I am concerned, there exists no obstacle to your projects. You may remain in Mexico until the Holy See defines your situation". (Letter from Father Rieu to Father Félix, January 9, 1925).

And finally, a year later, on the 9th of January, 1926, Pius XI granted Father Félix permission to transfer from the Society of Mary to the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit. The prolonged test of his faith had ended. The Lord's promises had been fulfilled. Now Father Félix could work in peace for his beloved Congregation.

But another kind of test threatened not only Father Félix but also the whole church in Mexico, and it was the new religious persecution organized by General Plutarco Elías Calles, who had been elected President on December 1, 1924. This persecution became more and more implacable. On the 10th of April, 1925, Father Félix wrote to his Father:

"We are all fine so far, but threatened by the religious persecution. The government is radically socialist and inimical to Catholics.

"Currently we are 106. If the government were to take over our houses we would need to go North. I have a place prepared for us. We are ready. But pray to God that this does not happen because transportation for 106 persons over 700 miles from here with furniture, books and everything, would be terribly costly. But I will do the impossible to save this beloved Congregation. I fear no sacrifice; Jesus will help us."

In the month of December of that year (1925), despite the difficult political situation, Father Félix accepted two other churches to be staffed by Missionaries of the Holy Spirit: the Church of Santa Clara in downtown Mexico City and the parish of Nuestra Señora de los Remedios, an old Marian sanctuary located on the outskirts of the city.

By February 1926, Calles and his government had exiled more than two hundred foreign priests. Father Félix hid again in the homes of friends who were delighted to have him. He wrote the following letter from one of these homes:

"I learned that government agents were at the doors of the novitiate yesterday, waiting for me to leave the building. There was an undercover policeman, two officers, four soldiers and a car. But since yesterday afternoon I had left for the place you know. I am fine and showered with thoughtful kindnesses. I have just begun my spiritual exercises, in silence for 41) days, until Easter. I am very much in need of this time of reconciliation and solitude." (Letter to Mrs. Gil de Partearroyo, February 23, 1926).

A few days later he wrote as follows to Father Treviño:

"Things are getting progressively worse, but God is with us. His enemies will only be able to do what He allows them to do. Let us pray that God will forgive them. I really believe they do not know why they are doing, as Jesus said from the Cross." (February 15, 1926).

On July 3, 1926 the so-called "Ley Calles" (Calles Law) was proclaimed. It ordered the expropriation of all buildings belonging to the Church and restricted the number of churches and of priests to that determined by the governor of each state. It also decreed the shutting down and confiscation of all convents, seminaries and Catholic schools.

The Mexican bishops could not accept that law and in protest they decreed public worship suspended throughout the country. The 31st of July all churches were closed. Before that date, Catholics filled the churches to attend the Eucharistic celebration for the last time and to receive the sacraments: baptism, confession, confirmation... Moreover, on July 31, government agents appeared to take possession of all the churches, which led to the first clashes between Catholic civilians and soldiers. This was the beginning of the armed movement of the "Cristeros" (soldiers of

Christ the King), which grew and became strong throughout the country, supported and protected by all the people. But the reaction of the government was very violent and they began to imprison priests and to exile bishops.

Despite all this, in the log of the Novitiate we read that 19 novices entered in 1929. Father Félix left his hiding place often to instruct them as best he could under the circumstances:

"This week I have spoken to each of the 34 novices. I find them happy and enthusiastic. I believe Jesus is happy with them.

"From Sunday on I will be at the Apostolic School to preach at the annual exercises and to speak to each student, from Jesús Oria, who is 38, to Ignacio Navarro who is 10." (Letter to Father Iturbide).

That same year, being aware that the religious persecution was growing, Father Félix bought a house of studies in Rome for philosophy and theology students. The first 10 brothers arrived in Rome the 3rd of November.

In 1927 the Calles persecution reached the height of cruelty. Father Félix' correspondence for this period is very interesting:

"Once more I am in hiding. It is said that Mexico is going to go through the cruelest crisis now. The fathers in Morelia are living with a family. The Sisters of the Cross of the Sacred Heart of Jesus have disbanded. Where might they be? The novitiate and Apostolic School are in grave danger. We are going to spend a very sad Holy Week." (Letter to Father Alvarez).

"I don't know what will happen, but we are in the hands of God. My greatest concern has been to look for practical means to save this Work and avoid the scattering of all who have grouped around me. I have met with the most influential bishops who are also in hiding in this capital city, where it is easier to disappear. All of them have offered me their powerful help. So that, even if the persecution were to touch bottom, I have the practical means to save the Congregation. Blessed be God, because His fatherly and powerful hand has visibly protected us." (Letter to Mrs. Mateo Lalor, March 9, 1927).

"Since my last letter things have not changed. There are new, horrible tragedies. But do not worry about this news for the worst, the torture and death of Catholics is the best, most glorious news for this country, because this blood of martyrs prepares the soil for better times.

"If God should wish our blood to be the foundation of the Congregation, here we are, ready for His call. Would that we were to be so lucky and have so much glory!

"This very day I am moving to the novitiate, because I think it is my duty to be there. If I should fall prisoner I don't think they will exile me; they will probably shoot me. If Jesus should do me the immense favor of letting me die because I am his priest, I commend to you, my vicar, the care of the Congregation. I would die happily and thanking God because it would be impossible to find a more desirable and glorious death." (Letter to Father Edmundo Iturbide, October 6, 1927).

"The situation here is getting worse. The religious persecution is daily more alive and bloody. Last week they shot Father Pro S.J., a very humble and pious priest, a great apostle who never meddled in politics. I envy him! I sincerely believe that with a death such as that of Father Pro, I would end my work in a much better fashion than living on several years and it would be the only way to make up for all the mistakes which I have made due to my incompetence since December 25, 1914. In my night prayers before the Most Holy Sacrament I asked for the grace to be a martyr

and felt much fervor. And this morning when I celebrated Mass I asked God for this immense benefit. Will He grant it?

"We have learned from several sources that my name is on the "most wanted" list of priests they wish to imprison. I am not going to act imprudently, but I know that martyrdom is such a great and desirable grace...We cannot deserve it, but we can lead God's heart to grant it to us.

"Often I imagine myself to be there, where Father Pro fell, and I feel calm and happy; I repeat: happy you! and commend myself to his prayers and ask Jesus to say yes. I think that the Congregation has a solid foundation and the plan is outlined in the Constitutions." (Letter to Father Vicente Méndez, November 28, 1927).

We know that Father Félix' only wish was to protect and drive forward his little flock. Only one thing was a higher priority for him: to give up his life for God. He saw the possibility of martyrdom at close range and asked the Lord for this grace above all else, as a supreme testimony of his fidelity and the best way to follow Christ, his Teacher.

CHAPTER XII

TEACHINGS OF THE FOUNDER

For this chapter, I will excerpt pertinent material from Father Vicente Méndez' writings and talks.

"Our founding father is a real teacher. When I entered the novitiate with other classmates, we knew nothing about the religious life, nor about the spirituality of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit, but Father Félix taught us everything."

PRAYER

Father Félix insisted on this point. We can divide his teaching on this subject under three headings:

- A. Personal Prayer
- B. Adoration before the Most Blessed Sacrament
- C. Liturgical and community prayer, especially the Eucharist

Father Félix summarized personal prayer outside the chapel as paying **LOVING ATTENTION TO GOD** and he explained it thus:

- Did any of you have a girl friend before coming to the novitiate? -Yes, Father.

-And did you think about her a great deal?

-Yes...

-Well, now you substitute God for your girl friend, Our Lord, who is not only next to you, but within you, and this is **LOVING ATTENTION**.

- Do you know the sunflower?

-Yes.

-Well, just like that flower follows the sun from morning till night, so our heart can be looking for God all day, and this is **LOVING ATTENTION**.

-This is not something one acquires easily. We have to make an effort to acquire this habit until being with God becomes as indispensable to us as breathing. I suggest these three things to you: try to think about God a little more every day, avoid useless thoughts and do not allow your heart to become attached to anything, or anyone because then there will be not room for God.

-Inner silence is also necessary. Avoid useless curiosity: wanting to know who comes in or goes out, or being on the prowl for news, or meddling in other people's lives and things that have nothing to do with you.

-Do you think reporters have that inner silence required to find God? No. Well, in monasteries we sometimes find novice-reporters, and they will never advance in the ways of prayer. Avoid being like that.

-Try to keep the house quiet; do not only avoid useless conversations which distract you and the rest but also avoid noise: do not bang doors, or move chairs noisily; a silent house helps one to think about God. Do this for the love of others, so as not to distract them, to help them be with God."

Father Félix lived in the presence of God. Hundreds of times we heard him summarize his talks in a way which characterized him: he would close his eyes and say slowly: "God... God...God...God... only God."

He wrote to me: "My health is not very good; I am really full of ailments but the presence of God does not leave me even for a moment."

He recommended frequent celebration of the Eucharist, but what really impressed us was to watch him celebrate Mass every day. I never saw him hurry or become distracted. One could see that he was practicing what he taught: "Offer to the Father the only perfect victim, which is Jesus, in union with our Mother Mary, who offers Him always in heaven; unite yourselves to her intentions which are so wise, to her great love for all. With her, offer Jesus to the Father asking that His kingdom come and His will be done on earth. But offer yourselves together with Jesus, unconditionally, for the Father to do what He will with your lives, without fear, because no one loves you as does that Father of infinite goodness."

And I can say the same thing about prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Certainly he talked much about it, but what we really learned was his example. Despite his multiple occupations, he was very faithful to his prayers, an hour during the day and another hour at night. He told us one day:

-When you see me in chapel, do not disturb me under any circumstances, unless a bishop wishes to see me. This is Jesus' time and everything else must wait.

At night he took his turn at adoration for an hour, just like we did: with a light wooden cross on his shoulder and a crown of thorns on his head. The crown was not intended to hurt, but rather was symbolic. Our father told us that the purpose of these symbols was to make us aware that we were offering ourselves to the Father together with Jesus, the way He had done it when He was on the Cross and crowned with thorns, with all our love and for the salvation of all.

Sometimes he took two or three turns. And we know that sometime he stayed all night before the Most Blessed Sacrament, because the novice whose duty it was to clean his room found the bed untouched. One day I got up quickly and went to the chapel and there I found Father Félix, fast asleep. He had wanted to keep vigil all night with Our Lord, but sleep had gotten the better of him.

I remember that whenever I went out with him he would tell me: "Let's go say good bye to the Lord," and upon returning he would say: "Let's go say hello to the Lord." It was only for a couple of minutes but you should have seen his recollection and how he genuflected when he arrived and when he left the chapel... You could tell that he practiced very well what he recommended many times we do: "Let your genuflecting reveal your faith."

LOVE OF NEIGHBOR

On this point our founder did not set down many theories; he was very practical. This was some of the advice I remember he gave us regarding fraternal charity:

"In conversation, do not interrupt the person who is talking; let him finish and show attention and interest although he be boring. Do not try to impose your point of view; know how to yield, because union and peace are worth more than anything else. Neither should you try to monopolize the conversation or always take the lead; let everyone participate and, if necessary, keep silent to give others a chance to express themselves.

If you are angry, do not show it; the others are not responsible for what happened. Always have a pleasant demeanor and try in this way to make others happy.

Never have a good time at the expense of another person. Know how to refrain from saying the clever or timely word if you believe it will hurt or bother your brother. Never make fun of anyone, or try to show off at the expense of another.

During free time, go along with what the rest want to play although it may not be to your liking. At meals do not pay so much attention to your food; watch to see if the others need anything, if they are lacking anything, and offer to serve them water.

Treat with greater kindness those you like the least; that way you will get used to not discriminating against anyone; that is true love.

Speak well of the others, because this tends to unite the community. Never criticize anyone. Do not ever judge anyone because that is God's prerogative.

Pay attention to the good qualities of the others. They all have good qualities although sometimes they do not know how to maximize them. Encourage others to develop their aptitudes. Be good to your superiors. Be understanding. It is not easy to be a superior. It is an arduous and thankless task. Whether the superior fulfills his task well or poorly, he is never responsible for having been named to that office. And I assure you that they all wish to do their job the best they can."

All his advice regarding charity was very practical, he was very kind when correcting our faults, but when we failed in fraternal charity, he became stern.

Again, what instructed us best on this point was his example. Everyone says that kindness was his characteristic virtue.

He was so attentive to each one, that we all thought we were his favorite person. He had a list of our birthdays and he never failed to write us a letter of congratulations, very brief, but very loving, he used to handwrite these letters using two colors of ink, putting in red what he wanted to emphasize.

He also showed his love through gratitude. I have never heard anyone say the words "thank you" with as much sincerity as our father.

It came from the depths of his soul. "Thank you, my dear son!" was one of his favorite expressions. Once when he was sick it was my turn to bring him lunch. When I returned to pick up the tray I asked him:

"Was it good, mon père?"

"Oh yes, thank you. The taste of love was very strong."

SACRIFICE

Father Félix did penance and fasted. But, good spiritual director that he was, he knew that God does not lead everyone down the same path. That is why he used to say to us:

"Jesus tells us that if we wish to be his disciples we have to follow him carrying 'our cross every day.' So, without a cross, we cannot follow Jesus. But this daily cross does not consist of doing penance, but rather of offering God with love everything that is difficult for us: religious observance, patience with the rest, the faithful fulfillment of all our duties, prayer when we find ourselves in a time of spiritual aridity, overcoming the temptations to fulfill the commandments... All of this is 'the daily cross.'"

To be self-sacrificing is to say many times during the day: "Nothing for me, all for Jesus."

The most perfect advice I can give you regarding this point is what our spirituality points out: To be victims in union with Jesus who always offered himself to the Father, moved by the great love that the Holy Spirit had poured out on Him.

To be victims with Jesus does not necessarily mean to do penance. Rather it is an internal attitude, it is a constant YES to everything God wants; a big YES, as large as the sky; a confident and generous surrender, without limit or condition. That is what it means to be a victim; it does not mean to do something, but to really love, accepting all the consequences of a true love.

Jesus' time came. Perhaps He did not do penance, but one night the hour of Gethsemani arrived, of the unjust judgment and of the condemnation and the lashes and carrying the cross and being nailed to it; and Jesus said YES to the Father: "Not my will but yours be done." "Father, I place my life in your hands."

