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YOUR HOME

A Church In Miniature



YOUR HOME, A CHURCH IN MINIATURE



"The Christian must make his home holy . . . The Christian home must realize the Christian ideal."—Bishops' Statement on Secularism, 1948.

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INTRODUCTION

A rapidly developing interest in the restoration of family religious practices has led to a pressing demand for such booklets as this one. We trust it will do much to help promote this very worthy cause.

Your Home, A Church in Miniature should serve as interesting reading for individuals in the family circle, and it should prove useful to study groups aiming at preparing themselves to meet the threat of the secularization of the home today.

The publication consists for the most part of contributions made at various family life conferences, sponsored over the past five or six years by the Family Life Bureau of the National Catholic Welfare Conference.

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I

Your Home, A Church in Miniature

Rev. Edgar Schmiedeler, O.S.B., Ph.D.

REFERRING several years ago to marriage and the family, in their statement on "The Christian in Action," the Bishops of the United States noted the need for professing the Christian truths of stability and sanctity of the marriage bond and for keeping clearly in mind the true purpose of marriage as constituted by Almighty God. But they did more. This alone, they said, was not sufficient. "The Christian," they added, "must make his home holy—the Christian home must realize the Christian ideal."

There is a great challenge in these words for us today. Referring to family life generally in this country, we must admit that secularism has made very extensive headway. As the Bishops pointed out in their statement, we have today, for the first time, an experiment in secularizing the home. They would willingly admit, of course, that we have many very excellent Christian homes in our midst. But at the same time it cannot be questioned that there are also great numbers that have been invaded by the secular spirit, that have become more or less indifferent to religion and the things of religion.

The antidote is, of course, religion within the family circle, the spiritualizing of the home. It is, therefore, of profound importance

that those who are founding a family, and those who are living a family life, strive zealously to "make their homes holy," to bring to full flowering in their family life "the Christian ideal."

If there is anything the world needs today, it is deeply religious families. If there is anything our own beloved country needs, cursed as it is with a secularist spirit and by what Pope Pius XI has called in his encyclical on "Christian Marriage" a "perverse morality," it is precisely, deeply religious fathers, saintly mothers, holy children and God-fearing families.

How is that need to be met? How, specifically, can the antidote of religion be applied? How, in detail, can we spiritualize our family life? These are precisely the things we aim to give answers to in this book.

The family, like the individual, gets much spiritual aid from the Church. She is the divinely constituted, organized expression of religion. It is to her that we logically look with regard to religion. Through her sacraments, through the Mass, through a variety of devotions which she fosters, she brings man into relation with God and channels out to him the redemptive waters of salvation. The Church, in other words, constantly holds out help

to married couples, to fathers and mothers, for the fulfillment of their duties to God and man.

The Home, A Little Church

However, religion is not only a matter for the Church. It is also, and very much so, a matter for the home. And it is in this regard that we are particularly interested here.

It has always had a place on the home hearth. The old pagan Romans, for instance, had as their war-cry, "*pro aris et focis*," "for our altars and our hearthstones."

But particularly has religion had a place in the Christian home. Indeed, to such an extent has this been true that from early Christian times it has been looked upon as a Church in miniature. Thus, we find the term, "little Church," applied to it by St. John Chrysostom in one of the earliest centuries of the Church's existence.

St. Augustine, who lived but shortly after, touched upon this same idea when, in addressing a group of fathers of families in his own Diocese of Hippo, he referred to them as bishops—"my fellow bishops."

Again St. Benedict, almost a contemporary of both Saints Chrysostom and Augustine, referred to the monastic homes of his religious, as "the houses of God."

And so in other ways was this view of the time expressed. The father was looked upon in a sense as a priest in the little church, the home. Evidences of religion were present within this sanctu-

ary. Religious devotions within it, all the family members participating, were customary.

The history of the Middle Ages—the "Ages of Faith," as they are called—shows the same picture of the Christian home. Family religious practices and customs were commonplace in the homes. They were the expected thing. As a result, there was little room for secularism in the homes of the time. Everywhere there was evidence of God and of the things of God.

And we may well add that, if Catholics of our day wish to keep the spirit of secularism from their home, if they wish to make God honored and respected therein, they may well look again to those old and tried religious customs of the Christian families of the past, and reintroduce them, with adaptations suited to the times, into their own homes. There are many possibilities for this. We shall examine some of them in the following.

The Sacramentals

Let us look, first of all, in this connection to the so-called "little sacraments," the sacramentals instituted by the Church. These should definitely find a place in the family circle. Many of them even have a direct bearing on family life. A relatively simple but highly important means of union between the altar and the home, they are so many media for channeling from the one great spiritual reservoir, given into the Church's keeping by Christ, the living and

transforming waters of grace from the Savior's fountains.

A sacramental might be defined as an object set apart and blessed by the Church to excite good thoughts, to increase devotion, and thus to remit venial sin. "The Catholic Encyclopedia Dictionary" (p. 467) defines and explains the term as follows:

It is "an action or object which in its performance or use bears some resemblance to a sacrament. . . . If used in accordance with the mind of the Church, sacramentals are the means of receiving actual grace to do good and avoid evil, of protection of soul and body, and the remission of venial sin. These effects are entirely dependent upon the mercy of God who regards the prayers of the Church and the good dispositions of those who use them. They therefore differ from the sacraments both in operation and effect; but they are an extension of the sacramental principle of using material objects to signify spiritual truths and processes, and employing the unity of man, of matter and spirit."

The same volume distinguishes six different classes of sacramentals, saying that "the largest class" consists of blessings—"including the consecration of Kings, the blessing of abbots, churches, houses, bells, etc., the blessings and use of candles, palms and ashes, and many other objects, medals, scapulars, images, etc."

We might add that the blessing given by a priest is a sacramental.

The same is true of the blessings we give ourselves as we make the Sign of the Cross, with or without holy water. So, too, is holy water itself, used in so many blessings of the Church, a sacramental.

Actually, there is a great multiplicity of sacramentals. Thus, there are many blessings that might be called agricultural sacramentals; that is, they relate to farm and field, to crops and livestock, to the things of the countryside. Again, there are others that might be termed "industrial." Such are, for instance, blessings for an auto, a dynamo, an airplane, a printing press, a typewriter.

Then, too, many blessings are for individuals. We shall refer to some of these later. Many blessings, whether for persons or things, relate very definitely to the home and family life. These last mentioned can be made to play a highly important part in driving secularism from the home hearth, in keeping God and the things of God within the family circle.

Hence, they are much in place in that miniature church, the home. Those who may be too sophisticated to make use of them are probably at least dangerously near the brink of a secularized family life.

We have no intention of giving here a complete treatise on the sacramentals. But we shall make reference in the following to such as pertain in some way to family life.

Holy Water

First of all, in speaking of blessings and blessed articles, we may well think of Holy water. This blessed water is used for many purposes and in conjunction with many blessings. It should be on hand in every Catholic home.

The formula the Church uses in blessing it is a very fitting one. It reads as if it were meant specifically for home use. Here are some of its words:

“Whatever it sprinkles in the homes of the faithful, be it cleansed and delivered from harm. Let such homes enjoy a spirit of goodness and an air of tranquility, freed from baneful and hidden snares. By the sprinkling of this water, may everything opposed to the safety and repose of them that dwell therein be banished, so that they may possess the well-being they seek in calling upon Thy Holy Name, and be protected from all evil.”

Holy water may be blessed by the priest at any time. Very commonly, however, it is blessed before the principal Mass on Sunday and is then used for the *Asperges* that precedes that Mass. In many churches it is kept in a large crock or other vessel at the rear of the church. From there the people can take it in containers to their homes.

At least one holy water font should be in every home. There will be a number of opportunities to use it during the day. If used regularly in the evening—for in-

stance, for the blessing of the children before they retire—this practice will be a consistent reminder to keep a supply on hand.

Another type of holy water is *Easter water*. It is so called because of the fact that it is distributed to the people on Holy Saturday, the day before Easter. Part of the water is used for the blessing of *baptismal water*, the remainder is given to the parishioners. It is used for various purposes in the homes, but particularly for the blessing of the Easter food. In some places it is used for the solemn blessing of the homes of the parishioners by the priest on Holy Saturday.

Besides the usual holy water, Easter water and baptismal water, there is still a fourth kind of holy water. This is known as *water of consecration*. It is used in the consecration of churches, altars and altar stones. It is also called Gregorian water, after Pope Gregory IX, who ordered its use.

The Dwelling Place

The family home or dwelling place should be blessed. Where that is done, there really should not be such a difference between cottage and castle, between hut or mansion or palace. Any and all of these will then be in a special sense a “little church,” God’s blessing resting thereon.

The beautiful words of this particular blessing read, in part, as follows: “that God may deign to send his holy angel from heaven to guard, cherish, protect, visit

and defend all who dwell in it." The blessing may be given at any time.

There is also a *blessing for a new home*. In giving it, the priest prays God to give to those who dwell therein "the abundance of the dew of heaven, and food of the fatness of the earth," and that He let "their desires and their prayers find fulfillment in Thy mercy."

Mention has already been made of the *blessing of the home with Easter water*. There is still a fourth blessing for it, namely, that of the *Three Kings*, given at the feast of Epiphany, or within its Octave. Among certain nationalities this blessing is still faithfully carried out.

With chalk, especially blessed for the occasion, the priest writes the following legend at the top of the door of the house: 19-C-M-B-52. The three letters stand for the three kings who were traditionally known as Caspar, Melchoir, and Baltassar. The numbers, of course, indicate the year in which the blessing was given. Incense is used in this blessing, presumably in remembrance of the incense offered by the Three Kings.

In religious houses the legend is written over the door of every room. Like the other blessings of homes, this one is meant to invoke protection over the mind and body of those who dwell within. In this instance the priest prays:

"Bless, O Lord, Almighty God, this home, that in it there may be

health, chastity, strength of victory, humility, goodness, and industry, a fullness of law and the action of graces through God the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and that this blessing may remain on this home and on those who frequent it. Through Christ our Lord. Amen."

It is unfortunate today, that homes are often not blessed. This may be accounted for in part by our modern mobility and lack of home ownership. But it is also due in some measure to carelessness and neglect on the part of the faithful. It is probably also due to the large size of many parishes and the preoccupations of the clergy, particularly at the time of such feasts of the Church as Epiphany and Easter.

Evidence of Religion

Sacred furnishings in the home, evidences of religion on the walls of the home, such as sacred pictures, images, crucifixes, should also be blessed. If these are blessed, they are sacramentals.

The Church prays, in blessing them, that "those that behold them may be led to contemplate and imitate the lives and holiness of those depicted" and "that those inspired by the pictures to honor the saint in question, may by his merits, obtain grace in this life and eternal glory in the next."

It should be unnecessary to say that pictures of the Holy Family, the Sacred Heart and the Blessed Virgin should be in every Catholic home. Crucifixes, too, should adorn

the walls. Statuettes and a little altar or shrine might also very fittingly be placed in these churches in miniature. Blessed candles and blessed palms should be given a place. We shall add a few words further about these various sacramentals.

The Crucifix: A blessed Crucifix or representation of Christ on the Cross should be found in a prominent place in the home. It is a most widely used sacramental. It vividly expresses Christ's love for us. And certainly Christ's death upon the cross for us should by all means be kept before our minds in our daily lives within our homes. Nothing will serve this purpose so well as will a crucifix prominently displayed in the home.

Sacred Pictures: As already stated, there should be at least a few sacred pictures in every home. All the better if there are one or more in every room. They are reminders of Our Lord, His Blessed Mother, the Saints, and of religious truths. They help to stir the soul, to instill devotion, to keep away distraction.

Blessed Candles: Candles that have been blessed by the Church should be available for use in every home. They are age-old and inspiring sacramentals, and can be used for a variety of purposes on the family hearth. They can be used on the Blessed Virgin's May shrine and on the "throne" of the Sacred Heart. They can be used in time of sickness or storm. They can also be used for gala occasions, on special feast days

and on religious anniversary celebrations in the home.

The candle is rich with meaning. The wax represents the Body of Christ; the wick represents His Soul; the flame represents His Divinity. A lighted candle also represents the Gospel of Christ. Again, it stands for His Church, the pillar and ground of truth. It is a symbol of our faith.

Candles are blest by the Church on the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, often referred to as Candlemas Day. It is customary for Catholics to have candles blest for their home on that day.

At baptism the Church gives the newly-baptized a candle as a symbol of his faith. In the case of the baptism of infants this candle is held by the sponsor while the minister of the sacrament pronounces these solemn words:

"Receive this burning light so as to keep thy baptism without blame. Keep the commandments of God, so that when our Lord shall come to His Nuptials, thou mayest meet Him together with all the saints. . ."

Among some peoples, the baptismal candle is kept and later made to serve as the First Communion candle of the child, and even later still as the bridal candle and death candle of the individual.

Blessed vigil lights can also be had for the home.

Blessed Palms: Palms are blest by the Church on Palm Sunday. They are afterward distributed to

the faithful. The purpose of this treasured sacramental of the Church is to remind us of the triumphal entry of Our Lord into Jerusalem which occurred shortly before His Passion and Death. It is customary to place the palms that are taken home from church over a crucifix or picture in the home, or otherwise to display them in the house. Their presence should encourage us to triumph over ourselves, over our temptations and wayward inclinations.

Home Altar or Shrine: Every home-church should have at least some little altar or shrine, a place for the family to kneel and pray. It should, of course, be blessed. It need not be pretentious — perhaps only a little table or a shelf affixed to the wall. On it may well be placed a crucifix and a few candles; above it, a sacred picture. A vigil light can be kept available for use at least on special occasions. Children, properly instructed, will consider it a privilege to care for this little domestic shrine.

Bridal Chamber: Speaking of the blessing of the home and its various appurtenances and religious ornaments, it should be well to remind that the Church also has a special blessing for the bridal chamber. The words used in bestowing this blessing are beautiful in their significance. They are a plea to God “that they who share it establish themselves in Thy peace, conform themselves to Thy Will and as the years increase, may be enriched with fullness of

life and come finally to Thy Heavenly Kingdom.”

It must be hoped that young couples today are not too sophisticated to request this blessing. Where its influence resides, one may rest assured that the unnatural vices that have become so prevalent in modern married life will be denied all entrance. In view of the conditions of the times, it would seem particularly unfortunate that this blessing is so universally neglected today. It should be speedily brought into use again.

Blessings for Family Members

There are many blessings connected with marriage and family life. Not a few of these are for individual members of the family. A blessing given an individual by the Church or in the name of the Church is a sacramental. It is a ceremony which calls upon God to give the party concerned, either for the present or also for the future, a right to divine protection or to the exercise of worship. It has a special power, not of itself, but from the prayers of God's Church.

The Nuptial Blessing: One of the greatest sacramentals of the Church is the Nuptial or bridal blessing. It has deep significance and should become more cherished with each remembrance during the years that follow its reception. This solemn blessing is for bride and groom, but especially for the former. The fact that it is incorporated into the Nuptial Mass

suggests its importance in the eyes of the Church.

It consists of three meaningful prayers. Two of them are recited as the priest halts the Mass for that purpose immediately after the Pater Noster. With the exception of the consecration of the oils on Holy Thursday, no other blessing is so intimately associated with the Canon of the Mass. The third prayer of the blessing is recited over the couple just before the last blessing of the Mass.

The text of this blessing is readily available today in the English language. Hence we shall but briefly indicate the content of the three prayers here.

The first asks God's help for the two who have been united in the institution of marriage which God Himself has founded.

The second draws a detailed picture of what the life of a truly Christian wife should be. For example, it holds up for imitation on her part such holy women as Rachael, Rebecca, and Sarah. Again, it urges that she be adorned with virtue; adhere to faith and the commandments; be faithful to her husband; fortified through strong discipline, grave in demeanor, modest and well taught in heavenly lore. The words of the entire prayer are in sharp contrast to the ideals that stream into the modern home through the voice of the world about us today.

The third prayer of the nuptial blessing is recited, as already noted, just before the last blessing of the Mass, or, in other words,

immediately following the Post-communion. The Church chooses this moment, when the sacred bond of marriage has been sealed in the Sacrifice of Christ, and when the newlywed couple has been united in the Communion of Christ's Body, to close her prayer with maternal good wishes from the same source with which she began the wedding Mass, namely the Book of Tobias.

"May the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," she prays, be with you, "and may He fulfill His blessings in you, that you may see your children's children even to the third and fourth generation, and thereafter may have life everlasting, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who with the Father and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth forever. Amen."

After this prayer the priest sprinkles the newly married couple with holy water. Next, with head bowed toward the altar, he recites the usual prayer from the Ordinary of the Mass that is known as the *Placeat*. Following this, he turns toward them, blesses the two, as well as all who have been in attendance at Mass, in the name of the Holy Trinity.

This special nuptial blessing suggests the high esteem in which wedded life is held by the Church. It is the Church's solemn petition to God that the union be holy and richly blessed. Its origin reaches back in one form or other to the earliest Christian centuries. It should be particularly meaningful

today because of the low estate to which marriage has fallen. The Rev. Bernard Sause, for instance, writes of it as follows in "Why Catholic Marriage is Different":

"In this blessing and in the lesson it stresses, in wise and humble submission and beautifully worded prayer and sacrifice, the Catholic is in calm possession of the one answer for which others are searching. He has the one counter-influence to a mentality far removed from the sacred and only real nature of Christian marriage. His is a treasure thoroughly to be understood, appreciated, cherished. Its significance is not for the morning of the wedding, only to make the Catholic ceremony different from that of others. It is to regulate married *life*, to lift it to a plane with heights that merely human effort is incapable of scaling."

Blessings For Children

Expectant Mother and Child:

Very appealing to the Catholic parent should be the different blessings that center in the child, the primary purpose of marriage. There is really a whole group of these blessings. Thus, there is, first of all, the blessing of the mother with child.

The Church prays, in giving it, that "by the obstetric hand of Thy mercy her infant may happily see the light of day, and being reborn in holy baptism forever seek Thy ways and come to life everlasting." Then pouring forth the blessing of the Church upon the mother and the child who lives within her,

the words of the prayer become a plea that God's holy angels "may preside to keep them in peace, and that God's blessing may be ever present."

Churching: Then there is the blessing for the mother after childbirth, the so-called "churching of women." In it the Church asks God's blessing upon the mother who, as the prayer reads, "comes rejoicing into His holy Temple to make her thanksgiving." The blessing is customarily given the mother on her first visit to the church after the birth of her child. In some countries this was, in earlier times, made quite a gala occasion, her neighbors accompanying the mother to the church and rejoicing with her.

There is an ordinary blessing for children and a special one for sick children. The little ones may be blessed in the church or in the home. In some churches a special service, including the blessing of children, is held for children on Christmas day, or, more commonly, on the Feast of the Holy Innocents.

For more than a decade a beautiful custom of blessing children has been observed in the Diocese of Buffalo. There the bishop personally blesses every individual infant that is brought to the church at a time set aside specially for the purpose. For some years the blessing was only given at the Cathedral, but more recently it has also been given at six other centers in the Diocese. (It is given every year at the Cathedral and in alternate years at the other centers.)

Cards containing a prayer of dedication are handed the mothers as they enter the church. The mothers recite this prayer together. Since some thousands of infants are blessed the shortest form is used; namely, the ordinary blessing, not the special blessing of the Church for infants.

Beautiful are the prayers of the Church for the visitation of a *sick child* in the home. The words, pronounced by the priest, are as follows:

“O God, to whom all things grow, and by whom they are strengthened when grown, stretch forth Thy hand upon Thy servant who is sick at a tender age; that recovering the vigor of health, he may arrive at the fulness of years, and always give unto Thee a faithful and grateful service all the days of his life. Through our Lord. . .”

“O Father of mercies and God of all consolation, who providing in manifold tenderness for the good of Thy creatures grantest the grace of healing not only to the soul but also to the body, deign to raise this sick child from his bed of suffering, and to restore him safe and sound to Thy holy Church and to his parents; so that all the days of his prolonged life he may increase in grace and wisdom before Thee and men, serve Thee in justice and holiness, and give due thanks to Thy mercy. Through Christ. . .”

“O God, who in a wonderful order appointest the ministries of angels and of men, grant in Thy mercy that they who ever stand

ministering to Thee in heaven may also guard the life of this child upon earth. Through Christ. . .”

Placing his right hand on the forehead of the child the priest adds: “May Jesus, the Son of Mary, the salvation and Lord of the world, through the merits and intercession of His apostles Peter and Paul and of all His saints be merciful to you and full of tenderness. Amen.”