"Our time" will come to each of us. A time of sickness, of a very violent temptation; a time to lose our beloved relatives or friends; a time of misunderstandings, false accusations, persecution, unjust judgments. And then we will say the same YES of Jesus, closely united to Him and with the force of the same Holy Spirit who always gave Jesus the courage and light and love to offer Himself to the Father for the salvation of all."

"Do you understand the spirituality of the Cross? It is to be self-sacrificing, it is to carry one's cross together with Jesus."

One day I went with our father to the Apostolic School. He visited each classroom and greeted each student with a handshake. Then he talked to them for a little while. I remember that he told the younger ones the following story:

"One day St. Peter lost the key to heaven, so nobody could go in and a long line started forming at the door. And the key was nowhere to be found. St. Peter himself was outside and could not get in and the line got longer and longer and they were all impatient..."

St. Peter started crying. But then a little old lady stepped out of the line and got close to St. Peter, winked at him and said:

-Don't cry, I have the key...

-You have it! Did you steal it from me?

- No, don't be silly. And the little old lady took off a chain she was wearing around her neck with a cross her mother had given her when she was a young girl, and she told St. Peter:

-Don't you know that this is what opens the doors of heaven for all of us and that the person who carries the cross of Jesus never remains outside?

And immediately they went to the door and the little old lady put the cross in the keyhole and opened wide the door so all could go in.

And you, my dear children, do you always carry the cross of Jesus? Don't think that you have to wear it on a chain, no. The point is to imitate Jesus who always obeyed the will of God the Father, always, always, even to His death on the cross..."

LOVE FOR THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Let us not forget that Father Félix belonged to the Society of Mary from the time he was 19 until he was 53 years old. It is not surprising that he would have great trust and love for the Mother of Jesus. Our father was not a writer. He wrote a booklet entitled "Conference about the Stars" and another on the life of Mary Martell. But the only book he wrote was one entitled MARY. And this is very significant.

Our father prayed the three parts of the rosary daily, that is to say 150 Hail Marys. We used to watch him walking in the orchard, rosary in hand, praying away... And since we were novices we were imprudent and would get near to ask for permission or to ask him something, something silly... But he would smile and answer us, as the Mother of Jesus would have done, she with whom he was so united at that moment. That is how I knew that our father prayed the rosary well.

Father Félix instituted a custom that we still observe: in each house of our congregation there is always an image of Mary above the door of the superior's room. Our Founder taught us that what that means is that the true Superior and Queen of each of our houses is the Mother of Jesus, who is also our Mother".

This chapter would be longer if we wished to gather the testimonials that his students have given regarding the teachings of Father Félix. But that is not necessary, since the second part of this book deal with the Spirituality of our founder. We will read his teachings in his own words, from quotations of what he himself wrote.

CHAPTER XIII

BLESSED ARE THE PERSECUTED

It happened what Father Félix feared. Government agents discovered the Apostolic School and Novitiate. But they accepted a bribe and did not report them. Father Félix did not know the Mexican words to designate that type of transaction. He wrote to Father Iturbide:

'If we continue working by giving alms to the police, I thank the Divine Providence with all my heart.'

In a letter to the students in Rome he told them:

"Our church in Morelia is closed. The two fathers live in different homes; they do not dare get together because it could be even more dangerous. But from where they are, they do good to a lot of people."

"In our church of "Los Remedios", Father Ramón del Real has behaved very courageously, and in certain cases, heroically. He has not wished to abandon the parish despite the danger of imprisonment or something worse. He has continued to administer the sacraments there and in a neighboring parish whose pastor disappeared months ago.

"As for Santa Clara, now the priest cannot even get near there for fear of being imprisoned. He is hiding in Mrs. Cabrera's house." (February 1, 1928).

A year later, due to the pressure of the "Cristeros", who were increasingly strong and victorious, the government decided to look for peaceful solution to the religious conflict. And so on the 21st of June, 1929, the "agreements" were signed between interim President Portes Gil representing the government and Bishops Pascual Díaz and Leopoldo Ruíz representing the Church. Those agreements were not in the least favorable to the Church. The adverse laws were not modified at all. Very limited freedom was granted for worship. Why were the agreements signed? Why were the Cristeros told to lay down their weapons when their movement was on the way to overthrow a government repudiated by more than 95% of the Mexican people?

It would take a long time to explain all of this. What is certain is that the order came from Pius XI, who based his decision on the information presented by certain Mexican bishops. Their argument was that "since the government was seeking peace, the Church ought to support it to avoid more bloodshed."

Later, Pius XI himself wrote an encyclical (*Acerba nimis*) in which he bitterly laments the religious persecution in Mexico and the lack of compliance with the agreements reached in 1929. But it did not do any good. It was too late. The political mistake of three years before could not be remedied. We can hardly understand the suffering which Father Félix underwent because of that prolonged religious persecution which lasted from 1914 until 1937, shortly before his death. We have to consider in realistic terms what it meant to live hiding in someone else's home, without being able to take good care of his Congregation, or gather new vocations or exercise his ministry. How he must have suffered when his churches were closed, his sons dispersed and his whole Work threatened... And this, day after day and year after year living constant ups and downs in a foreign country.

However, in his letters we find no complaints, but rather a complete acceptance of the will of God, trust in Him, prayers for his enemies, gratitude to the Lord for having granted him the blessing of being persecuted for His sake, and the sincere desire to be a martyr.

The example which Father Félix left us is that of a person who knew how to translate into the reality of his daily life his offering to the Father in Heaven to be a victim in union with Christ, for the salvation of all; but with simplicity, optimism, with joy, "with much pleasure", as he frequently said.

The following are some randomly selected lines from his letters corresponding to the period we are analyzing:

"Mexico is suffering a very difficult test. We are living through sad times, but we have faith in God. This Work, these vocations are His. How could they perish?" (To the students in Rome).

"We have five houses that only God can preserve from total ruin given the law governing the confiscation of property. For my part, I am ready to say AMEN to everything God wants, and I will say it smilingly because God is infinitely fatherly and what He permits will be for our greater good. I see a furious wave approaching. But perhaps it will be the last one. And, if not, may God's will be done; I say it with all my heart." (Letter to Father Rieu).

"It is said that a great crisis is approaching. But... Does anything happen without God permitting it? All we need is patience, love and trust. Jesus will take care of us and nothing will happen. Who is there like God?" (Letter to Father Iturbide).

"Jesus has left us under the power of His enemies until this Holy Week. May His will be done! And may He who pardoned the good thief, also give them an opportunity to repent, and pardon them the many evil they have done. The mercy of God is infinite and reaches all." (Letter to Elisa García).

"The Mexican soul had never been revealed as heroic and full of faith. But the persecution is becoming daily more cruel. Many are afraid, and I too have a thorn stuck in my heart, namely the fear of seeing the novitiate and Apostolic School closed and the boys put out on the street. But the Father is more powerful than all of them. If He punishes us, we richly deserve it. If He purifies us, it is out of love. But I feel sorry for those who now serve as His stick to punish His children. Let us keep them in our prayers; I do so with all my heart. They also are our brothers, may Jesus forgive us all." (To the students in Rome).

"Mexico is being physically and morally martyred. The persecution is causing so much suffering! I am not concerned about the humiliations and grief which we have gone through; what pains me is the many souls that are lost because of it." (Letter to Father Angel Oñate).

"Currently the house in Morelia is the hardest hit, but they are all happy and smiling. God our Father takes care of us. Therefore we are taken care of." (To the students in Rome).

"Although we are internally full of anguish, we accept this trial joyfully because our Lord has told us that we will be blessed if we are persecuted for His sake. What consoling words! They fill us with encouragement since it is only because of Him that we are being persecuted right now." (Letter to Alice Calamy).

"I have to remain in hiding because they are looking for me. It is very sweet to be persecuted for being a disciple of Jesus. I feel calm and at peace. And also happy, why not? If I see myself persecuted, it is because I belong to him." (To Blanche Giraud).

"I move around a lot, because the Masons persecute mercilessly those who serve the Church. Since the persecution started in 1929, more or less 150 priests from this country have received the crown of martyrdom. A thousand times blessed those who share this fate! They have already warned me about it. I wish that happiness with all my heart, although I do not deserve it." (Letter to Alice Calamy).

"Humanly speaking, there is no way out of this situation. But we have faith in God who has intervened thousands of times throughout history in favor of those he loves. They tell us now that we will be living tragic because of the triumph of socialism and atheism. If this is so, the only request we can make is that God give us the strength to resist even until martyrdom or exile, or any kind of persecution, and thus we will follow the Lord even more closely." (Letter to Rev. Mother Isabel Padilla OJS).

"I had to come here to hide until the tempest blows over. If this continues to get worse and they take everything from us, God be praised, because we know and firmly believe that everything comes from God and we also know that the trials He sends to those He loves are for their benefit." (To the novices).

He writes the following to the Superior of a religious congregation of women:

"You are also persecuted solely because you are Christ's. I know that your house has been reported. Happy you and happy us! Happy those of us who suffer for the sake of Jesus because our reward will be very great. We want whatever the Lord wants, everything He wants. So we are not going to tell Him, Lord, deliver us from this or that. No. Everything He wants is what you and we want. Isn't that so?" (To Rev. Mother Isabel Padilla).

"The Missionaries of the Holy Spirit are seriously threatened everywhere. But I see them calm. They know everything comes from God and God is our Father. If they take everything from them and persecute them with cruelty, they will accept it. Persecution is a very great grace; it is the pledge of immense favors for the future if we accept it as we should. (To the students in Rome).

Despite everything that has been said, and thanks to those "agreements", the years 1930 and 1931 were reasonably favorable to the Church and the Congregation. In fact, it was in 1931 when Father Félix could finally organize well the "House for Priests", intended to offer spiritual and material help to priests. This house, situated in Coyoacán, continued to give excellent service until the 15th of April, 1936, when the government confiscated it.

On the 7th of December of the same year (1931), Father Félix agreed to have the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit staff the church of San Felipe de Jesús, located in Avenida Madero 11, in the heart of downtown Mexico City.

Father Félix' letters help us understand how the community was developing during these years, in 1930 he wrote:

"We are now 115 (counting the students of the Apostolic School, novices, students and priests). What small numbers in 16 years! But I thank God because I think that everything we have done is solid."(Letter to Teresa Lozano).

In 1931 he writes:

"Things are going very well here and we are living in relative peace. Our Lord blesses our Works, and they grow despite great difficulties. We are already 135. The spirit of our young people is excellent, thank God. We are planning new foundations as soon as our new priests arrive from Rome." (Letter to his niece Yvonne).

In 1933 he writes:

"We number 154, of which 17 are in Rome completing special studies. They had never had such good grades before. I continually thank God for having blessed their studies in this fashion. They are the future. In all our houses I find fervor and full observance and a great love for Our Most Holy Mother." (To Teresa Lozano).

On the 13th of October of this year (1933) he wrote to a novice as follows:

"I established this foundation without resources, and I did not have to look for handouts because our Lord, with the tenderness of a mother, sent everything we needed every day and we never lacked food, or dress or anything. And that constant intervention of Jesus was not felt only in the beginning but rather has lasted until today. And as the number of members of the Congregation has grown, so have the resources He has sent. What admirable things, how grateful must we be to Our Lord!" (To Brother Ramón López).

In 1935 he wrote to Archbishop Leopoldo Ruíz the following words:

"Three new Missionaries have just been ordained. We now have forty priests. Blessed be God! The formation has been long, but we are sure that it has been solid". (August 13, 1935).

In 1936 he writes to the Superior General of the Marists, his friend, Father Ernesto Rieu:

"This year, which has been rich in crosses, is about to end. This small Congregation has lost its principal houses. The Government confiscated the apostolic school, the novitiate, and the house for students of philosophy and theology. But the vocations have increased and we are forming them well. We are almost 200 and we thank God for having helped us so mightily these first 22 years, because although trials have not been lacking, God's consolation has been superabundant." (December 30, 1936).

In his previous letter, Father Félix refers to the new religious persecution of President Cárdenas, which lasted until 1937, and which stripped the Congregation of almost all its houses. The year 1935 was the worst of the persecution.

The 25th of March of that year, (1935), Father Félix wrote:

"Here we are, half defeated. The students of the apostolic school are staying in a temporary location, the students of philosophy in another and the students of theology in a third. They number 130 altogether and we have not lost a single vocation. All of them have demonstrated their love for Christ and for His Cross. Happy are those persecuted for the sake of Christ, because their reward will be very great!

"I have visited the 52 boys of the Apostolic School, and I see them happier and more determined than ever. This is a blessing from God. Education in times of persecution is more solid and effective because the learners see heroic examples which are forever engraved in their memory." (Letter to Father Angel Oñate).

Towards the end of May, Father Félix described the state of things in the following way:

"The situation remains the same. But it is a great joy; a blessing that they take away our houses, furniture, beds, clothes, etc....only because we are Christ's. I have not heard a single complaint. They all have had to suffer: sleeping on the floor, and having few clothes and little to eat, etc. From the house in Rome we have been congratulated for having overcome the trials. And we feel happy and know that Jesus is pleased. We are not considering leaving Mexico because we have found good vocations here, a living faith, very Christian families, good education, people already formed for the religious life." (Letter to Blanche Giraud. May 5, 1935).

He tells his spiritual director:

"We have resisted the persecution, pardoning those men from the bottom of our heart, and commending them to God. We have suffered much, but lovingly.

"The Apostolic School is now experiencing the worst trials, but we have not lost a single vocation. Our boys have understood that being persecuted for the sake of Our Lord is a blessing and they have shown themselves to be courageous, happy, optimistic and full of trust in God. They have received excellent grades in school, for which I am grateful to God.

"Despite so many difficulties, we are moving ahead. There are now 141 of us besides the ones in Rome. Shouldn't we thank God?" (Letter to Archbishop Ruíz, May 30, 1935).

And how was Father Félix?

His strong constitution was very broken down despite his invincible optimism. So much suffering and so many concerns had harmed his health. In Conchita's diary we find this very telling note:

"Father Félix visited me again. Each time I find him progressively thinner and holier." (April 1935).

CHAPTER XIV

THE END OF A JOURNEY

We have reached the year 1936. Father Félix was 76 years old, but continued to be the leader and unifying force of his small Congregation.