Parents, too, may wish to read these prayers over their sick children.

The Parental Blessing

Of very long standing is the parental blessing. First of all, there is the first blessing given the newborn babe by his father and mother after birth. This consists of the parents individually blessing the infant three times with holy water as they say these words: “May the Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, bless you, my child, for time and eternity, and may this blessing remain forever with you. Amen.”

Very properly is this blessing repeated by the parents after the child's spiritual rebirth in baptism. The inspiring practice should also be continued as they grow up under their care. Thus parents should bless their children when they retire in the evening. They should also bless them when they leave the home, particularly to go on a considerable journey.

Perhaps this practice, like so many others, is more faithfully kept up in religious communities—

religious families, we might well call them — than in Catholic homes. There the superior customarily sprinkles the members with holy water, as he invokes God's blessing upon them the last thing in the evening before they leave the community chapel where they had gathered for night prayers. There, too, the individual member kneels for the superior's blessing both upon leaving the community and upon his return.

Unfortunately, like so many other fine family customs, this one is often neglected today. To be sure, the parental blessing is still found in some homes. And, we are happy to add, there is some evidence that it is coming into its own again. It should be a worthy activity to help make it universal again.

A well known example from history, showing the observance of this practice, is that of the recently canonized St. Thomas More. The custom had been observed in the home of his childhood. He continued it as an adult. Even when he held the position of Lord Chancellor of England, the second highest post in the kingdom, he still continued the practice of kneeling for his father's blessing each day before going to take up the duties of his high office. It suggests, among other things, how such a practice, simple as it may seem in itself, lends dignity to parenthood and makes for mutual respect on the part of parents and children.

To show that the practice of the parental blessing is not totally unknown among ourselves, the fol-

lowing example from one of the dioceses of the middle west might be mentioned.

The aged father of one of the Monsignors of the diocese is visited regularly by his son. When it comes time to take his leave, the Monsignor kneels for his father's blessing. Then the father, in turn, kneels for his son's priestly blessing. To the two there is nothing unusual about this. The Monsignor had been accustomed to receive his father's blessing regularly since the earliest days of his childhood.

The simple blessing of one's pastor should also be mentioned. It is appreciated by the faithful. It is proper to request it frequently and particularly so upon a visit by him to the home.

Religious Family Customs

There are a large number of religious customs that have been observed in Catholic homes of the past. Some of these are still found today. Where they are no longer to be found, they could with but little effort, be restored again. And they should be restored. They are admirably suited to the church in miniature, the home.

Some of the customs referred to relate to daily practices such as prayers in common. Others relate to the celebration of certain religious anniversaries or other milestones in family life. Others, again, relate to the observance of special Feasts such as Christmas, Easter, Corpus Christi; still others, to special seasons of the church year, such as Lent or Advent, or to certain

months of the calendar year, such as May, the month of Mary; June, the month of the Sacred Heart; October, the month of the rosary; November, the month of the poor souls.

Many examples of these will be found in the section of this publication, entitled, "Religious Family Customs of Various National Groups" and also some in the section on "Family Devotions for the Liturgical Year." However, we shall single out a few here for special mention.

Enthronement of the Sacred Heart: A religious practice that is growing considerably in popularity in this country today is the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart. It grew out of a promise made by Christ to Margaret Mary Alcoque: "I will bless every house in which an image of My Heart shall be exposed and honored."

The idea of the Enthronement is that "in the Christian home a throne of love and veneration is erected for the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and that His sovereign rights over the family be thereby recognized." The practice is an external recognition of the fact that Christ is the real head of the home. It is not merely a passing act of consecration to the Sacred Heart but a permanent state of devotion and love.

The Enthronement itself is a simple procedure. A picture (or image) of the Sacred Heart is secured. On a chosen day, the pastor is invited to the home to read the Act of Consecration to the

Sacred Heart for the family and to bless the picture and the home. It is then "enthroned" in a prominent place in the home. The names of the members of the family, living and deceased, are customarily inscribed on a scroll and placed with the picture. The Act of Consecration should be renewed by the family members monthly, and on special occasions.

Still other suitable practices should be cultivated. These might include, for instance, the observance of the First Friday of the month, special Sacred Heart devotions during the month of June—the month of the Sacred Heart—a holy hour in the home on Thursday evenings or at some other convenient time during the week.*

Pope Leo XIII, during his pontificate, had founded the Association of the Holy Family. Its purpose was to promote devotion to the Holy Family in Catholic homes. Once this Association was well known in this country. Today it has largely lapsed. However, it is still quite active in some other countries.

Family Prayer: Family prayer is a most helpful religious practice in the home. At some time during the day, at least, the family members should pray together. Among the daily prayers that might be

*Information regarding the enthronement is available at a considerable number of centers in our larger cities. Among other places that volunteer information are: The National Center of the Enthronement, 4930 South Dakota Avenue N. E., Washington 17, D. C.; Benedictine Convent of Perpetual Adoration, Clyde, Missouri; The Family Life Bureau, N. C. W. C., 1312 Massachusetts Avenue N. W., Washington 5, D. C.

mentioned as particularly fitting for family use are: the rosary and litanies; meal prayers; morning and evening prayers; the Angelus. There is some evidence in recent years that the practice of reciting such official prayers of the Church as Prime, Vespers, Compline by family members is enjoying considerable growth. Lay Oblates and members of Third Orders may well lead the way in further popularizing this excellent practice.

Religious Expressions: The reverent use of the name of God and of religious expressions in the home is well deserving of special mention and attention. It is a practice that serves very well as an antidote against a secularized family life. Among the Italians, Poles, Portuguese, Germans, Irish, French, and others, one still finds such expressions in use. They should be made generally accepted practice again. They can exert a very profound influence over the lives of the family members. The following are among expressions still heard today: "God willing"; "The Lord reward you"; "Our Lady, help me."

It should be needless to say that the Sign of the Cross should often be made in the home. And not only should it be made before and after prayer, but also at the beginning of any important task.

· Celebration In Home

Religious Milestones: Another excellent family custom is the practice of having some little celebration in the home on the occasion of such spiritual milestones in fam-

ily life as the baptism, the first Communion, or the Confirmation of the children. Never should the anniversaries of these as well as of the wedding of the parents and the patronal feasts of family members be allowed to pass without at least some notice. A little thought will suggest ways in which a truly spiritual tone can be given to such celebrations on the part of the family.

The following are at least some possibilities: family group assistance at Mass and Communion; renewal of the baptismal promises on the part of the family members on the occasion of the anniversary of a baptism; renewal of the marriage promises on the part of the father and mother on their marriage anniversary; gifts of religious articles to the one whose anniversary is celebrated; the singing of appropriate hymns; special mention in the family prayers said that day.

Religious Articles: Mention has been made in the foregoing of certain religious articles, such as sacred pictures, crucifixes, candles, that should be in that church in miniature, the home. A few others, some for regular use and some for special occasions, may well be added here.

Thus, each member should have his own prayerbook and rosary. The older ones may well have a missal. Young and old should have blessed medals, scapulars, Sacred Heart badges. A crib should be in the home at Christmastide.

Incidentally, the husband and

wife may well bear in mind that the wedding ring is a sacramental. In the Diocese of Westminster, England, for instance, a hundred days indulgence may be gained by a married couple who kiss the blest ring and recite with contrite heart the prayer: "Grant us, O Lord, that loving Thee, we may love each other and live according to Thy holy law."

Means of Renewal: Several practices that have become fairly common today are serving as excellent means for the renewal of the spirit of the Christian family. One is the recitation of the pledge to Christian marriage.

This pledge consists of a series of short statements covering the fundamentals of Christian marriage and family living. In reciting it the individual recalls to mind the correct Catholic views and promises of a manner of life in accord with them. Needless to say, that, while serving as a renewal, the pledge also serves as an effective antidote against the poisonous and destructive doctrines and practices regarding marriage and family life that are so rampant today.

Then there is the *renewal of the marriage promises* on the part of married people. It is customary for religious to renew their vows regularly. Why should not married people do so? The renewal may take place publicly or privately. Many churches throughout the country have the renewal publicly on the occasion of the closing of the sessions of the National Catholic Conference on Family Life in mid-Lent each year.

Still another excellent means of renewal is the *family retreat*. This is a short retreat that husband and wife make together. It serves as a means for recalling to their minds the dignity of the sacramental state of marriage in which they are living and the duties they assumed upon entering it. It may well be made the occasion for bringing to their attention such a publication as this one and urging them to make its content a vital factor in their family life. It should lead them to rededicate their married lives, to renew their resolution to live in the full observance of all that their sacred state expects of them. Religious make an annual retreat. Why should not married people do the same?

To mention just one more devotion, one that is also in the nature of a renewal and one in which a number of the aforementioned practices are combined; there is the *Family Holy Hour*. This "Hour" is held in church, and usually with Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Husband and wife, and even the entire family group, attend together. Among the features of the devotions are the renewal of the marriage vows, the recitation of the pledge to Christian marriage, the consecration of the family to the Sacred Heart and its dedication to the Holy Family.*

*Family Holy Hour booklets, and also separate leaflets containing forms for the renewal of the marriage promises and for the pledge to Christian Marriage are available at the Family Life Bureau of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1313 Massachusetts Avenue, N. W., Washington, 5, D. C.

Common In Christian Home

These various sacramentals, these religious customs and sacred articles were once commonly found in the Christian home. Aidan Cardinal Gasquet, O.S.B., describes them for us as found in England in Pre-Reformation days.

"There was the constant recognition of God's sanctifying presence in the family," he stated, "and over and besides this there were those common religious practices of prayer and self-restraint and mutual encouragement to virtue of which alas, the modern counterpart of the old English home knows so little." And he concluded: "On the faith of those simple and generally unlettered people there was a bloom — I know of no other word to express what I see — which perished as one of the results of the religious revolution of the sixteenth century."

In our own day and country, these "common religious practices" are still found in some homes. But, there are others, and in considerable numbers, where they are totally neglected, and perhaps even unknown. It should be our holy ambition to restore them again, to make them universally accepted once more and carried into practice — to be sure, with suitable adaptations that may be called for.

Their simplicity and their beauty should make them appeal to all. And the ominous clouds of secularism of the day should make them appear peculiarly a need. For secularism, insofar as the home is concerned, is the absence of those practices on the family hearth. It is actually the rejection in practice of the truth expressed in the words of the Psalmist: "Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it."

II

Family Devotions For The Liturgical Year

REV. ALPHONSE WESTHOFF

THE term, "Liturgical Year," calls for definition. For that, I quote from a paper delivered by Monsignor Hellriegel at the Liturgical Week held in Denver in October, 1946:

"The liturgical year is a sacred cycle of solemnities by which we commemorate and celebrate annually the 'Work of Redemption' wrought by the Man-God Jesus Christ for the glory of God and the sanctification of men of good will." (Proceedings, p. 95).

To this definition he added: "The historical events, wrought by Christ 1900 years ago are rendered present, are brought into our midst, to the end that, through them, infinite honor, adoration and thanksgiving may ascend upon the Church." (Ibid.)

Just a little more than a year later, on Nov. 20, 1947, Our Holy Father stated officially that very same truth in the encyclical on the Sacred Liturgy, *Mediator Dei*:

"The Liturgical Year devotedly fostered and accomplished by the Church is not a cold and lifeless representation of the events of the past, or a simple and bare record of a former age. It is rather Christ Himself Who is ever living in His Church. Here He continues that journey of immense mercy which He lovingly began in His mortal life, going about doing good, with

the design of bringing men to know His mysteries and in a way live by them." (*Mediator Dei*, N.C.W.C. edition, p. 57.)

If the Church lives and breaths in the cycle of the Liturgical Year, it would seem to follow that the Church in miniature, the Christian family, should do the same.

Father and mother and children will do so, first and above all, by joining with their parish priests and their fellow-parishioners, as the mysteries of Christ are officially celebrated and re-enacted in their parish church. But they will do so also by their family practices of devotion, binding closely together the Altar and their home. They will do so by an intelligent and loving preparation for the seasons and feasts of the year; and they will do so by carrying into their homes religious practices in the spirit of these seasons and feasts.

Were there no other reason for this—and there are many—the very fact that interesting variation is introduced into family prayer-life, thus keeping it vigorous and vital, would be justification enough. This must not be interpreted in any way as a repudiation of the daily family Rosary; but, as a means of adding also to that practice fresh meaning, with the changing feasts and seasons.

We wish to consider in the following some forms of devotions and religious practices in the home which conform to the feasts and seasons of the Church's year. All will not appeal to everybody; all will not fit in equally well in every home. But let each choose and use those which are best in individual circumstances.

Advent Season

Comes the season of Advent. Parents and children will work together in advance to prepare the Advent wreath. It is not something which should be bought, but made, so that the personal element will enter into it. It may be hung from the ceiling or lie flat as the center-piece on the family table.

Altar and Home Press, of Conception, Mo., has a leaflet with a blessing to be read by the father before the first candle is lighted on the eve of the First Sunday of Advent. Let mother light the first candle, then the children in order of age the succeeding candles on the following three Saturdays. The collect of the appropriate Sunday is said, and, if desired, other portions of the Sunday Mass text may be added.

With the coming of the Advent Ember Days, the thoughts of parents and children might well turn to the task of helping to provide for the poor at Christmas. Mother and older daughters might use some of their time on these days to make clothing or similar articles to be given away, while father and the boys, who like to tinker, would

similarly use some of their time in the production of simple toys. The materials for all items might be bought from what parents and children have saved by means of Advent self-denial in the matter of entertainment or other luxuries.

Whether little or much results from such a home project, there would be little difficulty in finding some family upon whom the gifts may be bestowed at Christmas. And there would be no harm, surely, in having the father of the family read the Church's prayer of blessing, the *Benedictio ad omnia*, over them, before giving them away.

Christmas

Christmas itself, of course, is so rich in traditions of family practices, I need add only the insistent reminder that the crib should be of as much importance as the Christmas tree; and the more parents and children can put into these things by the work of their own hands, the better. Altar and Home Press, referred to before, has an inspiring Home Service for Christmas, which helps to create the true Christmas spirit in the home.

In more churches than was formerly the case, the Epiphany blessings of the gifts of gold, incense and myrrh, and the blessing of chalk, are held. The chalk, brought home by the children, is used to inscribe the first letter of the names of the Magi over the main door of the house. This serves as a reminder throughout the year

that, as the Epiphany blessing says—the home should be the “shelter of health, chastity, self-conquest, humility, goodness, mildness, obedience to the commandments, and thanksgiving to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

The feast of the Holy Family calls for special attention. Besides the assistance at Holy Mass and the reception of Holy Communion as a family group on that day some parts of the Proper of the feast-day Mass might well be used for family readings and prayers.

There is the Epistle in Msgr. Knox's meaningful translation: “You are God's chosen people, holy and well-beloved; the livery you wear must be tender compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; you must bear with one another's faults, be generous to each other . . .” The collect of the feast is especially suitable for home use.

When Candlemas comes, a sufficient number of blessed candles should be obtained, not to be put away merely for possible use in the eventuality of a sick-call by a priest, but to be burned on that day and on the other great feast-days, Name days, anniversaries of marriage and baptismal anniversaries.

Blessed candles are sacramentals, and surely the efficacy of the Church's prayer is not limited to their use in the church edifice. In our homes, too, we want to find fulfilled what the Church asks for in the candles' blessing: “Let them

so provide us with outward light that by Thy gift, the inward light of Thy Spirit may not be wanting to our minds.” (The Missal—Sheed and Ward)

Before And During Lent

It is suggested by Mrs. Therese Mueller in “Our Children's Year of Grace” that the three days before Ash Wednesday be signalized in our homes by making them a time of plenty in food and innocent pleasure, so as to enjoy then, in a special way, what is to be given up during the Forty Days of Lent.

She, too, is my source for the idea of getting together the blessed palm which has been in the home for the past year and burning it just as is done to provide the ashes for Ash Wednesday in church. The burning of the old palm by the children can serve to confirm their determination to remove from their lives the faults and failings which are made the subject of their Lenten resolutions. It is not amiss to recall, even to children's minds, that we are dust, and all of us shall return to it in God's good time.

A most appropriate prayer for home on Shrove Tuesday evening would be that which is used in church after the bestowal of the blessed ashes on Wednesday: “Lord, give us grace to inaugurate with holy fasting the defenses of Christian warfare, so that we who are to fight against spiritual wickedness, may be helped and strengthened by self-denial.”

Preparation For Mass

Since daily Mass is a "must" for all families who can make it during Lent, some kind of preparation of the Mass-text for the following day is a most appropriate practice for Lenten evenings. The St. Andrew's Daily Missal (E. M. Lohmann Co.) with its interpretations of the texts, and Msgr. Hellriegel's "Vine and Branches" (Pio Decimo Press) come to mind as aids in this study.

Children will also be interested in locating and marking the Stational Church for each day of Lent. A map of these is provided in the St. Andrew's Missal and one on a larger scale is available from the Altar and Home Press at Conception.

From the latter publishers there is also available an excellent booklet entitled "Our New Life in Christ" which contains a suggested form of devotions for home use and a short commentary on the Lenten Mass of each day. This booklet has the further advantage of carrying out the same plan for all of Easter Week.

It is so common, and yet to be regretted, that with the arrival of Easter every religious practice that has been part of our lives during Lent ceases abruptly. The wonderful Easter Octave is almost completely ignored. We act like the man who plows and plants and cultivates his fields all summer and then neglects to gather and enjoy the harvest in the Fall.

We should not fail, for instance,

to give back the Christian meaning to the Easter egg. Most people know that it is a symbol of the Resurrection of Christ. Just as the chick breaks the shell when it is hatched and begins its life, so Christ comes forth living from the apparently lifeless tomb. Why not then make it a definite point not merely to color eggs for Easter, but to decorate them with symbols of Christ—the Xi-Rho, the Cross, the banner of Christ's Victory, etc. Never must we forget that children learn not merely from words of instruction but from what they see and experience.

Here, too, is the place to mention that the newly-blessed Easter water should be obtained from the parish church on Holy Saturday and piously used during the Easter season. And since Easter is traditionally the church's great baptismal day, if the children's baptismal candles have been received and kept, they might well be lighted and placed on the family table for the principal meal of the day. Then, too, all of the members can together renew their baptismal vows.

We might add that throughout the Easter season a spirit of great joy ought to be cultivated in the family circle. Father and mother must jointly devise ways and means whereby the happiness of family life is promoted. If the season is far enough advanced, it is a time when the first Sunday outings might be enjoyed with perhaps a little interesting study of the plants and flowers which, like Christ, are

coming forth with a new life. An appreciation of the beauties of nature is not the least efficacious means of bringing children to a greater love of nature's Creator.

First Communion

Eastertide is usually the time for First Holy Communion. When this happy event occurs for a little member of the family it should be made an unforgettable day. Catholic parents do not always remember what a vital part they have in preparing their children for their very first reception of the Divine Food for their souls. Pastors and Sisters can do only part of the job. There is never a time when children are better disposed to learn and appreciate the truths of their holy faith.

Family preparation must not be limited to an excursion downtown to buy new clothes. Daily, and with more care as the holy day approaches, father and mother must repeat and renew with their child what he is learning at school. And, daily, the family must pray together for the little member who is preparing to be with them henceforth at the Table of the Lord; there, more than ever before, to become truly one with them by union with Christ.

The Rogation Days which precede the feast of the Ascension present another opportunity for family observance. After joining in the procession with fellow-parishioners in the morning, the Church's prayer for that occasion, the Litany

of the Saints, might be repeated at home in the evening.

While the petitions made to God on these days are directed primarily toward obtaining heavenly blessings on the growing fruits of the field, they need not be limited to that, especially in our own days when there is so much beyond our own personal needs to pray for.

After the Ascension, family prayers might well include the Novena in preparation for Pentecost. The Holy Spirit once descended into a little home in Nazareth and the Son of God began to dwell there in the womb of His Virgin Mother. The same Holy Spirit is needed, with His seven-fold gifts, to bring holiness to all members of the family, and to make Christ dwell in Christian homes in the midst of His own. Suitable prayers will not be hard to find if one will search through the Mass-texts of the Vigil, the Feast and the Octave of Pentecost.

Some greater emphasis might well be placed on the feast itself by an effort to decorate the home or the family table with suitable symbols, for instance, that of the dove or the tongues of fire. The grace of Confirmation might also be renewed by all members of the family who have been confirmed, when they gather for their evening prayer. The rite of Confirmation itself could readily be adapted for that purpose.