This year the political situation in Mexico continued on the same track. Father Félix's letters reflect this reality. For example, we have one letter from the 23th of March:

"The theft of our houses has been completed. They have put us out on the street. But everything has been to our advantage, because God has given us many graces for having suffered for his sake. We have lost all our material things, but we have gained everything spiritual: more faith, more trust in God, a better spirit, hope in a better future. We owe all this to God. Blessed be His name" (To Margarita Boulagnon, March 23, 1936).

Besides the cross of misunderstandings and persecution, God willed that Father Félix also bear often the cross of illnesses. They were an opportunity of personal purification for him, and of a greater union with Christ Crucified. It will be worth our while to focus on this aspect of his life because it gives us priceless examples which we can imitate should we become ill.

When he was very young, he suffered from arthritis and while in Barcelona he suffered tuberculosis of the lungs. When in Mexico, at 63, in January of 1923, his leg became gangrenous for lack of care of an infected sore. The doctors' diagnosis was worrisome and many feared for his life. But he finally got over it:

"I am well now, thank God. I was very ill. What a life! It can end when we least expect it to... Ask the Lord that I serve Him better in the little time I have left." (To Maria de Jesús Madrigal, January 10, 1923).

Father Félix regained his health and continued to work intensely, but in 1927 he became very ill again. The cause was amoebic dysentery but the doctors had failed to diagnose it correctly.

"For the first time in my life, our Lord has kept me in bed for a long time. Since March 1, I have tried to get up to celebrate Holy Mass, but I have had to interrupt it. Praise be to God! Illnesses make us suffer, but they do us spiritual good.

"From my bed I have been able to settle much pending business, thinking that the Lord may want to take me to my eternal abode. But the doctor is confident that I will get well again." (To Alice Calamy, March 25, 1927).

In the early part of 1928 he suffered from extreme exhaustion, because of excessive work, little sleep and many concerns:

"I have touched bottom in terms of exhaustion. Praise be to God! But I am sure I will get well again, if that is the holy will of God. And if it is not, whatever God wills. Today I had to stop in the middle of Mass. The doctor forbade me to celebrate for a few days. Our Lord has given me patience. Thank you, Lord!

"For me, the worst sacrifice is not to be able to do anything... Well, I hope to be able to give you good news soon. Thank you for your prayers." (To the students in the house in Rome, February

19, 1929).

The doctors again diagnosed amoebic dysentery and attacked the illness by means of such strong intravenous shots that they almost killed Father Félix. After the first injections he wrote to Bishop Maximino Ruíz:

"I am much worse. I can no longer write to you. I am extremely weak. But I can still dictate these lines. I want to be cured or to die happily surrounded by my sons. That is why I will move in with them in the novitiate. I will renew my religious vows there, receive the Holy Viaticum and the Anointing of the Sick, and I will remain in the midst of my own as long as God wills. I commend myself to your prayers and ask for your blessing." (May 16, 1928).

No sooner said than done. The next day he moved to the novitiate. He asked for the Anointing of the Sick, which he received with great devotion, and then he prayed: "My Father, if You wish to take me, I accept your most holy will. If You wish to leave me here longer, I also give myself to You to do as you wish."

Later that day he wrote to Archbishop Ruiz:

"I want to let you know that I am at the novitiate. Today was a very happy day for me, because I returned to my center, with my own. I have great hopes of getting well because that is what we have asked the Father repeatedly, in the name of Jesus. I commend myself to your prayers and beg you to bless me and all the rest." (May 17, 1928).

Father Félix regained his strength, little by little, and with a great deal of optimism he wrote to the students in Rome:

"I am very well, thanks be to God. I eat everything, even beans and tortillas, but not chilies. I can lead my normal religious life. I continue to express my gratitude to God after having been so close to death." (July 2, 1928).

The following year, 1929, in the month of March, the amoebic dysentery returned in full force:

"The doctors say that the same illness I had last year has returned and I think this time it will take me because I am getting weaker. May the will of God be done! The rest is nothing." (To Father Iturbide, March 24, 1929).

On Good Friday he wrote to the Missionaries in Rome:

"Human life is a day of work and love. But it finally reaches its limit. But just as Jesus died to continue living and loving, so the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit will also die to continue living in heaven a more active and more fruitful life. We will continue to work and love in heaven, as Jesus does for all His Church." (Good Friday, 1929).

The year 1930 was not a good year for Father Félix's health. His appetite disappeared, as he tells Sister Ana María Gómez:

"Every day I have to struggle with my 'atole'" (a thick, hot milk drink). (March 20).

On June 28 of that year, he wrote the following:

"For the last five years I have been struggling between health and extreme weakness. May God's will be done! I hope these sacrifices have been beneficial for the Works of the Cross".

Two days later, he wrote to the Superior in Morelia:

"I am more or less healthy. But who is healthy any longer? It is no longer in style. I am in bed and not feeling well since I returned from San Luis. Nevertheless, I hope to recover because, I cannot be accepted as a victim, for being who I am. God knows how to choose souls that are valuable to be His victims. Unfortunately, I am not one of them; rather, I am run of the mill. That is why I ask the Eternal Father to cure me, in the name of Jesus, and I am sure He will grant it." (To Father Treviño, June 30, 1930).

He also wrote to the Daughters of the Holy Spirit:

"My health is very good...That is to say, it is the way God wishes to give it to me these days. And God only gives His children good things.

"The truth is that I have been working a great deal, beyond what I am capable of doing, and now I am paying the price. But the worst days are the best if we know how to take advantage of them.

"I promise to be prudent and take care of myself. I am sure that very soon I will be fine." (July 30, 1930).

He got much better during the month of July because the doctors discovered he was anemic and gave him four blood transfusions.

"Just imagine, I would have died very soon if they had not given me a blood test. Instead of five million red corpuscles that I should have, I only have one and it is impossible to live that way.

"All the novices want to donate their blood. How grateful I am!" (Letter to Archbishop Ruíz).

After the fourth transfusion, Father Félix told the doctor:

"Now you should congratulate me because I have a lot of Mexican blood. I even dreamed that I participated in a cock fight!"

On August 26, he took a few days' rest in the home of Conchita Cabrera and his spiritual director, Archbishop Ruíz, ordered him to take advantage of that "vacation" to write what he remembered about his participation in the Works of the Cross. Conchita wrote in her diary:

"That very afternoon we started working. He dictated to me and I wrote it down. We covered a lot of ground, remembering so many painful events, so many grace filled moments and also so many successes. Later he dictated a short autobiography." (August 30, 1930).

On January 6, 1931, he suffered an intestinal occlusion and was taken by ambulance to the French Hospital for emergency surgery. The operation lasted two hours. There followed several days during which he struggled between life and death, suffering greatly. The sleepless nights seemed endless. Sometimes he would ask what time it was and then he would comment: "Oh, Lord, this clock is not working!".

But he got over the danger and recuperated rather quickly, so that by the end of February he could return to the novitiate. And the 20th of April he wrote to his niece, Ivonne, as follows:

"I have started to celebrate Mass again, after three months of enforced abstinence. Praise be to God for everything! Everything comes from God and He is our Father. He is infinite love."

"I will be in bed for some time. How long? ... only God knows. But if this is His will, that is what I

want."

In September he wrote:

"I am much better. However, I feel as if I had wooden fingers and I can hardly manage them. How instructive illnesses are! Pain purifies and unites one to God. This time it has lasted a year already. I hope I have suffered with love and resignation." (To Teresa Lozano, September 21, 1931).

The year 1932 and 1933 were good for Father Félix's health. He wrote to the students in Rome:

"I am pretty good, suffering from the ailments proper to my age which, thank God, do not keep me from working." (July 4, 1933).

And two more years passed with ups and downs in terms of ailments, but not bad considering his age. At Christmas in 1934 he wrote:

"I am well, very well. I have some problems with my legs. My illness consists of having celebrated 74 on the 17th. They tell me I look 50. That is what they say... Please pray to God that in the same way that my health has improved, my soul will improve also..." (December 24, 1934).

Father Félix made his spiritual exercises in May of 1935, although he complained of a sharp pain in the area of the liver. After the week's retreat, he wrote his resolutions:

"I will pray four hours a day and I will be patient and kind." (Diary, May 30, 1935).

Around this time, Father Félix agreed to staff another church: Nuestra Señora de la Merced (Our Lady of Mercy) in Celaya. This was the fourth church the Congregation served.

In 1936, Father Félix accepted the church of Nuestra Señora del Rosario (Our Lady of the Rosary) in San Luis Potosí on October 25. And the next year he was given El Santuario de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe (the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Guadalupe) in Saltillo. This was the last foundation established by Father Félix.

Of the last two years, 1936 and 1937, Father Félix had the following to say:

"I went through everything: colds, exhaustion, fevers, rheumatism and strong headaches that forced me to go to bed. God be praised!"

On March 3, 1937 Conchita Cabrera died. It was a terrible blow to all the Works of the Cross, but even more so for Father Félix.

By this time, his eyesight was failing him.

On June 29, he petitioned Archbishop Ruíz:

"I beg you to grant me permission to pray fifteen mysteries of the Rosary instead of reading the Breviary. The last two years I could still read the Breviary, although my right eye was almost gone, but now the left one is also losing strength. For this reason my confessor advised me to ask for this permission."

Such was the state of his health when he celebrated his Golden Jubilee as a priest on September 24, 1937.

This is the short speech he made after a dinner offered in his honor:

"There is a great deal of truth in the words of St. Paul to the Ephesians: that we ought to spend our life being grateful for God's gifts. We have received so many spiritual gifts, gifts of the body as well as material gifts. He gives us all these benefits.

"But there are special graces that we are unable to truly appreciate, such as the grace of the priesthood, which has been the reason for this celebration during which you have congratulated me with such undeserved affection.

"I am deeply grateful to all of you who wanted to be with me to thank God for so many benefits which I have received throughout 50 years of priestly life.

"May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus, and mother of all priests, obtain for us the grace of responding completely to our holy vocation. And that after having worked following the footsteps of Jesus in this temporal world, we will be united in the possession of God in the world that endures forever, in an eternal life of happiness, gratitude and love."

CHAPTER XV

THE DEATH OF THE FOUNDER

The celebration of his golden jubilee as a priest exhausted Father Félix and two days later, he had to be taken to the French Hospital because of an attack of anemia.

The second General Chapter of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit was held from October 17th to 23rd. Every six years members of the Congregation get together to name the Superior General and his Counselors, evaluate the last six years and plan for the next six. Father Félix attended all the meetings, except on the morning of the 19th, when he did not feel well.

The members of the Chapter voted unanimously to reelect Father Félix Superior General. In this action, they were moved more by their feelings than by their thoughts. He could hardly celebrate Mass. He was 79 and only had two months to live.

On December 31 of that year, he suffered an intestinal hemorrhage which left him very weak. New Year's Day, 1938, he could not even go to communion. Brother Agustín Lira, who nursed him until the day of his death, remembers that Father Félix told him that day:

"I am in great pain. This is my New Year's gift. Every day I ask the Lord to participate in His Cross, and well, He has listened to my request..."

On January 4, Brother Agustín told him:

"Father, they tell me that the intern is coming to give you another IV..."

"For God's sake, no more, exclaimed the sick man, "Leave me alone!...", and then he added:

"Well, all right... I promised the Blessed Virgin that I would not complain and I would refuse nothing... Let the intern come."

On the 6th, Father Edmundo Iturbide gave him the Anointing of the Sick. On the 8th, he suffered an intestinal paralysis and on the 9th peritonitis set in, causing terrible stomach pains. Father Edmundo tells that Father Félix sat up in bed and started to perspire profusely. His whole body was wracked by pain. He looked at Father Edmundo with great anguish and asked him:

"My son, what shall I do? Tell me. I feel that the pain is more than I can bear.... Pray for me!..."

They were able to get him to sleep under the influence of strong sedatives. All houses of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit were advised that Father Félix was very sick. That afternoon a large group of Missionaries gathered around his sick bed. At 5:30, Father Félix woke up and asked:

-Have I stopped complaining?

Father Angel Oñate, Vicar General, answered in the name of the group:

-Father, many of your sons are here representing the whole Congregation. We ask your pardon for the times we caused you pain.

-I have nothing to forgive, my dear sons.

-Would you like to give us some words of advice?

-Yes, that you love the Father in heaven a great deal, as Jesus did. And that you be able to say with him: I ALWAYS DO WHAT PLEASES MY FATHER.

-What virtue do you recommend the most?

-That you be humble.

After some minutes of silence, he added:

-I offer my life to the Lord so that you will always remain united.

-Until now we are all united, said Father Angel.

-I know, and it is a great consolation to me.

Another Missionary asked:

"What about the Blessed Virgin Mary?"

-Everything with her, nothing without her.

Father Oñate said:

-Father, we thank you for everything you have done for us. -God has done everything... everything...

After a few moments of silence, he said:

-I am suffering a great deal, but I offer it to God...

Father Oñate asked him to bless them. Father Félix with much effort raised his hand and blessed them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. With tears in their eyes, they approached to kiss his hand and he had a word of goodbye for each one. Then they left so he could rest.

On January 10, he was in agony. He had difficulty breathing. He asked for some Lourdes water someone had given him and he took a sip. Then he fixed his eyes on a painting of Mary which one of the Missionaries was holding. His breathing became more and more labored and finally, at 10:27 he surrendered his soul in the hands of the Eternal Father whom he had loved so much.

In the Constitutions, Father Félix included the following rule: "When a Missionary of the Holy Spirit dies, those present will sing hymns of thanksgiving because the work of the Missionary has ended and it is fitting that he leave this world giving thanks to God in union with his brothers."

The hymns were sung and then they prepared Father Félix for burial, dressing him in the habit of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit.

At 3:30 p.m., the body of Father Félix was taken to the cemetery in Tepeyac and buried in the same tomb which 21 years before had received the body of Archbishop Ibarra, the great protector

of the Works of the Cross.

Currently, the mortal remains of Father Félix are found in the Church of San Felipe de Jesús, in downtown Mexico City. On his tombstone was engraved his name which summarizes his life perfectly: FÉLIX DE JESUS (Félix of Jesus).

AN OVERVIEW

One day young Félix raised his hand in the schoolyard to indicate he wished to become a missionary. Since that time, God accepted his gift of himself. Félix was 19.

Then on February 4, 1903, God showed him new horizons and invited him to follow Jesus more closely, carrying His Cross, on the way to Calvary, to fulfill the will of the Father and save his brothers and sisters. And Father Félix decided to follow Christ, Priest and Victim.