Observance Of The Lord's Day

We have covered very briefly the principal feasts and seasons of

the Liturgical Year. But, this presentation would be more sadly inadequate than it is, if a word were not added on the family observance of the Lord's Day. The writer's own opinion is that we must begin by bringing about a change in our use of Saturday night. If we can make of it, for all members of the family, a night "in" instead of *the* night "out," a great step will have been taken towards the sanctification of the Sunday. A half-hour spent in the family circle reading and discussing the Mass-text for the following day would make the participation of all in the Sunday Mass much more of a living experience. Early to bed on Saturday night will surely make for greater attention and devotion before the Altar the next day.

The Sunday itself should have an air of joyous celebration about it, not by excluding the recreational element which is so much a part of our American way of life, but by elevating that, too, to a supernatural level.

One final suggestion: Family prayers and devotions will be enriched immeasurably if they include family song. That is definite-

ly a lost art in our country, but it can be revived.

Our parochial school children know many hymns, and perhaps if they were encouraged to sing them at home, father and mother, too, might find that they are familiar from their own school days. The joyful heart expresses itself naturally in song. And if religious hymns contribute something to the joy of home life they will contribute something towards holiness as well.

Perhaps it might well be repeated that all that has been suggested—and, truthfully, only the surface has been scratched—will not appeal to everyone; all will not fit equally well in every home. But there is no limit to the adaptations that can be made. The effort to live in the spirit of our Holy Mother, the Church, the whole year through, will help to make a reality of the ideal that every Catholic home should be the Church of God in miniature. That sincere and persevering effort will contribute much to the goal of making Catholic home life happy, by making it holy. At home, just as everywhere else, happiness and holiness go hand in hand.

III

Family Religious Customs Among German People

MRS. W. F. ROHMAN

WHEN the invitation reached me to speak to the National Catholic Conference on Family Life on the subject "Family Religious Customs among the German People," my first impulse was to decline gratefully such an honorable invitation. But then the thought occurred to me that even my small contribution should not be withheld from this esteemed assembly, but rather be added to the greater efforts of others whose one concern is that a rich Catholic Family Life be restored, built on the Church's Year, its divine Sacrifice, its life-begetting Sacraments and its sanctifying sacramentals.

I would love to go with you through the entire Church's Year and point out its transforming influence on the Christian home in German lands, an influence, so permeating that it resulted in a holy wedding of Altar and Home. But, because we have not the time, permit me to stress at least some of the more important Catholic customs observed in the home during the season of Advent and Christmas.

Advent—"Rorate Mass"

Advent has always been very dear to the German peoples of Austria, Switzerland and Germany:

the time of preparation for the coming of the Lord, His coming in the humility of a Child at Bethlehem, His coming in mystery by grace from the Altar, and His coming in majesty at the end of time.

Special efforts are made to participate daily—from the first Sunday of Advent till Christmas—in the so-called "Rorate Mass," a Mass celebrated early in the morning, with great solemnity, during which the faithful sing their treasured Advent hymns, particularly the "Taufet Himmel den Gerechten" (Drop down dew, O gracious heavens). It is an edifying spectacle to see an entire family, with lamps in their hands, humming Advent hymns, on their way to the "Rorate Mass."

In many homes one will find the "Advent wreath," a wreath made from pine branches, hung up horizontally in the living room, adorned with four candles—one for each week—and with purple bands descending from the wreath. The round form of the wreath speaks of the Church's holy cycle; its greens, of the divine freshness that comes to us by living with the Church's feasts and fasts; the four candles, of the four weeks of Advent; their light, of Christ the Light who is also our Light, and the purple bands, of the numerous

blessings which descend into our hearts during these "way-preparing days" for the coming of the Lord.

The Advent Candle

Another beautiful custom is to set up in the home the so-called "Advent Candle." Into a candlestick, covered with white silk, is put a large candle, to symbolize our Immaculate Mother Mary from whom came the Light of the World. What an eloquent reminder of the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God born from the chaste womb of Mary, as this candle burns on the family home-altar while the family is at prayer evening after evening of Advent.

On the first Sunday of Advent the children must write their Christmas letter—not to a Santa Claus—but to the Christchild (*Christkind*), who, accompanied by His angels, will bring the Christmas tree and all the good things on it and *under* it.

In this letter—and the letter is of great importance—the child makes known his most secret wishes to the Divine Child, and also the efforts he is going to make during the season of Advent.

Before going to bed the letter must be put on the window sill. The first thought in the morning is: "What happened to the letter, is it gone?"

Good children's letters are taken away during the first night, as a sign that the Divine Child is pleased with them. Others—and their number is usually bigger than the ones whose letter disappeared

—may have to wait two, three or more days, a sure sign that Jesus is not altogether pleased with them, that their spirit of penance, of obedience, of work, of greater purity and charity must first wax stronger.

"Tomorrow, in the Rorate Mass," says mother, "you must ask Jesus to put greater love for Him in your heart and promise Him to be a much better child."

St. Barbara Twig

The excitement of the first Sunday of Advent has hardly died down when the feast of the virgin-martyr Barbara, December 4th, comes along, inviting every member of the family to put his "St. Barbara twig" (a cherry or peach branch) into water, so that it may sprout and yield blossoms on the day "when Mary bore a Flower bright, which opened in bleak winter, all in a starlit night." Naturally, the child whose twig has the most blossoms is holy Mary's most favored "Twig."

Two days later, December 6th, comes the great friend of children, St. Nicholas, whose visit to the home is quite a momentous event, because he is going to ask every child about his Advent efforts, his prayers, especially the daily "Angelus" and his obedience.

The good children receive apples and nuts, the bad ones are called on the carpet by "Krampus," the black fellow who accompanies the Saint. "You must change your lives, or else I will take you with me," Krampus tells them. With joyous fear they readily promise

and, in the end, also get their apples and nuts.

Although Krampus will do a good bit of grunting and rattling of his heavy chains he dare not, by order of St. Nicholas, touch any of the little ones, whose tearful eyes and stammering promises prove so eloquently their readiness to amend their lives.

Christmas Preparations

After December the 15th intensive preparations for Christmas begin. From now on the children tip-toe around the house, and usually speak in a whisper. The Christmas tree is decorated with cookies, hard candies, chocolate wrapped and frilled tissue paper, gilded nuts and small apples, all hung on red thread on the tree. Wax candles, and colored paper chains, and a large silver star at the top complete the decorations.

Christmas would not be perfect without the crib. Before the crib is one large candle burning to remind all that the "Holy Child, the Light of the world, is with us." Around the crib we find candles, one for every member of the family, which are lighted from the one large candle, for all "light" comes from Him who is the "Light." All kneel in adoration and sing the "Silent Night."

St. John's day, two days after Christmas, brings new joy to the home. After holy Mass the blessing of the wine takes place "in honor of St. John," the Lord's beloved disciple. Before the evening meal the father fills the loving-cup which is passed from member to

member with the greeting; "Drink the love of St. John, the Apostle." "And where charity is and love, there is God."

On New Year's eve the family members gather around the Christmas tree to thank the Holy Child for the blessings bestowed on their hearts and home. Around nine o'clock the father brings from the nearby bakery a large "Pretzel" and mother gets the coffee ready. Before the family sits down to enjoy the coffee and the Pretzel, divided into as many parts as there are members, the children thank their parents for their kindness and love during the past year and wish them God's blessing for the new year about to begin.

On the feast of the Epiphany each family receives in church a piece of blessed chalk to write with it the names of the three Magi, Casper, Melchior and Balthasar over the main door of the home, inviting the "first fruits of the Gentile world" to obtain for us the blessing of the kings to whom they offered gold, frankincense and myrrh.

In some parts of Germany and Austria the children carry bread, eggs, salt and incense to church to be blessed. Bread and eggs are given to the poor, the salt is preserved as a reminder that every member of the family must be "salt of the earth, never to lose its savor," and with the incense the whole house is filled with an odor of sweetness, a symbol of that sweetness of charity which must bind together parents and children.

Candlemas Day

The whole family looks forward to Candlemas day. Each member takes with himself a candle to be blessed before Holy Mass to burn as the Christ-candle in the center of the meal table on Sundays and the greater feasts of the year, to be lighted in days of sorrow, in storms and sickness, and to be placed on the family shrine, especially on the family "May-Altar," for the evening prayers.

If a new member is expected in the family, or if one expects to be chosen for a godparent, an extra large candle is presented for the blessing. This candle is to become the baptismal, first Communion, bridal and deathcandle of the child expected.

On the evening of this blessed "day of light" every member of the family lights his new candle for the recitation of the joyful mysteries of the Rosary before the Crib.

After the Rosary, and when the candles of the Christmas tree are burnt out, the father cuts the branches from the Christmas tree, one for each child, and now the children can enjoy the candy, nuts and fruits of that lovely tree that brought so much happiness and charm during the forty days of Peace and Joy. Needless to say, these good things taste so much better because they come from the

tree which the Christchild had brought to them.

And so I must close. It would be a delightful task to speak of the family customs in German lands during the other seasons of the year, Lent and Easter, the Ascension and Pentecost, name-days and baptismal days, Marydays and Saintdays. But, may the few examples of Advent and Christmas suffice to point out the wealth we have in our holy Faith to transform our home and home-life.

There was a time when pagan houses were turned into Christian Homes. Today, there is danger that Christian homes become pagan houses. All of us have a sacred duty to prevent such a catastrophe.

No new means need be invented. We have them in abundance in the sacramental life of the Church. The streams of life must flow again from our parish altar into our home and the Christian home will flourish and blossom into a new spiritual springtide, into full, rich and joyous Christian life.

As the Church's Ritual says, there will abide in it "Health, purity, victory, strength, humility, goodness, meekness, the fulfillment of the law, and thanksgiving to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, and this blessing of God will rest on our home and upon all who dwell therein. Through Christ our Lord."

So be it!

Living Holy Week With Christ*

(Examples of Austrian Family Customs)

MARIA AUGUSTA TRAPP

WHEN we had left our home in Austria as many voluntary refugees back in 1938, we couldn't take much money or many valuables with us. Soon we should discover, however, that the things which could not be taken away from us at the border—our faith and all the rich heritage of an old culture, like music and folk customs—were the very essentials which made our family life such a happy one. They were far beyond money and what money can buy. Therefore, when one day someone pitied us: "Isn't it terrible to be so poor?" we answered, astonished: "But we are not poor; we just don't have any money."