After a year which he considered to be "his novitiate" on the new path of the Works of the Cross, he asked his superiors for permission to establish the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit because the Lord had asked him to do so.

They made fun of him. They considered him deluded. They denied him the permission. They sent him to beg and teach children...

For ten years, he obeyed, suffered and trusted in God. For ten years, he surrendered to the will of God without reservation. He was willing to do whatever God decided: to establish the new Congregation or to do nothing.

In 1914, he obtained the desired permission, but only for two years. He returned to Mexico at age 53 and found it in the worst moment of its history. Without wasting a day, he started to struggle to fulfill the task that the Lord had entrusted to him. But the temporary permissions expired, three times for two years and once for five. And each time, the humble founder was ready to obey, to leave everything if that was God's will, "and go to the remotest island in the Oceania missions."

Finally, after eleven years of anguish over deadlines, he was granted the final permission: he was now a Missionary of the Holy Spirit forever. But just then, the religious persecution hit him with all its violence. They closed his churches, confiscated his houses, and persecuted him with the intention of killing him. Moreover, he accepted everything because "God permits it and He is above all our Father". And he encouraged the depressed and consoled the downtrodden and prayed for his enemies, and yearned to give his life for his Lord.

Since 1903, Jesus had invited him to climb His Cross. And he remained there for 33 years: five in Barcelona, five in Saint Chamond and twenty-three in Mexico during the revolution. What perseverance! What fortitude!

Martyrdom would have been easier. But God wanted Father Félix to be the model for those who accept the Cross of Christ by remaining nailed to it every day with unalterable tenacity until the Cross of illness breaks the Cross of this life and the glorious light of Easter appears.

If we want to study the spirituality of the Cross, let us read the writings of Conchita Cabrera and Archbishop Luis Martínez. However, if we need an accessible model who encourages us to live it, let us pay attention to the life of Father Félix.

Here is a hero who does not blind us with the glory of his exploits. He was a simple man who knew how to carry his daily cross faithfully, and who knew how to lighten the load, with love for the Father and for a community of brothers.

Because Father Félix was not one of those solitary heroes. He helped many to walk along carrying their cross and always let others help him carry his. He always sought life in community; he loved

his friends and his brothers and accepted their love of him without reservation.

Father Félix is a good model for common, ordinary people. It is easy to walk alongside him because his path is simple: to do the will of God who is Love.

PART TWO

OUR FOUNDER'S SPIRITUALITY

INTRODUCTION

Studying the spirituality of a saint, one participates in the lights God gave him to live the mystery of Christ. Therefore, this will be a helpful chapter for all of us.

Of course, the spirituality of Father Félix is none other than the Spirituality of the Cross, that is to say, the following of Christ as priest of the Father, whose offering is Himself, for the salvation of all. Therefore, we are not talking about studying a spirituality different from that of the Works of the Cross, but rather to assimilate it with the help of the concrete example of someone who knew how to live it in a simple, common ordinary existence similar to ours.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FATHER

The essence of the spirituality of Father Félix is his love of and devotion to each of the three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity. This is very logical, since the end of the Spirituality of the Cross is God the Father, to whom we constantly offer two gifts: the principal one, which is Christ, and with Him ourselves, moved by the Holy Spirit through Whom Jesus offered Himself constantly to the Eternal Father.

In this chapter we will present excerpts from the writings of Father Félix about devotion to the Most Holy Trinity and especially to the Eternal Father.

"The principal characteristic of the Missionary of the Holy Spirit is his great devotion to the Most Holy Trinity: to each of the Divine Persons." (1)

"I have just spent two months with the novices and gave them the morning meditation every day. I emphasized the devotion that is most characteristic of our Congregation: to the Most Holy Trinity, each of the three Divine Persons." (2)

"I want to love the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, with all my soul, and see to it that everyone loves these Divine Persons. May my love for you, Oh, Most Holy Trinity, grow every moment and may my only reward be to love you more." (3)

"It is true that the three Divine Persons are inseparable, but they really are DIFFERENT PERSONS, infinitely different, because in God everything is infinite. The Father is the beginning, He who receives the life of the Father from all eternity and loves Him with infinite love and receives from the Father the same infinite love. The Holy Spirit is that love, which proceeds from eternity from the Father and the Son and Who is a person, as are the Father and the Son. If God were ONE but not a TRINITY, He would be forever alone, because He could never give or receive divine

love in all its fullness. Creatures could not dispel His solitude, because all being that is not God is infinitely distant from God." (4)

"Being LOVINGLY ATTENTIVE TO GOD, is being in love with God; it is a strong passion, which consists of not being able to forget either the Father, or Jesus, or the Holy Spirit." (5)

"The life of a Missionary consists of copying that of our beloved Jesus, living with Him in the Father: 'I am in the Father and the Father in me.'" (6)

"Union with Jesus to go to the Father under the impulse of the Spirit is the center of all our spiritual life. But let us not lose sight of the fact that it is the Father who first leads us to Jesus: 'No one comes to me if my Father does not bring him.'" (7)

"That is why our devotion to the Father unites us more and more to Jesus by the gift of His Spirit. Like Jesus, let us constantly repeat: 'I love my Father' (Jn. 5:30 and 12:50). Jesus' contemporaries saw only the exterior: the worker who labored among them, who suffered from tiredness, hunger and thirst like everyone else did. But Jesus was always with the Father, always calm, indescribably happy in His love. Here we have the perfect image of what a Missionary of the Holy Spirit ought to be." (8)

"The great secret to become saints is hidden in these words of our beloved Teacher: 'If anyone loves me, my Father will love him and we will come to him and will make our abode with him. "' (Jn. 14:23). So we are the temple of the living God. (2 Cor. 6:16). And I am convinced that the reality of the three divine persons living in us is the central, fundamental dogma, on which we must feed at all times. That is why Sister Isabel de la Trinidad used to say in all truth: 'Since I found THE GREAT SECRET, since I became aware that the words of Christ and St. Paul about GOD IN US were to be taken literally, because they are a reality, since then I have made this reality the center of my life.'" (9)

"Let us all make this reality the center of our life. This is what I have preached to you in the novitiate a thousand and one times, and this is what the BEING LOVINGLY ATTENTIVE TO GOD is about. This is the substance of the contemplative life, from which we ought not to separate ourselves, even in the midst of intense apostolic activity."

"Work to make yourself aware of the active presence of these three Divine Persons in you."(9)

"My daughter, you are never alone. When that temptation assails you, think that it is only your imagination, because it is false. It is a truth of faith that the three Divine Persons dwell in all the souls that find themselves in the grace of God. Jesus assures us of this: 'If someone loves me, my Father will love him, and we will go to him and make our abode with him.' (Jn. 14:23). These are the words of our Lord. They are among the most consoling words He told us, and they are documented in the Gospel." (10)

"Give thanks to the beloved Father for so many gifts. He sent Jesus to us, and He sent us the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:24 and 16). We owe everything to the Father, whom we will never love in this world as we should. He also gave us Mary, Our Mother. And He gave us the gift of our vocation, and with it so many other favors."

"Oh, Father, Good Father, Holy Father, Merciful Father, Eternal Father, Heavenly Father, Father from whom comes all that is good, Father from whom all Fatherhood comes, Father of Jesus Christ, most beloved Father, Our Father: make us, your children, love you passionately." (11)

"I want and beg of Jesus what I am asking of Him, for my sons and for myself: That we truly love the Divine Father as He loved Him, without measure and unto the Cross." (12)

"Only Jesus can teach us what the Father is for us and what we are for Him. But the Christian revelation about our relationship to the Father is summarized in this name which Jesus gives Him: 'He is my Father and your Father' (Jn. 20:17). He who begets the Word from all eternity, the Father of Jesus Christ, is also OUR FATHER." (13)

"After dinner I went to see Mrs. Concepción Cabrera de Armida, who is very sick. She is suffering from very strong and constant pain. I was going to say 'cruel', but no, nothing is cruel, because everything comes from our Father, and especially to those who serve God. He is the Father who is infinitely attentive to each of His children and does everything for our good, although sometimes we do not understand it, but we are certain of it and this is the greatest consolation in our sorrows." (14)

"Every day that goes by I feel more attracted to the Father. And this has been so for a long time. I believe this is how I am imitating Jesus."

"I have no doubt that it is the Holy Spirit who leads me more and more towards the Divine Father, because the Holy Spirit it is who makes each of us, little by little, a copy of Jesus." (15)

"The Father is life, tenderness, mercy, forgiveness, promise. His Fatherhood embraces all. Let us go to the Father, to the Father of Jesus and our Father. It is impossible to call on the Father without receiving an abundance of spiritual gifts because He is the beginning and source of every gift, in heaven and on earth." (16)

One day, a novice asked Father Félix:

- Why don't you write a book for us on the devotion to the Father? In this way we would have in writing everything you have preached about this subject, which you consider to be the most important...

Father Félix answered:

- That is not necessary, my son, that book is already written; it is called the Gospel.

"And how true this is! The first recorded word of Jesus refers to the Father: "Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know that I must be about my Father's business? (Lk 2:49). He told His disciples: "My food is to do the will of my Father and do the things He has commanded me to do" (Jn. 8:34). And on another occasion He summarized His life saying: "I always do what pleases my Father." (Jn. 8:28). Whenever He prayed, He addressed the Father and the only prayer He taught us was the Our Father. (Mt.6:9). At the Last Supper with His disciples He made a long prayer to the Father and then He told them: "So that the world can see how much I love my Father, arise and let us go." (John 14:31). And He led them to the place where He was to be taken prisoner and put to death. In the Garden of Olives He again prayed to the Father: "Father, you can do all things. If it is possible, let this chalice pass from me, but not my will but yours be done." (Mk. 14:36). And His last words on earth, His last thought, His last act of love was for the Father: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." (Lk. 23:46).

"Really, can we call ourselves disciples of Jesus if our love is not for the Father? And really, do we need another book besides the Gospel to learn this truth?

"With great pleasure I started to pray today and right away the presence of the Father enveloped me in an atmosphere of joy. And I understood that His gaze is love and my prayer was my loving gaze responding to His. Look for look and love for love, an exchange of looks and love! Oh, most beloved Father! I promise to fix my eyes only on You forever and to have You as my only possession... I promise to consult you on everything and to always do your will with all my love." (17)

"Loving attention consists of gazing on God our Father. But when we look at Him, He also looks at us; and today I would like to write something for you about this gaze of the Father:

"This gaze has been on me forever, because it is the gaze of God and it will be over me for all eternity. That gaze fills me with joy, fortitude and confidence, it gives me strength and sustains me. It tells me: Love! Come! Climb to where I am and talk to me, because you are my beloved son! Other times it tells me: Silence! Be quiet! Listen to me! Other times it says: Be humble, be little in my sight. And it invites me, and accompanies me and never leaves me alone. That gaze is my heaven on earth: it warms me, it refreshes me, it gives me life, it kills me and resurrects me at the same time. It is the gaze of God Himself, who takes me from this world and attracts my soul to follow in His wake. And if I yield to small temptations, that gaze pricks me like a thorn and purifies and cleanses me, because it is LOVE. And my soul remains closer than before to the heart of God, who wants it all for Himself. Oh, gaze of the Father, gaze of love, do not turn from me and my brothers! Make us pure, loving, happy and saintly!" (18)

Father Félix also wrote these thoughts, with which we will close this chapter:

"I put myself in Your presence, most beloved Father, and I saw that ETERNAL River. Did I see it? Or was it my imagination? Was it You? The fountain of the divine? I wish to be all yours and love you passionately, in time and in eternity; because I am a drop of that River ... Because I am truly your son, aren't I, Father?"(19)

"I began my prayer as always: Most loving Father, I adore you, I adore and love you... But then I felt surrounded on all sides, and could only say: *YOU, YOU, YOU...* and I felt happy with that plenitude and the *YOU* changed to *YOURS...* and my surrender was total once more..."(20)

"I began my hour [of adoration] with very good will, dedicated to the Father of my soul, to the Love of my life, to my most beloved Father. But many distractions came to me. I begged my beloved Father to take me for His own and I told Him that within me was both a wanting and not wanting... With distractions and all I completed my hour. God be praised!" (21)

"I was anxious to go with my Beloved Father, but I was not free until 10 a.m. Charity towards my brothers forced me to move back an hour my "hour of love". I left all the mail in disarray, although it is urgent. My Father is first. He arranges everything for me later.

"Before my Father, I united myself spiritually with all men and women in the world and in the name of all His children I told him: Most beloved Father, I adore You, I love You, I ask your pardon... Save me, enlighten me, take me to Jesus, because only You can do it" (22)

"The work of the day was tiring. I slept for a while and then, at 11 p.m., I began my prayer to my beloved Father, with all good will... Then I slept again until after midnight. I was ashamed of my laziness...I should have stood so as not to go to sleep; that at least would have been an act of love towards my most beloved Father. That is what I will do the next time" (23)

"Father, forgive me! You know my poor life...much worse than poor. Forgive me! I have so many faults... from the smallest to the largest. Forgive so many sins, so many omissions, and the abuse of your grace. Forgive so much forgetfulness and so much coldness. I don't want to be like that, I don't! I want to live in intimacy with You. But first, your forgiveness. Oh, Father, forgive and purify me!"

Yours, Félix" (24)

SOURCES

1. Letter to Rome August 15 , 1936.
2. Ibid. February 11, 1934.
3. To the Daughters of the Holy Spirit, January 12, 1924.
4. Magazine La Cruz, November, 1927.
5. To the Daughters of the Holy Spirit, June 14, 1924.
6. Jn. 14:10
7. Jn. 6: 44
8. Letter to Rome, January 23,1932.
9. Letter to Fr. Alvarez, December 19, 1920.
10. Letter to a Daughter of the Holy Spirit, Undated.
11. Notes 1 pp. 123.
12. Talk to the Students, April 18, 1924.
13. Magazine La Cruz, December 1927.
14. Notes, March 31, 1935.
15. Notes, June 16, 1925.
16. Talk to the Novices, June 24,1932
17. Notes. Undated.
18. To the Daughters of the Holy Spirit, October 1924.
19. Undated.
20. Undated.
21. Undated.
22. Undated.
23. Undated.
24. Undated.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SON

In the previous chapter we saw how God the Father, the first person of the Most Holy Trinity, is central to the spirituality of Father Félix, which is none other than the spirituality of Christ, Priest of the Father and Offering to the Father.

Let us now consider how the Word made Flesh, the eternal Son of the Father, born of Mary, is integrated in perfect unity in the spirituality of Father Félix.

Jesus tells us: "No one knows the Father but the Son, and those to whom the Son wishes to reveal Him" (Mt. 11:27). "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one can come to the Father but by me" (Jn. 14:6). "No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him." (Jn. 1:18). "No one has seen the Father; the only one who has seen Him is He who has come from God." (J n. 6:46).

Therefore, we cannot speak of love and devotion to the Father separate from the only way that leads to Him, the only one who knows the Father, the only one who can reveal Him to us.

On the other hand, if Jesus is He who knows the Father, who else can be the model of love and devotion to this Father? If He is the only Son by nature, who else can teach us to be truly His sons?

And, lastly, if we are children of the Father, it is because we participate in the same divine life of the Son: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned." (Jn. 15: 1-6). Our spiritual union with Jesus, because we have believed in Him and because we have accepted Him with all our being, is what gives us the right to be children of God with Him and like Him: "To those who received him and believed in Him, He gave the privilege to become children of God. And they are children of God, not by natural birth which comes from the desire of a man, but because God has begotten them." (Jn. 1: 12).

Of the Biblical texts I have cited, there follows clearly the unity which exists between our relationship with the Father and our relationship with the Son. It is similar to the oneness of the road and the end, the river and the spring, the promise and the condition. It is the substantial unity enjoyed by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Let us now see some relevant texts selected from the letters and writings of Father Félix:

JESUS, OUR REDEEMER

"Let us rejoice in the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ, in which lies our salvation, our life, our resurrection!"

"When we say 'THE CROSS', we must understand 'JESUS CHRIST CRUCIFIED'. We rejoice because by His crucifixion He rescued us, redeemed us, obtained for us all grace, and eternal life. We have all this thanks to Jesus, crucified for us. And we rejoice today with gratitude and love, as

we contemplate what Jesus has done for us. He loved me and gave up His life for me." (Gal. 2: 20) (1)

"May the precious blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ purify and unceasingly water our souls, because it is a divine river that runs unceasingly in the Church to wash away our sins and to give us all divine life. I want you to have a strong devotion to the Precious Blood of Christ. We say 'Precious' because its 'PRICE' is infinite."

"I believe I have never had the occasion to speak to you about this, but I will do so soon."(2)

"I ask everything of the Father, and with complete trust, IN THE NAME OF JESUS, as the Church teaches us: 'Through Christ, Our Lord.' Because I have nothing of my own that would make me worthy of being listened to by the Father, but I have Jesus, I have His merits. Ah, that Christ... Our Jesus! How much should we love Him, Him who loves us so much!" (3)

"If you could imagine how painful it has been for me not to have been able to be in communication with you and not to have answered your letters as I would have wished... But I have asked the Divine Father to cure me IN THE NAME OF JESUS, and I am therefore sure He will grant me this grace." (4)

"Jesus wishes me to abandon myself in His hands, in full trust. And I firmly believe that He has forgiven me as only He knows how; and that He loves me with infinite mercy. How can I not trust without limits?" (5)

"Oh, Jesus, you have not been able to defend yourself against love!... And you have loved me to the point of dying for me on a cross. Oh, Jesus, I want to give my blood and my life to you who gave your blood and life for me!" (6)

UNION WITH JESUS

"The union with Jesus to go to the Father, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is the center of all our spiritual life." (7)

"Above all and before all, union with Jesus. This is the only way to go to the Father. He said it: I AM THE WAY, NO ONE GOES TO THE FATHER EXCEPT THROUGH ME. [This letter is interrupted here and he adds only]: I can write no more because of ill health... but I am getting better." (8)

"If we do not attain an intimate union with Christ, we will not carry out the will of God. Our life, beloved children, even to our last breath, must be nothing else than to continue the work of Jesus, under His loving impulse." (9)

"Let us make an effort to pray more so as to be more united to Jesus, because this is the only way to gain thousands of souls for God. We have to be other Jesus and this is our foremost wish." (10)

"To see with the eyes of Jesus and that Jesus see through ours. To speak as Jesus spoke, and that it be Jesus who speaks through our lips. To love as Jesus loved and that Jesus love with our heart. To live like Jesus, and that Jesus be our life."

"What a beautiful plan! But this assumes a great intimacy with Jesus, a special union of hearts, a total trust, a living faith in which everything is forgiven and forgotten, and that we live with Jesus in

a true atmosphere of love." "Meditate on each of these thoughts, because they are a source of holiness. This plan alone would be sufficient to destroy all our imperfections." (11)

"In all your actions see only Jesus, and despise the opinions of others. See everything through the eyes of Jesus. This is what St. Paul says: 'I no longer live, but it is Christ who lives in me.' (Gal. 2:19).(12)

BEING TRANSFORMED INTO CHRIST

"To copy Jesus, to be transformed into Him, this is the ideal of ideals; the rest is not important."

"Keep in mind, one and all, that you came to the Congregation to be transformed into Jesus Christ, and to be, insofar as it is possible to each one, another Jesus: 'Those He elected, He also predestined to reproduce the image of His Son.'" (Rom. 8:29) (13)

"Each one in his ministry will have to be ANOTHER JESUS. This is the condition to save your souls: to become transformed into the only Savior. So the spiritual life is simple, it consists only of our progressive transformation into Jesus, and knowing the means that will help us to achieve this." (14)

"I have prayed much to the Incarnate Word to bless us all, and to grant each of us not only to live united to Him, but to become truly transformed into Him. Ah, if we would understand that this is the whole of our poor and most precious life!..." (15)

"The great task which Jesus has entrusted to each of us, is our transformation into Him."

"And let us not say, my beloved children, that it is difficult, that it is impossible. No, Jesus does not demand of us things that are impossible."

"This transformation, so desired by Jesus, and so precious for us, has already begun. Jesus Himself explains it in the parable of the leaven which a woman mixes with three measures of flour. The flour is us. The Church, which gives us Jesus in Baptism, is the woman. Jesus is the leaven which will transform us. And in time it will leaven everything, and it will become a bread worthy of the table of the Heavenly Father. We only need to correspond to this grace to become more and more like that Jesus who is our only ideal, all our hope and all our love." (16)

"I would like the Heavenly Father to find His pleasure in each of you, because He sees that every day you resemble more and more His beloved Son in whom He is well pleased. This is what the Holy Spirit tells us through St. Paul: 'Be clothed with our Lord Jesus Christ.'" (Rom.13:14). (17)

He told the following to four young men who took the habit of Missionaries of the Holy Spirit:

"Our habit says a lot, because it has the inscription: JHS, which means JESUS, SAVIOR OF MEN. That indicates your mission and your ideal. You are destined by God to save thousands and thousands of souls. And I have told you not what they are, but what the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit aspire to be. You are called to be what Jesus was, for the glory of the Father. When one is another Jesus, he is truly a savior...So you must say frequently: I want to be another Jesus, whatever the cost. That is why you have come here, to work to be another Jesus." (18)

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE TRANSFORMED INTO JESUS

"Be concerned with doing the holy will of God, in such a way that this divine will be your food, as it was the food of Jesus." "What perfection is to be found in the practice of this objective! The end of the spiritual life is union with God, but union with God is nothing else than the union of our will with the Divine will. That was the essence of the example of Jesus: 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent me.' (Jn. 4:34). 'I have come from heaven, not to do my will, but the will of Him who sent me.' (Jn. 6:38). 'He who sent me is with me and does not leave me, because I always do what pleases Him.'" (Jn. 7:29)

"This is how we become transformed into Jesus, doing every day the will of the Father, who created our will to unite it to His will." "Oh, beloved Jesus, your food will be our food, your life will be our life; we promise you that with the help of your grace we will follow you from the manger of Bethlehem to the Cross of Calvary." (19)

"Jesus wishes everyone to know that love for his divine Father is what made Him faithful to His will. 'So that the world may know that I love the Father and I do what the Father has commanded, arise and let us go.'" (Jn. 14:31)

And what were the characteristics of Jesus' love for His Father? We can list the following nine:

1. His love was radical: "I came from heaven, not to do my will, but that of my Father." (Jn. 6:38).
2. It was obedient: "I have kept the commands that my Father gave me." (Jn. 15:10).
3. He denied Himself: "I do not seek to do my will, but the will of Him who sent me." (Jn. 6:38).
4. It was a gentle love: "I always do what pleases my Father." (Jn. 8:23)
5. It was a tender love: "I remain in His love." (Jn. 15:10).
6. It was a love of union: "My Father is in me, and I in Him." (Jn. 10:38)
7. It was a most faithful love: "Father, I have glorified you on earth, and I have accomplished the work you wanted me to do." (Jn. 7:14).
8. A love capable of any sacrifice: "The Father loves me because I give up my life." (Jn. 10:17).
9. A filial love, a love of surrender: "Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit" (Lk. 23:46).

"The union of infinite love which unites the Father and the Son from all eternity continues to be the same after the Incarnation, when the Son came to earth to fulfill the mission He received from the Father. Just imagine how great and how perfect our love and our surrender to the Father have to be, for us to be able to say that we are a copy of Jesus. But it is the same Father who sends us also, so forward and upward to the holy mountain, to Tabor, to Calvary, to eternal glory!..."

"What a wonderful life plan! To give glory to the Divine Father always imitating Jesus, like him, doing His Father's will!" (20)

"May you be a living copy of Jesus: obedient, meek, humble, loving the hidden life of Nazareth; and also a true apostle, like Jesus: in the highlands, on the sea, in the city, among crowds, among the sick, with the children, with the poor, with everybody... And with Jesus to Mount Tabor, and with Jesus to Calvary, so as to be able to rise with Him from there to eternal glory." (21)

The following was his explanation to the novices on retreat, of the meaning of transformation into Christ:

"The novice who wants to be like Jesus makes an effort to be obedient and docile, humble and modest, poor and detached from everything, pure and without a stain of sin, compassionate and generous, devout and quiet; Jesus was like that. And furthermore, He was repentant and mortified,

prudent and discreet, orderly, self-sacrificing, with an intense spiritual life, always with God. And He loved all to the point of giving His life on the cross to save us."

"If a novice should make a good will effort to be like Jesus, then Jesus Himself will accept him as a disciple and will sanctify him, will make him happy, will make him apostle, will keep him in His heart, will love him as His own, will bless him when he awakens and will guide him all day, will watch over him always, will keep him from harm and will be with him at his death." (22)

"Among us there is but one teacher: JESUS. And we all work enthusiastically to follow in His footsteps: Thinking like Jesus, speaking like Jesus, seeing things and people from the point of view of Jesus."

"Oh, most beloved Jesus, this is what we promise you with all our soul: we will be like you, honest, humble and good to all! We will be good with the priests whom you love with a preferential love; good with those who love us and good with those who persecute us as they persecuted you; good with the good souls, and good with the poor sinners... Yes, with your grace, we will know how to sacrifice ourselves for all and to see each of our brothers with deep affection... the way you did." (23)

"Our way is Jesus crucified. Be like a host consecrated to Jesus: full of Jesus, our Teacher and model. A Missionary of the Holy Spirit ought to be a voluntary martyr, accepting every cross for the love of Jesus, martyr to his duty even unto death, martyr to his apostolate until he receives the crown. This it is to be a copy of Jesus." (24)

THE LOVE OF JESUS

"May we love Jesus passionately! This is my constant prayer. This is what I ask for me and for each one of you."(25)

"Love Jesus with all your heart, love Him without measure. He is your support, your Light, your Life, your Spouse, your All." (26)

"Jesus loves you, my daughter, as only He knows how. How do you love Him? Truly without limit? Pray as much as you can during the day, go to visit Jesus and thank Him a thousand times for everything He has done for you; return to Him love for love. Be faithful to Jesus! and be happy in his love." (27)

"God, God, God! ... I have repeated it thousands of times and now I also say very often: Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. And when I say JESUS, I see everything that He has done for us... For love of each one of us, He gave up everything. Is it not fitting that we give ourselves to Him and that we love Him without measure?"

"We live each day in the love of Jesus. The gaze of the resurrected Jesus is one of infinite and incomparable love for each one of us. 'He lives always to intercede for us before the Father' (Heb. 7:25), and obtains for us more and more favors, more and more forgiveness, more and more mercy."

"In the midst of the bright, arid periods of faith, my beloved sons, always bear in mind, at all times, that Jesus is looking at you, and that gaze is of pure love, and envelops each of our souls in His very Soul."

"May the same Jesus, who is all our hope, grant us the only thing we wish: to be His, even to the smallest vibration of our spirit." "May Jesus keep us all in His love and in that of his Divine Father, and in that of the Holy Spirit, who together are one God." (28)

"I have just started my retreat two days ago, and I already see myself as a leper. I have the clear vision of a soul full of miseries: it is mine! This is very painful and very good. Ask together with me for a radical change in my life, a complete conversion."

"The goodness of Jesus towards me is so great, so incomprehensible... And my ingratitude so black, everywhere I turn..."

"But I have complete confidence, because His mercy is infinite for those who love him, and, despite all, I truly love Him." (29)

JESUS IN THE EUCHARIST

This chapter would never end if I were to reproduce here everything that Father Félix wrote about the love of Christ in his letters and talks.

I only wish to add a very clear aspect of love for Jesus in the spirituality of our founder, and that is his devotion to Jesus Christ present in the Eucharist. It is true that Christ, as God, is present everywhere, but the man, the son of Mary, He who was called Jesus, He who lived on earth and died for us is only present in the splendor of His glory and in the consecrated hosts. Father Félix was always impressed with the physical presence of the humanity of Christ in our tabernacles. And he made explicit his love and gratitude towards Jesus dedicating many hours of his life, day and night, to the adoration of Christ hidden in the Eucharistic bread.

Very frequently he talked to the novices about "being with Jesus before the tabernacle," of "adoring Jesus present in the consecrated host," of "keeping Jesus company when He is left alone in the churches," of "visiting Jesus many times a day," of "comforting Jesus and making up for so much forgetfulness, so much indifference, for so many sins..."