In a way we didn't so much begin a new life; we just continued going through the year of the Church as we had been used to doing in the old country. There were a great many of the old customs which could be transplanted to the new country. Of these I want to tell you. This is the way a refugee wants to pay for all the hospitality and helpfulness he found. "Gold and silver I have not," he says, "but what I have, I give to you." We know how much happiness there is in celebrating a great feast in the family circle together, and so we want to have

our new friends share this happiness with us.

I shall tell now how we celebrate Holy Week in our new home, Cor Unum, in Stowe, Vermont. These age-old folk customs should not be regarded so much as "Austrian," or "Polish," or "Italian," but rather as "Catholic," which means general or universal. They are everybody's property.

On the day before Palm Sunday we prepare, as we always did in the old country, little bouquets made of pussy willows and twigs of spruce or fir, adding a few palm leaves. Every little bouquet is tied around a stick about three feet long, decorated with gaily-colored ribbons.

On Palm Sunday we take these in to church and have them blessed during the solemn blessing of the palms. Upon our return home a tiny bottle (usually saved from the medicine chest) is filled with holy water and tied to the bouquet.

On Palm Sunday afternoon the whole family goes over the whole property (we live on a large farm), placing these blessed palms all over the land. Every unit of meadow, of pasture, of ploughland, orchard, vegetable garden, the maple sugar grove—they all get their own blessing.

*Our Sunday Visitor, March 18, 1951

The little bouquets of blessed twigs serve as a sacramental, keeping away the influence of evil spirits, averting the punishment of weather tragedies such as floods, hail storms, forest fires, and drawing down from heaven God's blessings on the year's crop.

The children in the house have some extra fun on the morning of Palm Sunday. On this one morning of the year every one of them wants to be out of bed first. Then they congregate before the door of the one member of the family who happens to sleep longest and at the top of their lungs they shout! "Palm Ass, Palm Ass!" This privilege of the children to shout loudly throughout the house on Palm Sunday morning must go back to those children on the first Palm Sunday, who greeted their Lord and Master with shouts and jubiliations as He came riding on the back of an ass.

Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of Holy Week are devoted to spring cleaning in its most thorough form. Carpets, sofas, easy chairs, and mattresses are carried out into the meadow in front of the house and there the winter's dust is beaten out of them. If there is some snow left on the shady slope, the carpets are spread out on the snow and vigorously beaten. Then they are carried, spic and span, into the house, leaving a black pattern on the snow. All over the house the floors are freshly waxed, curtains are taken down for cleaning, windows are washed. Everybody helps, and the house is buzzing with activity. On Wed-

nesday night everything has to be back in its place, shiny and glossy.

On the last three days of Holy Week, only the most necessary chores are done. Throughout Catholic countries they are considered semi-holidays.

Holy Thursday

On Thursday morning all the bells in church are rung during the Gloria, after which they remain silent until Saturday morning. The children believe that they fly to Rome to be blessed by the Holy Father. Throughout Thursday and Friday and Saturday morning the job of summoning the faithful is taken over by a wooden clapper.

And so it is in our house. The bell-ringing for the meals or family devotions is also substituted by a hand clapper. It is handled by the youngest member of the family, who announces solemnly from door to door with a terrific noise that lunch is ready.

Holy Thursday has a menu all its own. For the noon meal we have the traditional spring herb soup and afterward, spinach with fried eggs. The evening finds the family around the festive supper table in Sunday clothes for a solemn celebration.

At the father's place are specially made hot cross buns and a cup of wine for every member of the household. Making the sign of the Cross over the first bun while breaking it, he hands it, together with a cup of wine, to the mother, and then down the line to all the others in the same way.

The family waits, standing, un-

til the father has blessed bread and wine for every one. Then they sit down and slowly eat and drink "in His memory," while the father reads the Gospel of the Last Supper.

After this, the Easter Lamb is brought in. It should be barbecued or roasted as a whole. The father, carving it, serves it to the members of his family. There should not be anything left over. Afterwards, the members of the family take turns going to church, where the Blessed Sacrament is kept on a special altar among flowers and candles, not exposed, however, but locked up in the tabernacle in memory of that night in prison. So we all take turns keeping Him company.

Good Friday

Good Friday is a very quiet day. There is very little to do in the kitchen as fasting is observed rigorously on this day. There is no breakfast, and for lunch there stands on the bare table, without table cloth, only one pot with a thick soup which everyone eats standing up, in silence.

There is little noise around the house. Talk is restricted to the bare essentials as it would be if a dearly beloved one were lying dead in the house. This is the day for the spring cleaning in church or chapel as the Blessed Sacrament is not reserved. The tabernacle is wide open, the candlesticks are laid flat on the altar, the vigil light has been extinguished. Then the holy House of God empty and desolate, vessels, chalices, ciborium,

monstrance, are polished. Candlesticks are cleaned and fitted with new candles, and everything is gotten ready for the greatest feast of the year.

As we are privileged to have a chapel in our house, all this is going on in our sacristy. The vigil light before the picture of the Blessed Mother in the living room is also extinguished like the one in the chapel. On Good Friday there is no light in the house. From twelve to three, the hours of Our Lord's suffering on the cross, all activity around the house stops. We sit together around a cross and spend these hours in spiritual reading, prayer, and the singing of Lenten motets and hymns.

Holy Saturday

Early on Saturday morning the whole family joins the other people in the village in front of the church around the little pile of wood, which is set afire by a spark from a flint. Very solemnly this new fire is blessed by the priest. From it the triple candle is lit, and the new light, carried in procession into the church is used for lighting the Easter candle, the vigil light, and all the other candles throughout the church.

We have a couple of lanterns with us to take home this holy light. Zealously will the vigil light be guarded throughout the year. It should never be allowed to go out until the next Good Friday. We also take a few of the blessed faggots home with us. They are kept on a shelf in the kitchen. When there is one of those heavy

thunder storms, such as we are used to in the mountains during the summer, one of these blessed pieces of wood is put into the kitchen stove as a protection against lightning.

On Holy Saturday there is a great activity around the house. Chapel and house are decorated with pussy willows and the first greens and the first tender spring flowers. From the kitchen come the most tempting odors. There the great Easter ham is boiling in a big kettle, and the Easter bread, made according to its own recipe and braided in its old-fashioned pattern, is baking in the oven.

On the stove there are various pots with Easter egg paint, betokening the greatest industry of the day. In every corner an artist of the family has opened his private workshop. One has some acid with which he etches the most intriguing patterns out of the blue, green, and red eggs.

Another most artistically fastens dried ferns and herbs around his eggs, boiling them in paint afterward. When he finally takes off their garlands, the shape of the flowers and herbs is left white, while the rest of the egg is colored. That looks very pretty.

The real highbrow artists sit with paint and brush, and under their clever fingers appear pictures of an Easter lamb, or the Blessed Mother, or Our Risen Saviour, the different patron saints of the family, or a few bars of an Easter hymn with plenty of alleluias.

Ever since coming home from

church in the morning with the new Easter light from which the lights in our house are lit, there is a festive mood all over the place.

Day of Days

On Easter Sunday, according to age-old custom, meat, bread, salt, and eggs are blessed. Therefore, the big Easter ham and the beautiful Easter bread, a basket of Easter eggs, and a little dish of salt are placed on the Communion rail. There is a special blessing for just these essentials of human food which the priest says over them before Holy Mass begins.

Easter breakfast is a very special occasion. The table is set differently every year and always most elaborately decorated. It is amazing how much love one can put into such things, how much happiness it spreads throughout the family. We have, for instance, an iron mold with which we bake an Easter lamb. This presides over the breakfast table. With red ribbons, pussy willows and multicolored Easter eggs, a large family table can look breathtakingly beautiful.

Everyone finds his special Easter eggs at his place. All are in a mood for fun. An Easter egg with a fitting cartoon referring to some funny incident of the past weeks can be a happy surprise. Then there is a bowl with just plain colored eggs. Everyone takes one and asks: "Who wants to crack with me?" It is an interesting game. Grasping their Easter eggs firmly with the small end protruding the two "crackers" hit the eggs sharply together, each one trying to crack

the shell on the other's egg, but not his own.

The highlight for the children comes when the parents announce that they think the Easter rabbit has been around somewhere, and why don't they go and look? All over the garden, or in rainy weather, all over the house, are little nests with eggs and small surprises. The occasion is like a second Christmas Eve for the little ones.

Of course, the family is dressed in their feastday best, which is the best of the best. When the mem-

bers meet for the noonday meal, where the blessed ham and bread and eggs and salt are waiting for them, instead of saying grace, the father intones, and the family repeats three times: "Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!" This is kept up during the whole *Octava Privilegiata*.

Everyone who tries it will see how much warmth and happiness these religious folk customs spread throughout a family. They are the liturgy of the home, and a great help to make every family *cor unum et anima una*—one heart and one soul.

Mexican Family Customs In Our Catholic Southwest

REV. THEODORE J. RADTKE

IN our southwestern states there are more than 3,000,000 Catholics of Mexican extraction. They are citizens of the United States, born and raised north of the border.

The influence of Spain through its missionaries is largely responsible for the Catholicity of these people; the Spanish culture still pervades the atmosphere, particularly through the medium of the Spanish language. Spanish is spoken by the entire body of Catholics of Mexican extraction in our southwest. The majority of them, however, also speak in English.

It is going to be necessary for me in the course of this paper to use certain words and phrases of the Spanish language because the customs of our people in the southwest are intelligible only in terms of the Spanish language; there is no suitable English equivalent.

The family customs which prevail in our southwest are not the customs of the southwest, but rather the customs which form the pattern of life in Mexico. It is well to note that among our people in the southwest, where the opportunities for religious education are still meagre, religious traditions are a powerful influence in safeguarding their faith.

It is a very good thing for a people largely uneducated, according to the standards we uphold in the United States, to have deep-rooted traditions in family life. These traditions were inculcated by the early missionaries among the Indian peoples of Mexico as the means of indoctrinating them in the truths of Catholicism. In some cases, it may be true, the traditions are linked with superstition; in others, they are purely pagan rites coated over with a religious and Catholic significance by the early missionaries from Spain hundreds of years ago.