We will therefore end this chapter with some paragraphs in which Father Félix talks to us about love for Jesus in the Sacrament of the Eucharist:

"The Eucharist is the supreme manifestation of the love of Jesus, not only for His Church, but also for each of us. The Council of Trent declared that: 'Our Savior, before leaving this world to return to His Father, instituted the Sacrament of the Eucharist in which He poured out the riches of His divine love towards mankind.'" (S. 13. C.2)

"If we consider in the Eucharist the three dimensions of love which St. Paul admires in the Incarnation (Eph. 3:18), we will see that they are also present in this admirable Sacrament: there is no limit to the depth, because it is the infinite which gives itself to us. There is no limit to the breadth, either, because it is given to all without exception. Neither is there a limit in time, because it is given at every instant until the end of time."

"Although the Lord should confide to us numerous ministries, the center of our life is the Eucharist. Our soul does not leave this center, where it finds new strength for its apostolate."

"More Tabernacle, my sons, more Tabernacle every day!" (30)

"Our spirituality is one of love for the Eucharistic Jesus. Let us keep our heart in the Tabernacle, next to the Heart of Jesus which is on fire, so that He will kindle in us His fire and His love." (31)

"Christ remains present in each consecrated host, and there he renews His priestly oblation and invites us to an intimate and personal union with Him. That is why the prayer before the Most Blessed Sacrament is our characteristic way of praying and demands of us special fidelity. This is how we unite ourselves to Christ in His constant glorification of the Father and in His intercession for mankind." (32)

"Every day we will offer the Lord an hour of prayer before Jesus, present in the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

"As a practice which conforms to our spirit and mission, we also recommend dedicating time during the night for adoration of Jesus in the Eucharist, even when this would require a special effort." (33)

"I know live a life that is a bit different, with these pains that have nailed me to the feet of Our Lord. I do nothing but tell him that I wish His will be done. I understand that these days of pain are days of grace. And although I am so sick, what consolation it is to be able to spend long hours at the feet of Jesus in our chapel." (34)

SOURCES

1. Talk to the novices. September 14. 1932.
2. To the Daughters of the Holy Spirit, March 3, 1929
3. Notes. September 2, 1929.
4. Letter to the students in Rome. August 1, 1930.
5. Notes. April 17, 1924.
6. Notes. November 14, 1921.
7. To the students in Rome. January 13, 1932.
8. Ibid. October 25, 1931.
9. Talk to the students, January 7, 1929.
10. To the students in Rome. June 20, 1931.
11. Ibid., April 13, 1929.
12. To a (man) religious, September 20, 1928.
13. Draft of the 1929 Constitutions.
14. Talk to the Novices, February 9, 1930.
15. Ibid.
16. To the students in Rome.
17. Talk to students, January 17, 1932.
18. December 25, 1932.
19. Commentary to the constitutions, April 15, 1934.
20. Letter to a priest, March 20, 1934
21. Letter to Fr. José M. Gonzalez, March 19, 1919.
22. Talk to the novices, September 6, 1918.
23. Letter to the students in Rome, undated.
24. To a missionary, December 3, 1923.
25. To Father V. Méndez, December 17, 1923.
26. To a religious woman, June 22, 1924.
27. To a religious woman, December 6, 1928.

28. To the students in Rome, May 5.-1930.
29. Retreat, November 4, 1925.
30. Retreat, April 22, 1934.
31. Letter to Rome, undated.
32. Constitutions No. 48.
33. Ibid. No. 96.
34. To the students in Rome, April 29, 1934.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is also essential to the spirituality of Father Félix, not only because He is the third Person of the Most Holy Trinity, inseparable from the Father and the Son, but also because His action in us is indispensable to follow Jesus as Son of the Father, as Priest-Victim, and as the Anointed by the Spirit of God.

We have seen how much Father Félix insisted on imitating or copying Jesus in all things, but especially in His filial love to the Father. According to Revelation, He who pours into our hearts that filial feeling is the Holy Spirit: "To show us that we are His children, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, and it is this Spirit who makes us cry: Abba Father!" (Gal. 4:6).

And regarding our love for Jesus and our union with Him, we would not have the least possibility if the Holy Spirit were not working in us: "Therefore, I tell you that nobody speaking by the spirit of God says, "Jesus be accursed." And no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). This means that we cannot even have faith in Christ or recognize Him as Lord, without the action of the Holy Spirit in us. Much less could we understand the mystery of His priesthood, of His sacrifice, of His love, of His Cross... That is why when Jesus bid farewell to His disciples, a few hours before His Passion, He told them these words: "I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth" (Jn 16:12).

Father Félix often explained why the symbol of the Holy Spirit (the dove) is over the cross and over the heart of Christ in the symbol of the Works of the Cross, and when he explained it, he always referred to the text of the Letter to the Hebrews: "Through the Holy Spirit, Christ offered himself to God as a blameless sacrifice" (Heb. 9:14).

If the Scriptures show us a Jesus always moved by the Holy Spirit, how much more was He so moved at that peak moment of His redemptive mission, of His obedience to the Father, of His priestly sacrifice...

And so we too, only under the impulse of the Holy Spirit will have the love and the light necessary to live as offerings of holocaust in union with Jesus, Priest and Victim.

And lastly, let us consider that we would be very far from reproducing Christ, if we were not full of the Holy Spirit; because Jesus was that, the Anointed by the Spirit: "I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him; but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'" (Jn 1:32-33).

"Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days" (Lk 4:1). And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the Sabbath day. And he stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor" ... he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Lk. 4:16-21).

"At that very moment he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will" (Lk. 10:21-22).

"For the one whom God sent speaks the words of God. He does not ration his gift of the Spirit" (Jn 3:34).

Let us remember that Jesus asserted that He cured and performed miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit, in such a way that those who said that they worked by the power of Satan were blaspheming against the Holy Spirit (Mat. 12:31).

When we read these texts we have a clear vision that Jesus was a man full of the Holy Spirit, anointed by the Holy Spirit, moved by the Holy Spirit, and destined to "baptize us with the Holy Spirit," that is to say, to share His ANOINTING with us all. Even the names we give Him remind us of this fundamental and often forgotten fact: CHRIST means "The Anointed". And when we say: JESUS CHRIST, we are saying, JESUS THE ANOINTED. And Jesus received from His Father no other anointing but that of the Holy Spirit.

The essential mission of Jesus now and forever is to give us His Spirit as Revelation tells us. The day of Pentecost, Peter explained to the surprised multitude what had just happened:

"God raised this Jesus; of this we are all witnesses. Exalted at the right hand of God, he received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father and poured it forth, as you (both) see and hear" (Acts 2:32-33).

Now, if we are not men and women full of the Spirit of God, moved by the Spirit of God, and capable of communicating the Spirit as instruments of Christ, then, how do we relate to the Anointed, or in what do we resemble Him? How right St. Paul was when he said: "He who has not the Spirit of Christ, is not of Christ." (Rom. 8:9).

We can see clearly, then, why the devotion to the Holy Spirit is not something superimposed on the spirituality of Father Félix, but is someone whose presence is absolutely essential.

Let us now see some selected texts written by our founder in which he speaks to us about the Holy Spirit:

"The words of St. Paul 'The Holy Spirit makes us cry out to God: My Father!' (Gal. 4:6), mean that it is the Holy Spirit who takes us to the Father in the same way that love casts the child into the arms of its mother with shouts of joy. In other words, the Spirit of the Son teaches us to deal with God as our Father. Only He can inflame us with the love of the Divine Father." (1)

"St. Paul tells us: 'Those who are moved by the Holy Spirit, they are the sons of God.' (Rom. 8:14). We are called to be sons of God. But, who really are sons of God? Those whom the Holy Spirit strengthens so they can follow the way of God, after having given them light to know Him. What else can we wish for in this world than to be directed by the Holy Spirit to be more and more sons of God! Everyone who seeks the Holy Spirit obtains the grace of being strengthened and guided by Him." (2)

"What was the essence of the life of Jesus? To be docile to the Holy Spirit in order to obey the will of the Divine Father in everything."

"The same is essential in our life. You are truly religious if the day you die you can truthfully say: Father, since I entered the novitiate I never wanted to do my will, but always yours, with the light and the strength of the Holy Spirit." (3)

"Holy Spirit, today I wish to renew my total consecration to You, because you are the One whom the Father and the Son have sent, you are the Paraclete Jesus promised us. I therefore consecrate to you all my being so that you can possess me completely and have absolute power over me, without limits or restrictions of any kind. I want you to be my Guide, my Light, my Strength, and all the love of my soul. I abandon myself without reservation to your divine will, and I ask for the incomparable grace of always being docile to your inspirations."

"I consecrate my soul so it will always be your temple; my memory so that you will always remind me of the words and actions of Jesus; my heart with all its emotions, so that captivated by the delights of divine love I will find in You interior peace, your consolations, gifts and fruits."

"In short, I consecrate to you my body and all I have and I am, so that, fully possessed by you, Spirit of love, I can be your apostle and bring thousands of souls to love You."

"Love me more and more, and may your love sanctify me and all those I love. Amen." (4)

Father Félix wanted apostles of the Holy Spirit to multiply everywhere. To this end he founded an Association called "Family of the Holy Spirit" (on August 20, 1917). Its slogan was TO LOVE THE HOLY SPIRIT AND MAKE HIM LOVED. At one point it had more than 80,000 members throughout Mexico. In the manual which Father Félix wrote for them, he says:

"We want to love the Holy Spirit enthusiastically. We want to be His untiring apostles. We will not let one day pass without spreading this devotion which brings life, light, strength and love to the soul. Let us look for new ardent friends for the Holy Spirit. Let us make the Spirit of Love be loved; in Him who is Love, let us hope with great trust by this holy apostolate to receive the most precious graces and a special glory."

"The Holy Spirit is God!" We know it and believe it. But we must LIVE OUR FAITH with enthusiasm, and with ardent love. We are engaged in the most sublime of works: To fill the hearts of all Mexicans with the Holy Spirit. And then, what changes there will be in our beloved country! Family of the Holy Spirit, go forward!" (5)

"Yes! Yes! Let everyone be consecrated to the Holy Spirit, the gentlest spirit of the Father and the Son, and let there not exist a single heart where Love, Union and Peace do not abide."

"We firmly believe that the reign of the Holy Spirit on earth will put an end to hatred, will sow fraternal love in our hearts, and unite all persons truly as brothers and sisters, bringing about the only true peace." (6)

"How many souls, desirous of perfection are stagnant because they do not invoke the Holy Spirit, they have forgotten him throughout their spiritual life. They wish to be saints without the Sanctifier!"

"But we cannot ask the Holy Spirit to come and possess us if there are obstacles in us to an intimate union with Him. That is why the monks of old asked the following question of him who wanted to join the monastery: 'Brother, is your heart empty so that the Holy Spirit might fill it?'"

"And it isn't just a matter of receiving the Holy Spirit. It is also necessary to make this treasure bear fruit. How many receive the Holy Spirit in Baptism and Confirmation, and how few are those who cultivate His gifts and friendship!"

"And we, do we truly love Him, consult Him, speak to Him, and are attentive to His inspirations?"

"When we examine the passages in Scripture related to the Holy Spirit one by one, it is soon evident that the same idea recurs in varied forms: the idea of life."

"Today's talk will be about intimacy with Him whom we call Lord and Giver of Life, He who is the Soul of our soul." (7)

"St. Paul says that we were baptized to form only one body, whose soul is the same Spirit, of Whom we were all given to drink (1 Cor 12:13). That means that just like the body was submerged in the water of baptism, so our soul is submerged in the Holy Spirit, and in virtue of this immersion in the Spirit of God, we are united, purified, sanctified and justified, because when we are submerged in the Holy Spirit we become completely impregnated by Him. And a symbol of this

abundance, in the language of Jesus Himself, is the reference to those rivers of living water which will flow eternally from the heart of all who believe in Him." (Jn 7:38) (8)

"God has given us all the Holy Spirit as spiritual director. How wonderful it is to feel that we are not alone in the spiritual life! Men and women of prayer feel it. But often, although the Holy Spirit is with us always (1 Cor. 3:16 and 6:19), and abides in us as in His temple, we do not pay attention to Him, do not consult Him, we do not converse with Him. Prayer is the time when we talk and He answers. This is nothing extraordinary. This is what ought to happen." (9)

"Although the Holy Spirit is omnipotent; He never destroys our freedom. We can therefore oppose His divine action, we can struggle against the Holy Spirit, and we can expel Him from our heart. That is why St. Paul tells the Ephesians not to make the Holy Spirit unhappy and not to extinguish His flame."

"But our free will can also elect to give itself to the Holy Spirit and the fidelity with which we obey increases the rhythm of His action and His efficacy in us."

"Let us make use of all the treasures which God has given us in our state of life, and let us not waste time with useless planning and wishing. Let us be well aware that in the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation we have received sufficient graces to become saints; therefore, instead of asking for more, let us be more faithful and let us apply ourselves to using the riches we already possess."

"We are rich with the riches of God Himself, and we cannot even imagine how great are the treasures which God has put in our hands for us to multiply, by means of a perfect correspondence to the motions of His Spirit." (10)

"Dear daughter, love the Holy Spirit very much and be very attentive to His inspirations, which are very frequent. The Holy Spirit speaks to us internally and often; if we do not hear Him it is because there is a lot of noise in our soul which we ourselves make with our thoughts and imagination. Other times we do listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit, but we turn a deaf ear because He asks us to overcome some obstacle, or make some effort or sacrifice. And there is something which ought to make us very sad. When we say "no" to the Holy Spirit, that grace goes away..." (11)

"All the gifts of the Holy Spirit are valuable and desirable; all are necessary; but perhaps the one we need the most is the gift of fortitude because we are weak, and we tend to have many ups and downs in our spiritual life. This is the reality for many Christians and even of many religious: ups and downs. But the life of a saint is a going up constantly and staying in the conquered heights, and to do that we need the gift of fortitude, to continue onward at all times, without tiring on the only road which goes upward which is Jesus crucified. But, can we perhaps follow this road counting on our own strength? God forbid that we should think so. We will only succeed if we let the Holy Spirit act in us. But letting the Holy Spirit act in us is not a passive attitude but rather an active love which opens its eyes well to follow the paths that the Divine Spirit points out."

"Let us go forward, with the trust which is the product of a passionate love of God. This poor life is only an effort which God asks us to make so that He can follow it up with His grace: 'Not me, but the grace of God that is with me' (1 Cor 15:10). What consoling words!"

"Let each one ask the Holy Spirit, for oneself and for others, the gift of fortitude to substitute our innate weakness." (12)

"Dear sons, consider your sublime vocation and give of yourselves so that the Holy Spirit abide in your souls and possess them fully." (13)

"Study more and more, beloved sons, the theology of the Holy Spirit to give your piety a solid foundation, and to be able to truly love the Third Divine Person." (14)

"Since you are going to be spiritual directors, remember frequently that you are instruments of the Holy Spirit in the work of the sanctification of souls. Therefore, be very devoted to the Divine Spirit, and ask Him constantly for the grace to be men of prayer." (15)

"Under the impulse of the Holy Spirit we will imitate Jesus, in His obedient love of his Father and in His humble love for men."

"Aware that only the Holy Spirit can transform us into Christ, we will consecrate ourselves to Him and will be docile to His inspirations." (16)

"Predestined to reproduce the image of His Son, we will let ourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit until we are transformed into Jesus crucified. Only this Divine Spirit who abides in our hearts will transform us into a permanent offering, together with Jesus, and will lead us to the full knowledge of the mystery of God and of the Cross. Therefore, our vocation consecrates us in a special way to the Holy Spirit and asks us that we be most devoted to this Holy Spirit." (17)

"Receive, Holy Spirit, the complete surrender of all my being, grant me the grace of being my Light, my Guide, and my Strength in each of my actions. I ask of You the grace to be faithful to all your inspirations, and that you make me a true image of Christ Jesus." (18)

We could summarize the spirituality of Father Félix in the following formula: "To transform ourselves into Jesus, doing the will of the Father perfectly under the direction, the light and the strength of the Holy Spirit".

In other writings, Father Félix insists that our following of Jesus ought to be principally as Priests of the Father, moved by the Holy Spirit.

SOURCES

- 1.- Talk to the novices. October 14, 1924.
- 2.- Magazine "The Cross". January, 1927.
- 3.- Talk to students. October 12, 1932.
- 4.- In a notebook. Undated
- 5.- Periodical Pentecostés, April 1924.
- 6.- Manual of the devotion to the Holy Spirit.
- 7.- Retreat to the novices. 1929.
- 8.- The Cross. November 1927.
- 9.- Talk the group of priest. October 1931.
- 10.- Notes for a talk. Undated.
- 11.- To a religious woman. February 6, 1931.
- 12.- To the students in Rome. July 1, 1930.
- 13.- Ibid. January 24, 1931.
- 14.- Ibid. April 8, 1934.
- 15.- Constitutions. No. 202
- 16.- Ibid. Art. 2.
- 17.- Ibid. Art. 8.
- 18.- Manual for the Family of the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER XIX

MARY

We have already mentioned the profound devotion Father Félix had for the Mother of Jesus. But let us not think that this element of our spirituality is simply a pious carry over from the Society of Mary to the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit; that is not so. Mary enters by her own right into the spirituality of the Cross because of her intimate relationship with Jesus, Priest and Victim.

Mary is the model for all those who wish to follow Jesus as Priest and as a perfect offering to the Father.

We see her in the temple in Jerusalem, offering her Jesus to the Father, with a great sense of reality and greater right than any priest at Mass. God Himself wishes to enlighten Mary about the transcendent meaning of that offering, and He sends Simeon to her as a prophet: "Behold, this child is destined to bring about the fall and rise of many in Israel. He will be like a sign for which men struggle, and the intentions of many hearts will be revealed. But for you, all of this will be like a sword that pierces your soul." (Lk. 2:34). "And Mary kept all this in her heart, and kept it in mind." (Lk. 2:19).

And when the time comes for Jesus, it comes for Mary. It is the hour of the Passion, of scorn, of blows, of spittle, of the crucifixion, of agony, of death... "And next to the cross of Jesus was standing His mother." (Jn. 19:25). She was not there as a leaf tossed by the tempest that was unleashed against Jesus. Freely, she had been following in her Son's footsteps, until they reached Mount Calvary and now she was standing there, like the priests who sacrifice a victim to God. And the victim was her beloved Son, and also her own soul, pierced by the sword of a pain greater than the sea... But Mary only repeated the words that summarized her life: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to your word..." (Lk. 1:38).

To live the spirituality of the Cross is exactly to live the life of Mary: To offer to the Father, as the only saving offering, the Son "in whom the Father is well pleased," and offering ourselves with Jesus to do whatever pleases the Father, without limit, unconditionally, without reservations. All for the glory of God, all for the salvation of the brethren, all for love...

Mary did not just live, she LIVES NOW, making that priestly offering of Jesus and of herself to the Father, in that "eternal sanctuary, which is not of this creation, where Christ acts as High Priest, where He offers His blood forever to obtain eternal salvation for us." (Heb. 9:12).

The priesthood of Mary is much more perfect now that she participates fully in the divine knowledge and the eternal love of God Himself. That is why it is so recommended that we offer the Incarnate Word and ourselves THROUGH MARY. What we intend is to unite ourselves to her intentions, which are much wiser than ours are; and unite ourselves to her love which is much more perfect than ours is. In this regard, in No. 10 of the Constitutions of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit, we read:

"The spirituality of the Congregation is expressed by offering the Word Incarnate and offering ourselves with Him to the Father, through Mary for the salvation of the world."

The years Mary, lived on earth after the ascension of her son to heaven are of special interest for us, because during this period in her life Mary was closest to us than ever before. She lived by faith and hope. Like us, she walked in darkness, awaiting the light. She walked with the great

desire to see God, and with the pain of not seeing Him. She walked believing in many promises, without seeing them fulfilled. She walked in love that desires to be with the beloved who is still far. She walked in the faith that feeds on pure faith. She lived like us...suffered like us. And in the meantime her main concern was the Church being born. It was the other part of her Jesus. This was a new "Body of Christ" which had to be fed and cared for and loved with the same tenderness as the Jesus of Bethlehem And Mary offered herself to the Father for the disciples then and for those of today, and all time, and thus exercised her priesthood in patient hope. She obtained for us graces of salvation, with Christ, by Him and in Him.

Everything we have said thus far is perfectly summarized in Nos. 56 and 57 of our Constitutions, which explain why Mary is an integral part of our spirituality:

"Since the Incarnation of the Word, Mary has remained inseparably united to the redeeming and sanctifying work of Christ. In the presentation in the Temple, she made the offering of Jesus to the Father, and later she was at the foot of the Cross, accepting with love the death of her Son, and uniting her own sorrows to the priestly immolation of Christ. Mary was given as Mother by the same Jesus to all the believers, represented in the person of the beloved disciple. Through Mary's powerful intercession, the gift of the Holy Spirit was showered on Pentecost."

"After the Ascension of her Son, Mary brought her maternal mission to its fullness, and with the pain of her loneliness she attained graces for the Church of all times."

Of course, the Marian piety of Father Félix is not limited to the priestly aspect of the life of Mary, or to the years of loneliness, but rather it encompasses all the splendid panorama of Catholic Mariology.

We will now present some selected texts written by Father Félix about devotion to the Mother of Christ. They are all taken from his book entitled "MARY", unless otherwise indicated:

"I am writing a book entitled "MARY" (Her life, her virtues and her worship.). I want to offer this little gift, although it is so poor, to our beloved Mary and I hope that it will serve to make her more loved by others."(1)

"Upon finishing this little work, seeing in Mary so many unique privileges, so many glories, so much maternal goodness, and especially so much intimacy with the three Divine Persons, I have understood more than ever that genial definition of Mary given by St. Epifanius: 'Maria liber incomprehensus'. Mary is a book not understood, impenetrable, because she personifies the unheard of joining of the divine and the human."

"Mary, in the eternal designs of God, was predestined, as no other creature, to collaborate very closely in the mystery of human redemption affected by Jesus Christ, especially because of her participation in the Incarnation and the Passion and Death of Jesus."

"The predestination of Mary to divine motherhood, establishes such an intimate connection between the Word Incarnate and the Virgin Mother that it creates between these two souls a communion of prerogatives and of graces. In virtue of that association established by God, the humble Virgin of Nazareth has a special place assigned to her in all the mysteries of the Savior, from Bethlehem to Calvary, and from the perfect obedience to the Father until the glorification, in body and soul, in the splendor of eternal life."

"See for yourselves how magnificently Mary implements her priesthood: in Nazareth she accepts, in complete freedom, to give heaven and earth the first pure Host which is going to substitute for

the holocausts which God no longer desires... Mary is like the first altar in which Jesus offers Himself for us; in her begins the celebration of that Mass which will be consummated in a bloody way on the Cross."

"Oh, Virgin Mother, you lived a fully priestly life. You begot the Victim of the new worship and with your special power as a Mother offered it to the Most High for the sins of the world, and when you gave us your Jesus from Bethlehem until Calvary, you gave us life in Him and that is why you are Mother to all of us. Because, isn't she who gives life, a Mother?"

"Mary, being the creature most beloved of God, was doubtlessly the woman who suffered most in this world. We would only understand the magnitude of her suffering if we understood the immensity of her love for Jesus. And why did God wish her to suffer so much? Because in His loving providence, He wanted Mary to be who would be most intimately associated in everything to her son, and would merit with Him the greatest recompense, for her obedience and heroic fidelity, so that in her we would have a constant example."

"In the sacrifice of Calvary, Jesus is at the same time Priest and Victim. He is Victim because He is sacrificed, but He is also the Priest who immolates and offers: "No one takes my life. I give it up voluntarily." (Jn. 10:18). And Mary also has that role of priest and victim. She is priest because she freely accepts the death of someone she can call HER offering, for the salvation of humanity; and she is victim with Christ because her soul was pierced and her heart crucified contemplating the martyrdom of Him whom she loved more than her own life."

"Let us not ask why Jesus did not save His Most Holy Mother the agony, so terrible and painful to her, of His death on the Cross. It is evident that He wanted to associate her to His life and to His work more so at that moment in which the redemption of humanity was consummated. And Mary accepted it all with such perfect charity that St. Alphonsus Liguori applied to her the same words that St. John uses referring to God the Father: "So much did Mary love the world that she gave us her Son, so that we might enjoy eternal life."

"The Redemption obtained by Jesus Christ is the only true, total, superabundant cause of all our salvation, without its being necessary to add anything else for the Sacrifice of Jesus for us to be justified and sanctified. It is God Himself who in His great goodness has wished to make us partners of Christ in his redemptive work. It is the same Jesus who tells us: "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few: pray to the Owner of the harvest to send more laborers to his fields." (Mt. 9:37-38).

"In different ways we are all God's workers, collaborators with Christ for the redemption of humankind. Some offer prayers, others sacrifices, others preaching, others Christian education to their children, so the effort and the merits of each one benefit all the people of God. This is the dogma of the Communion of Saints, which we recite in the Creed, almost always without understanding it. It means the sharing of spiritual goods that exists among all believers.

"It is in this area in which the Mother of Jesus has collaborated like no one else, and in a unique and exceptional way in our salvation, and for this reason she has merited the title of Co-Redemptrix more than anyone else."

"For Mary it is the same to be Mother of Jesus and our Mother, because Jesus has wanted to make us ONE with Him: One vine with its branches (Jn. 15:5). One body united to its Head (1 Cor 12:27).

"For her maternal heart it is the same to love Jesus and to love us, because Jesus is our Brother and we are the children of the Father. This certainty of being united to Jesus is basic to our filial love for Mary: and we call her with all confidence: 'Our heavenly Mother, our most loving Mother, our tender Mother.'"

"In the documents of Vatican Council II, we find support for calling Mary "Our Mother":

"Mary is Mother as regards the life of grace, because she cooperated in a unique way to the restoration of our supernatural life, conceiving Christ, giving Him birth, feeding Him, offering Him to the Father, and suffering together with Her Son while He died on the Cross.

"And with reason the Fathers of the Church consider Mary not a mere passive instrument in the mystery of Redemption, but rather an active worker for the salvation of men, by her faith and her obedience to God." (LG 56).

"Without a doubt we owe much to our mother on earth; but let us raise our eyes on high, to our Mother in heaven, who loves us even more than our mother on earth. The Blessed Virgin, the Mother of all the Saints, the same Mother of Jesus, is the Mother of each of us."

"Once received in heaven, the Mother of Jesus and our Mother does not cease to collaborate with Christ for the salvation of the faithful. Her love, her interest and her intercession in our favor have become universal and more efficacious, so that with just reason she is called: our advocate, Auxiliatrix, Help of Christians, refuge of sinners and our Mediatrix before her Son, Our Lord."

"There is a phrase in your letter which has made an impact on my soul, and it is a cry of love and gratitude to the Blessed Virgin. I love her much more now, after having written the book "MARY", because I had to read many very interesting things about our beloved Mother of heaven. Since then, aside from my ordinary meditation, I dedicate special time every day to meditate on the life of Mary. This morning I was thinking about her life of intimacy with Jesus in their little house of Nazareth."(2)

"We search for the will of God. In the first place, we must look for it in terms of love. And what are we asked to do? To love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, but also to love His creatures, especially those He loved the most. The first place belongs to the Most Holy Mother of Jesus."(3)

"Regarding the love of Mary, our model is Jesus", Fr. Félix used to say frequently.

"I thank God because I have seen that you look for Him anxiously in all the acts of your religious life as Missionaries of the Holy Spirit. But our life is difficult and we need someone to help us. Look for constant support in the maternal heart of Mary. She wants it more than anyone else, and she will help you in everything you are doing and everything you want to do."

"When you participate in the Eucharist, take your place very near the Mother of Jesus, there at the foot of the Cross, where St. John was. She will teach you to offer this holy sacrifice."

"Win in this life the place that you wish to occupy in the heart of Mary for all eternity."(4)

"Oh, Mary, my beloved Mother, I consecrate myself to you with all the energy of my soul. Today, tomorrow and all the days of my life I want to be yours, I wish to unite my life intimately to yours, and to try to imitate your love, your purity, and your humility."(5)

In a notebook, we found this small "letter" from Father Félix to the Blessed Virgin. It is dated March 29, 1937. He only had a few more months to live:

"My most beloved Mother: I greet you with all the love of my soul and I want to share a great joy with you.

"I feel very clearly, very strongly, that Jesus, in His infinite mercy has accepted me as His own, in a special way so that I may become converted in these last days and will be faithful to the graces of God.

"I write to you, Mother, to humbly ask you to help me respond fully to the love of Jesus. With you, I can do all things!

"Your son, Félix, who loves you so much, and asks for your blessing."

Father Félix summarized his spirituality in the following lines:

"To be hosts in honor of the Father, in union with Jesus and Mary, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, for the salvation of all."