The Sign Of The Cross

The Mexican child may be only a few days old when the mother takes its little hand and makes it go through the movements on the forehead, on the mouth, and on the breast, required to perform the *persignarse*. The mother forms the child's forefinger and thumb into a cross for this ceremony; she is very careful that the child do the act correctly. With thumb and forefinger crossed the hand touches the forehead making the four points of the cross there; the same is done on the mouth and on the breast.

The words which are said are these: "*Por la senal de la Santa*

Cruz, de neustros enemigos libranos Senor Dios Nuestro." It means, "By the sign of the Holy Cross deliver us, Lord, from our enemies."

At this point the regular sign of the Cross is made. The two "signatures" are differentiated by the terminology used. The first is called the *persignarse*; the second, *santiguarse*. The first means, signing yourself; the second, blessing yourself.

These two signs of the cross are used together, the one following the other. At the conclusion with thumb and forefinger still forming a cross the child is taught to put his hand to his lips and kiss the cross thus formed. The custom is habitual with all our people of Mexican extraction in the southwest. No Mexican would enter a church, or even pass it by, without the *persignarse* and *santiguarse*.

Baptism

The celebration of baptism is prepared for from six months to a year in advance. The celebration at each baptism must be in grand style. This requires the expenditure of a great deal of money, and the sponsors customarily furnish the celebration. This means they have to save money over a long period of time before they are ready for the baptism. This is the reason why many babies are not baptized until they are one year, eighteen months, and even two years old.

Oftentimes sponsors are selected who live at a great distance. It is not unusual for sponsors to travel from Mexico City to Tucson,

Arizona for a baptism. There is good reason for such extremes of travel and expenditure. To be selected as a sponsor is one of the highest honors that can be bestowed upon a person.

Parents select the sponsors; it is their personal choice and responsibility, and theirs alone. Because of the serious and lifelong relationship that begins at baptism between the person baptized and his sponsors, great care is taken by the parents in their selection.

The word, *padrino*, which designates the relationship between the child and his sponsor, means "second father." *Madrina* then means "second mother." The relationship of parents to the sponsors they select is expressed by two very endearing words: *Compadre—comadre*. There is no English equivalent for these terms.

The sponsors are not necessarily selected from the immediate family. In fact, it is quite customary to select friends of the family instead, because the spiritual ties engendered by the relationship of sponsoring tends to bring these two families into closer friendship.

In many instances where people of Mexican descent have lost their birth and baptismal records, priests in the southwest have found the people more accurate in remembering the names of their *padrinos* (their godparents) than their own father and mother. This occurs principally in those instances where the child has lost his father or mother at an early age, or in the case where the child was

reared with relatives—not an uncommon occurrence.

The sponsors take the baby from the home of the parents to the church for the baptismal ceremony. It is not customary for the parents to go along. Later, after the baptismal ceremony, the baby is returned to the parents. In some cases the sponsors will deliver a formal speech as they transfer the baby back to its parents.

The celebration on the day of Baptism usually starts in the morning and lasts all day and into the night. Chocolate, cake, and beer are the common food and drink served on such an occasion.

In many parishes of the southwest where the proportion of people to priests is 8,000 to 1, it is not uncommon to have 50 Baptisms on a Sunday afternoon. This, of course means that very little attention can be paid to the examination of the sponsors given for the purpose of determining whether they are good and practical Catholics. Priests are necessitated to allow sponsors to act in that capacity without demanding too great evidence of knowledge and practice of their Catholic religion.

If the standards in many parts of our United States were applied to the people in our southwest, many of the Mexican babies would never be baptized. In most dioceses of the southwest, however, the regulation is strictly upheld banning sponsors who married outside the Church. Where sponsorship means so much as it does in

Mexican tradition, this regulation acts as a great deterrent. If all other church regulations must be overlooked, this one is never passed over.

In strict Mexican tradition it would be necessary to name the infant after the Saint of the day on which it was born. Where this custom prevails the boy baby will bear the name of a girl Saint, if one happens to be born on the feast of a female Saint.

However, in the Spanish language almost all the names of the Saints in the calendar are applicable both in the masculine and the feminine. Margaret would be *Margarita* in the feminine and *Margarito* in the masculine.

Infant Confirmation

In all Mexican territory it is quite customary to have infants confirmed while they are still infants. This means any time after their Baptism—in many cases even on the same day.

On a Confirmation Sunday the Baptisms in any given church where there is a predominance of Mexican people might be increased three to five times. If the occasion presents itself, all parents want their babies confirmed. In many instances they will travel for many miles to be at the church where confirmation is being administered.

If the people live in a diocese where infant confirmation is not the custom, they will travel several hundred miles to the neighboring diocese on a confirmation Sunday. Some dioceses in the south-

west have begun to omit infant Confirmation; others still retain it. It is so traditional with the Mexican people that it is almost impossible for them to understand why it does not prevail everywhere.

As in Baptism it is a great honor to be chosen as a sponsor for Confirmation. However, the significance and relationship of sponsor to child is not so serious as at Baptism. Sponsors give the child a gift on this occasion; a religious chain and medal is most often presented.

First Holy Communion

First Holy Communion for the Mexican child is the most important date of his childhood. For the family it is a day of great celebration.

For this occasion also sponsors are selected similar to those in Baptism and Confirmation. However, the relationship engendered is not a very strong one. The sponsors select a gift, such as a prayerbook and rosary, to give to the first Communicant. The family custom is the same as that which prevails in other parts of the United States.

There is a noteworthy attitude assumed by the people with regard to First Holy Communion, which contrasts rather strikingly with other sections of our country.

Because the First Communion classes are large, the children receive only a minimum of instruction. Many parents consider that the child having made his First

Communion is now completely a Christian, understanding his faith because he knows his prayers.

Oftentimes parents from the outlying ranches will bring their child to the priest for First Holy Communion saying that the child knows its prayers. To their mind this is enough.

People living on the ranches, far from church facilities, have to do the instructing of their own children. Since the parents themselves have never received more than the minimum necessary for making their First Holy Communion, they consider their children prepared so long as they have taught the children the simple prayers which they know.

Marriage

In strict Mexican custom the girls are greatly restricted in courtship. Suitors would be required to carry on their courtship at the home of the girl's parents. If the young couple go out on a "date," it is necessary for the mother or an older sister, or some one of the girl's family, to accompany the young couple.

This strictly Mexican custom is fast disappearing in the southwest. Grandmothers and parents who are of the strict Mexican tradition, but now living in the United States, will try to uphold the Mexican custom. This meets with little success and is resented by the young American boys and girls. It is fast becoming accepted for Mexican boys and girls to pursue their courtship in the same

manner, as is customary throughout the United States.

The engagement may be announced at a private family party. More often it is a private affair whereby the boy presents an engagement ring to the girl and the date for the wedding is set.

Now the fun begins. The young couple has to institute a search for *padrinos* and *madrinas*—sponsors. In some weddings as high as fifteen couples are used as sponsors (*padrinos*).

First, there is the couple required by law, the actual witnesses of the wedding. Next, the *padrinos de arras*—the sponsors of the coins; then, the *padrinos de lazo*—the sponsors of the cincture; next, the *padrinos de los cojines*—the sponsors of the cushions; next, the *damas de honor*—the maids of honor; next, the flower girls. Of course, each maid of honor and each flower girl has a boy to walk with her.

Sunday weddings prevail in most parts; in many places, however, the people have been converted to the United States custom of Saturday weddings. The Sunday wedding is the Mexican tradition. This came about because most of the people had only Sunday to take off from their regular work.

Thirteen coins are used in this ceremony. The coins are presented by the bridegroom to his bride while the priest indicates the meaning of the rite by saying that these coins are given as a sign that this man is presenting to his bride everything that he possesses

with the promise that he will use it for her support. *Las Arras* (the coins) are kept by the married couple in a safe place for life as an indication of wealth.

El Lazo is a cincture similar to that worn by the priest at Mass. The sponsors of the cincture place the cincture over the bridal couple after the Gospel of the Mass and remove it after the Communion of the Mass. The meaning is very plain: the binding tie of marriage.

Following the wedding ceremony in the Church the families and invited guests return to the home or to a rented hall where it is customary to serve chocolate and cake. Without chocolate and cake the wedding would not be a wedding!

In some parts of the southwest it is customary for the bride's parents to impart their personal blessing to the bridal couple; following this, the bridegroom's parents repeat the blessing over the couple.

After the Mass the bride usually goes alone to the altar of the Blessed Virgin in the church and kneels there in prayer for some moments before stepping forward to place her bridal bouquet on the altar. At times this bridal bouquet is placed on the main altar of the church.

Funerals

Funerals are conducted in the ordinary manner of the Church wherever possible. However, a vast body of the people are poor—they are laborers—and they often request afternoon funerals. This

is done in order to give the men the opportunity of assisting at the funeral after their working hours.

It is expected that all the relatives of the deceased person be on hand and stay through the night at the wake. Coffee and cookies are served for the ladies, and drinks are available for the men.

The ceremony in the Church follows the ritual. However, since these people are more demonstrative and emotional than we, weeping and sobbing will be heard throughout the Mass and the funeral service. This sobbing and weeping continues to the graveside where it reaches a crescendo when the body is lowered into the grave. Many feel they must make a demonstration of their love before the bystanders by attempting to jump into the grave. There is no real intention in the demonstration.

The wailing will stop immediately that the priest begins to intone the prayers at the graveside. After the coffin is lowered and the cover has been put in place the priest will throw the first spadeful of dirt on it making the sign of the cross with it as he does so. Thereafter, all the bystanders step forward to take a handful of dirt, kiss it, and toss it upon the coffin.

If the deceased person was in any way prominent in the city, it is proper for those who hold positions of influence in the community to step forward and pronounce a eulogy at the graveside.

Oftentimes these speeches become lengthy.

The custom of making speeches prevails on almost any occasion of moment; at birthday parties, weddings, baptisms, dedications, civic occasions, holidays, etc.

Christmas

The drama of the Birth of Christ, called *Los Pastores*, is a semi-pagan custom. The early missionaries had to find a way of combining the pagan rites of the Indians of Mexico with Christian doctrine.

Los Pastores (the shepherds) is enacted once a year at Christmas time. It depicts the Incarnation. The roles of St. Joseph, the Blessed Virgin, the Infant, the three Kings, a good and a bad angel, are played by people selected from the community or neighborhood. When the presentation takes place all the people of the village or neighborhood attend in shepherd attire.