We will end this chapter with an enlightening quotation from Pope Paul VI:

"Given the singular place which Mary occupies in the redemptive plan of God, she deserves a special level of worship."

"This intimate worship of Mary in no way separates us from the only fountain of truth, life and grace which is Christ; on the contrary, it leads us to Him, unites us to Him and allows us to resemble Him. Because devotion to Mary, far from being an end in itself, is a means essentially ordered to orient us to Christ, and in this way to unite us to the Father in the love of the Spirit."(6)

SOURCES

1. To Rome, October 6, 1934.
2. Letter to a student, August 23, 1936.
3. Talk to the Novices, May 8, 1932.
4. Letter to a brother coadjutor, April 12, 1936.
5. Talk to fourth year students of the Apostolic School.
6. Talk, November 21, 1964.

APPENDIX

DOCUMENTED CHRONOLOGY OF THE LIFE OF FÉLIX DE JESÚS ROUGIER

- 1859 December 17th, the Servant of God born in Meilhaud, Auvergne, France; Diocese of Clermont-Ferrand (Summ 1. p. 21, par. 46)
- 1859 December 18th, baptized in the parish of Meilhaud. Received the names Benedict-Félix (Positio 1, p. 265, doc. 2)
- 1861 until 1865 lived with his parents in Rafayet, south of Meilhaud, Auvergne, France (Proc. Ap. Vol. 1, pp. 115)
- 1864 August 26th, his brother Manuel was born (Biography of Father Félix by P. Padilla, [henceforth Biography] Vol. I, p. 68).
- 1868 July 30th, his I brother Stanislaus was born (Biography Vol. I, p. 98).
- 1868 to 1872, the Servant of God boarded at the School of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart, at Saint-Germain-Lembron, Auvergne (Proc. Ap. Vol. I, p. 116).
- 1869 May 10th, First Communion of the Servant of God, at the Parish of Meilhaud (Positio super scriptis, Conspectus, p. 2).
- 1870 to 1872, lived with his parents in Breuil, Auvergne, France (Biography, Vol. I, p. 61).
- 1872 Went with his family to live in Les Iles, Auvergne, France (Biography, Vol. I, p. 131).
- 1874 to 1878 studied high school at the Seminary-School of Le Puy, which he entered on April 10th (Summ I. p. 21, par. 47).
- 1878 September 24th, entered the novitiate of the Marist Fathers at Sainte-Foi-les-Lyons (Summ 1, p. 4, par. 5).
- 1879 September 24th, made his first profession in the Society of Mary (Summ 1. p. 23, par. 51.).
- 1879 to 1880, studied Philosophy in the Marist Scholasticate of Belley, France, near the Swiss border (Biography, Vol. I, p. 155).
- 1880 to 1882, taught at St. Joseph School, Toulon, France (Biography, Vol. I, p. 164).
- 1880 September 5th, received the clerical tonsure (Positio 1. p. 285, Doc. 5).
- 1882 March 17th, the Servant of God met Don Bosco (Summ. 1, p. 101, par. 258).
- 1882 December 17th, received Minor Orders (Positio 1. p. 285, Doc. 5).
- 1882 to 1884, Prefect of Discipline at the Marist Boarding School of La Seyne (Biography, Vol. I, p. 175).
- 1883 February 2nd, Perpetual vows in the Society of Mary (Positio 1. p. 284, Doc. 4,b).
- 1883 February 17th, received the Subdiaconate at Toulon (Positio 1. p. 285, Doc. 5).
- 1884 October, begins theological studies at the Marist Scholasticate in Barcelona, Spain (Biography, Vol. I, p. 194).
- 1886 April 10th, was ordained a Deacon in Barcelona, Spain (Positio. 1, p. 285, Doc. 5).
- 1887 September 24th, was ordained a Priest in the city of Lyon, France (Positio 1. p. 285, Doc. 5).
- 1887 September, was named Professor of Sacred Scripture at the Marist Scholasticate in Barcelona, Spain (Summ 1. p. 24, par. 55).
- 1891 was appointed Director of the Marist Apostolic School in Barcelona, Spain (Biography, Vol. J, p. 216).
- 1892 from October 18th to 21st, participated in the National Catholic Congress of Seville, Spain. Presented a paper on Egyptology as it relates to Sacred Scripture (Biography, Vol. 1, p. 211).
- 1895 July 12th, was sent to Colombia (Summ 1, p. 24, par. 55).
- 1895 November 17th, settled with his community in Neiva, Colombia (Positio super scriptis, Conspectus, p. 3).
- 1897 January, was named Superior of the Community of Ibaguè and Superintendent of the Community in La Neiva, Colombia (Biography, Vol. II, p. 63).

- 1899 April 12th, saintly death of the mother of the Servant of God in Les Iles, France (Biography, Vol. II, p. 131).
- 1899 October 18th, the revolution known as the "Three Years War" broke out in Colombia (Summ. 1, p. 24, par. 56).
- 1899 April 28th, Bishop Esteban Rojas, Ordinary of the place, named the Servant of God Assistant Vicar General (Positio 1. p. 286, Doc. 7).
- 1900 February 16th, the Servant of God named Administrator and Chaplain of the Military Hospital (Biography, Vol. II, p. 143).
- 1900 from the 16th to the 23th of April preached Spiritual Exercises to the Clergy (Biography, Vol. II, p. 146).
- 1900 June 19th, the Commander General of the First Division of Tolima named the Servant of God military Chaplain (Biography, Vol. II, p. 141).
- 1900 the Servant of God promoted the work of charity "Bread of St.- Anthony", which he had founded (Biography, Vol. II, p. 146).
- 1900 November 30th, ordered by the Superior General of the Marists to leave Colombia (Biography, Vol. II, p.158).
- 1901 December 9th, the Marists left Colombia for good and go to Mexico (Biography, Vol. II, p. 169).
- 1902 February 10th, the Servant of God and his fellow Marists arrived in Mexico. He was appointed Marist Viceprovincial in Mexico and Pastor of the French Parish in Mexico City (Summ 1, p. 24, par. 56).
- 1903 February 4th, meeting of Father Félix with the Venerable Servant of God, Concepción Cabrera de Armida (Summ 1. p. 25, par. 57).
- 1903 April 9th, calling of the Servant of God to found the Congregation of the Religious of the Cross (Biography, Vol. III, p. 23).
- 1903 June 13th, the Servant of God, Mrs. Armida asked Father Félix to be her Spiritual Director (Biography, Vol.III, p. 42).
- 1903 Father Félix participated in the resurgence of the Sisters of the Cross of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Biography, Vol. III, p. 41).
- 1904 July 15th, the Servant of God traveled to France to speak with his General Superior about the Religious of the Cross (Summ. 1, p. 24, p.56).
- 1904 August to September 1909, time of waiting and trial for the Servant of God in Barcelona, Spain (Summ. 1, 24, par. 56).
- 1905 March 25th, death of Father Antonio Martin, General Superior of the Society of Mary (Biography, Vol. III, p. 139).
- 1905 August 13th, election of new General of the Society of Mary, Father Juan Raffin (Biography, Vol. III, p. 143).
- 1908 because he had been sick since February, during the months of July and August, the Servant of God was sent to recuperate to La Bourboule, Auvergne, France. There he held several interviews with Father Juan Raffin, new General Superior of the Marists (Biography, Vol. III, p. 182-4).
- 1909 September, the Servant of God at Saint-Chamond, France (Summ 1, p. 24, par. 56).
- 1911 April 11th, the Servant of God went to Rome with the permission of his Superiors. He met with Cardinal Vives, Prefect of the Congregation of Religious (Biography, Vol. III, pp. 221 and following).
- 1911 Several Mexican Bishops wrote to the Pope asking his permission to establish the Congregation of the Religious of the Cross and for the return of Father Félix (Biography, Vol. III, p. 246).
- 1913 The Servant of God, Bishop Ramon Ibarra y Gonzalez, in his own name and that of several other Bishops, requested from the Holy See permission to establish the Religious of the Cross. Pope Pius X granted the request on December 16 changing the name to Missionaries of the Holy Spirit. (Positio 1. p. 287, Doc. 8).

- 1914 January 17th, Father Juan Raffin, General Superior of the Society of Mary, lent Father Félix for two years to be in charge of the foundation of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit (Biography, Vol. III, p.265).
- 1914 August 14th, the Servant of God arrives at Veracruz, Mexico (Biography, Vol. III, p. 273).
- 1914 December 25th, founding of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit (Summ 1. p. 80, par. 195).
- 1916 March 7th, the permission was renewed for two more years (Positio 1. p. 288, Doc. 9).
- 1917 February 1st, death of Msgr. Ramon Ibarra, Archbishop of Puebla, Mexico, Protector of the Works of the Cross and first Missionary of the Holy Spirit (Biography, Vol. III, p. 308).
- 1917 February 4th, first Profession of the first two religious of the Congregation (Biography, Vol. III, p. 314).
- 1918 March 20th, the permission was renewed for two more years (Positio 1. p. 289, Doc. 9c) .
- 1918 August 18th, the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit took charge of the Church of the Holy Spirit in Tacubaya, D.F. (Proc. Ap., Vol. 1, p. 186).
- 1919 December 8th, establishment of the first Apostolic School in Tlalpan, D.F. (Proc. Ap., Vol. I, p. 156).
- 1919 Establishment of the Scholasticate of Philosophy and Theology in Tlalpan, D.F. (Summ 1. p. 82, par. 201).
- 1919 December 13th, arduous trip of the Servant of God to France and Belgium in response to an urgent request of the Greville family (Biography, Vol. III, pp. 348 and ff).
- 1920 May 6th, religious profession of the principal collaborators of the Servant of God (Biography, Vol. III, p. 372).
- 1920 month of June, Pope Benedict XV granted a new permission to the Servant of God, "ad quinquennium sed non ultra" (Summ 1. p. 32, par. 74).
- 1920 October 29th, establishment of a Residence in Morelia (Summ 1. p. 32, par. 74).
- 1921 August to October, another trip of the Servant of God to Europe due to urgent problems of the Greville family. Visit to his General Superior (Biography, Vol. IV, pp. 41 and ff).
- 1922 1st of August, death of John Ruffin, Superior General of the Society of Mary (Biography, Vol. IV, p. 65).
- 1923 August 11th, Father Ernesto Rieu was elected new General Superior of the Society of Mary (Biography, Vol. IV, p. 65).
- 1924 January 12th, founding of the Daughters of the Holy Spirit in San Luis Potosi, Mexico (Proc. Ap. Vol. 1, p. 178).
- 1924 October 12th, the Servant of God succeeded in having Mexico consecrated to the Holy Spirit (Biography, Vol. IV, pp. 28 and ff)
- 1925 January 9th, Father Ernest Rieu granted the Servant of God permission to change from the Society of Mary to that of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit (Positio 1. p. 280, Doc. 10a).
- 1925 June 11th, trip of the Servant of God to France, Belgium, England and Italy to deal with important matters (Biography, Vol. IV, p. 76 and ff).
- 1925 September 11th, saintly death of the father of the Servant of God (Biography, Vol. IV, p. 82 and ff).
- 1925 December 16th, the Servant of God agreed to take charge of the Church of Santa Clara, in Mexico City (Biography, Vol. IV, p. 115.)
- 1925 December 28th, the Servant of God agreed to take charge of the Santuario de los Remedios in the Archdiocese of Mexico (now Tlalnepantla) Proc. Ap., Vol. I, p. 256).
- 1926 February 9th, the Holy See issued an indult for the change of the Servant of God from the Society of Mary to the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit (Positio 1. p. 291, Doc. 10b).
- 1926 March 28th, the Servant of God made perpetual vows as a Missionary of the Holy Spirit (Positio 1. p. 293, Doc 10d).
- 1926 The Servant of God established a House of Studies in Rome (Summ 1..p.32, par. 74).
- 1926 Founding of a community in Havana, Cuba (Summ 1. p. 32, par. 34).

- 1929 May, the Servant of God agreed to take charge of the Interdiocesan Seminary, Castroville, Texas, USA. (Proc. Ap., Vol. 11, p. 156).
- 1929 June 29th, establishment of a Home for Priests (Biography, Vol. IV p. 295).
- 1930 September 15th, founding of the Guadalupana Missionaries of the Holy Spirit (Biography; Vol. IV, p. 433).
- 1931 December 7th, the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit take charge of the National Expiatory Church of San Felipe de Jesús, in Mexico City (Biography, Vol. IV, pp. 325 and ff).
- 1931 December 12th, Decretum Laudis and temporal approval of the Constitutions (Proc. Ap., Vol. 1, p. 151).
- 1932 from May 15th to 23rd, first General Chapter of the Congregation. The Servant of God was unanimously elected General Superior (Summ 1, p. 81, par. .198).
- 1936 May 28th, establishment of a Residence in Celaya, Gto. (Summ 1. p. 65, par. 156).
- 1936 October 25th establishment of a Residence in San Luis Potosi, SLP (Summ 1. p. 32, par. 74).
- 1937 March 3rd, saintly death of the Servant of God Concepción Cabrera de Armida in Mexico City (Biography, Vol. IV, p. 479).
- 1937 September 24th, Golden Jubilee of the ordination of the Servant of God (Proc. Ap., Vol. I, p. 255).
- 1937 from the 17th to the 23rd of October, Second General Chapter. The Servant of God unanimously reelected General Superior (Summ. p. 81, par. 198).
- 1937 December 11th, establishment of a Residence in Saltillo, Coahuila, (Biography, Vol. IV, p. 345).
- 1937 December 12th, foundation of the Oblate Sisters of Jesus Priest (Proc. Ap., Vol. I, p. 315).
- 1938 January 10th, holy death of the Servant of God in Mexico City (Positio 1. Doc 11).
- 1938 February 8th, solemn funeral service at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, on the hill of Tepeyac (Biography, Vol. IV, p. 493).
- 1955 to 1958, Introduction to the Process of Beatification of the Servant of God in the Archbishopric of Mexico (Decretum Introductionis Causae, p. 4).
- 1974 February 15th, Decretum super revisione scriptorum Servi Dei.
- 1981 December 15th, Decretum super Introductione Causae.
- 1982 June 21st to August 11th, 1984, initiation of the Apostolic Process in the Archbishopric of Mexico.
- 1986 February 27th, Decretum de validitate processuum.
- 2000 July 1st, Declared Venerable by John Paul II.