Singing and dancing play a great part in the drama. The songs, especially, were introduced by the missionaries for telling the story of the birth of Christ. The people of the village will gather in an open field. Music is furnished for the occasion and food is brought by everyone. The songs of the drama will tell of the birth of Christ, of the coming of the shepherds, and of the coming of the kings. There is also introduced into the drama a scene where the good angel throws the bad angel out and away from the manger. The entire drama will last for about an hour.

After the presentation the people will stay for some time, singing, dancing, and eating. *Los Pastores* is played as close to Christmas as possible, even on Christmas day itself. It is found among the people who are least educated.

Las Posadas (the inns) is a Christmas novena which begins on December 16. This custom is eminently Mexican in origin. It is strictly religious and it prevails among the people who are better instructed in the Faith. *Las Posadas* was introduced in order to present in a lively manner the story of the birth of Christ.

Nine homes of families are selected in advance for *las posadas* (the inns). The families taking part in *las posadas* join in procession every evening during the novena. They carry candles and stop at a different home each night. During the procession they sing hymns depicting the story of Mary and Joseph traveling on their way with the donkey looking for a place of lodging.

When the procession arrives at the designated home for that evening, Mary and Joseph in their songs will ask for a place for the night. The song that is sung in answer by the family there indicates there is no lodging for them. Each night of the novena Mary and Joseph are sent away. But before they go, the entire procession, singing, passes through all the rooms of the home of that evening.

At the home for the ninth evening the family prepares the Christ-

mas crib with the manger and the statue figures of Mary, Joseph, Infant, etc., similar to those we use throughout the United States.

The novena of *Las Posadas* is entirely Catholic in origin; it was introduced by the people themselves in Mexico with the approval of the clergy.

In many places refreshments have been made a part of *Las Posadas* at the nine homes visited during the novena. Among the rich, *Las Posadas* becomes a veritable party where champagne, wine, and all good foods are served the participants.

Holy Week

The custom of preparing for Holy Thursday by going to confession on Spy Wednesday afternoon or evening prevails among the Mexicans in our southwest. For Holy Thursday a special altar called the *Monumento* is built in the church and set aside for the Holy Thursday adoration all day and night. This altar is built on a special platform, usually quite high. It is magnificently decorated with candles and flowers, so that it literally represents a monument to the Holy Eucharist.

In some places in Mexico there is great rivalry between the parishes in trying to outdo each other in beauty in the decoration of this memorial monument to the Holy Eucharist.

On Holy Thursday the custom prevails of going on pilgrimage on foot to as many churches as possible to visit the Blessed Sacra-

ment and offer prayers of adoration. The adoration continues all the night through.

Good Friday

On Good Friday after the Good Friday Mass the *monumento* to the Blessed Sacrament is torn down and in its place is put a representation of Calvary itself. This includes a cross about 12 feet high with the body of Christ on it. Statues representing St. John and the Blessed Virgin, the Jews, the High Priest, the soldiers, are also placed in the scene on the platform.

At twelve o'clock noon the Three Hours start. Every fifteen minutes during the three hours a priest will mount the pulpit to preach to the congregation. The sermons are calculated to prepare the minds and hearts of the people for the three o'clock hour when Christ is to die on the Cross.

Shortly before three o'clock the altar boys will light up flashing powder to simulate lightning, noise will be made in the church to simulate the earthquake.

After the priest has ended his final sermon, he takes a ladder and mounts the Cross to detach the body of Christ. He takes it down and places it in a position

on the platform for the people to venerate.

All Souls Day

All Souls Day in Mexican custom calls for a religious celebration that requires preparation. For a week in advance the people will be making ready garlands and wreaths and crosses of real or paper flowers of every color under the sun to be used in decorating the graves of their deceased relatives.

From early morning on All Souls Day the people will trek to the cemetery on foot, in cars, and in buses. The majority of them will spend the entire day at the cemetery.

At a set hour of the afternoon the parish priest goes out to the cemetery for the recitation and singing of the prayers of the ritual at the graveside. Following this a sermon is preached to the assembled crowd. Then the priest is flooded with requests to go about the cemetery blessing the individual graves of the dead.

For weeks following All Souls Day the cemeteries in our southwest are colorful with the hundreds of garlands and wreaths and crosses. During this period the cemetery becomes a sight-seeing stop for visitors to our cities.

Slovaks And Family Religious Customs

ANN MICHNA

THE liturgy of the Church is not an isolated thing divorced from the daily life of the faithful. Its purpose is not merely to influence souls on Sunday mornings, or occasionally in the administration of the Sacraments. It seeks rather to induce the children of the Church to follow the injunction of Christ to "pray without ceasing." Therefore, it enters the Catholic home itself. This would seem quite in harmony with the 126th Psalm, which reminds us that "Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it."

Although domestic liturgy in many an American home is almost unknown, we of Slovak descent have enjoyed the inestimable privilege of growing up in an atmosphere of pious practices and symbolic ceremonies, inspired by and encouraged by the Church. This has given rise to the innumerable interesting and colorful celebrations, to a variety of religious customs, still observed at least in part by the majority of the Slovaks in America.

Religious Expressions

Among the Slovaks everything revolves about the liturgy — the year, the seasons, the months and days; work, rest, and play. For example, because snow falls near the feast of St. Martin, the people say:

"St. Martin comes riding on a white horse." Overcoats are always stored away "before Pentecost." "Get out the featherbed on the feast of St. Catherine." "Do all your planting before the feast of St. John." Such admonitions expressed in easily remembered rhymes are passed down from parents to children.

In 1872, Father Andrew Radlinsky compiled a prayer-book, "*Nabozne Vylevy*," arranged according to the liturgical year, which has since set the pattern for the spiritual life among the Slovak people. Any Slovak brought up on the "*Vylevy*" will know his faith thoroughly, be thoroughly familiar with the Church calendar and its seasons and feasts, live their spirit, be on intimate terms with Christ, His Holy Mother and the Saints, and have on hand a prayer for every occasion.

On entering a Slovak home, the form of salutation is always, "Praised be Jesus Christ," to which is answered, "Forever and ever." This salutation is also a "must" on the street when it is a question of meeting a priest or religious. In the home the hand of the priest and religious is always reverently kissed along with the greeting. On taking leave of a Slovak home, the expression used is always, "Remain with God," to which is answered, "And you with His Divine Son."

Other pious expressions heard repeatedly in every Slovak home are: "The Lord help you," "The Lord hear us." Gratitude is always expressed by "The Lord reward you."

Family evening prayers in the Slovak home are said in common. The Rosary is recited daily. If visitors happen to call, they may either join in the devotion or wait until it is terminated. There is daily reading from the Holy Scriptures, from the lives of the Saints, or from "*Nabozne Vylevy*." Every evening before retiring the children receive the blessing of their parents. Before leaving home to go to confession, the father, mother and children ask each others' pardon for any offenses they may have committed against each other by saying: "Forgive me if I have offended you in any way." This is answered, "May God forgive you."

Evidences of Religion

Crucifixes, statues, and sacred pictures occupy the most prominent place in the home for the edification of all. During the day, before each occupation, the parents make the sign of the cross and ask God's help. The mother never begins to slice a loaf of bread until she has, with knife, signed it with the sign of the cross. A piece of bread dropped accidentally upon the floor, must be immediately picked up and kissed.

The family Bible contains a record of noteworthy occurrences, such as births, deaths, anniversaries, First Communions, Confirmations and Marriages. Children in-

variably receive the name of the saint on whose feast they were born.

Volumes could be written on these and other religious customs and practices still observed by the Slovaks in America. True, many of them are slowly but surely going out of use. However, others remain. This is particularly true of those pertaining to the Christmas and Easter Seasons. Let me describe these in some detail.

Days before Christmas, the father and mother collect the necessary provisions for the family celebration of the Feast — nuts, raisins, cottage cheese, honey, and poppy seed. In Slovakia these items are produced in season right at home for most Slovaks are farmers.

Another important pre-Christmas event is the distribution of the *Oblatky*. *Oblatky* is the plural of *oblatka*. The word has a close resemblance to "Oblation." It is not a Slovak word. It is derived from the Latin, *Oblatio*, which is the name given to the bread used for consecration in the Mass. The large oval-shaped wafers are usually baked by the organist of the parish who, by the way, holds a very high place in the esteem of the people of a Slovak parish. About a week before Christmas, the organist goes from home to home distributing these *oblatky*, leaving in each home as many as there are members in the family.

Christmas Eve among the Slovaks is called *Stedry Vecer*, or "Generous Eve." Indeed this is a very appropriate name, for on this night

the most generous gift of God was lavished upon us — He sent His only Begotten Son to save us.

Christmas Eve Supper

On Christmas Eve the Slovaks prepare a very elaborate supper. They keep a rigid fast all day; in fact, those of the old school eat absolutely nothing all day until this "Generous Supper," as they call it.

At this supper, there is a special menu that is adhered to with very few deviations. As a rule, it consists of a special soup made of sour kraut brine and dried mushrooms, cooked peas, turnips, and *Opekance*, — a delicious dish made up of tiny cakes or dumplings in a sauce of poppy seed and honey. Then there are the *Kolace*, or Slovak pastry, nuts, and a sip of wine for everybody.

Only the most urgent reason would keep a member of the family from being present at this supper. Some travel hundreds of miles from other cities and states just to be present with the folks at this supper. If the absence of one of the members is absolutely unavoidable, a cover is set for him, and all due remembrance is made to the missing one.

The supper is usually held at a late hour so that no one need be late. The head of the family, usually the father, says a special grace. Then a specially formulated Christmas wish is recited which lays stress on God's blessing for the family, on health, on success in all labors, and peace and good will among neighbors. The souls of the faithful departed are then prayed

for, special mention being made of members of the family who were present the year before, but who had gone to their eternal reward since.

The first food eaten is the *Oblatky* already described. It is to remind us of the "Bread that came down from heaven" — Christ coming as God and man. Usually, the father serves the *Oblatky*. He takes one wafer at a time, puts a little honey on it, and hands it to each member of the family. The adding of the honey signifies the goodness of God.

A very lovely custom is this: if Slovaks know of a person who is destitute or very poor and alone, they invite him to the Christmas Eve supper, and they treat him with as much consideration and respect as they do a member of the family. If there are any servants in the household they also sit at the family table for the evening.

Towards the end of the meal, while still at the table, the family may be aroused from their reminiscing by strains of music, and the singing of Christmas Carols. This announces the coming of the *Jaslickare*, a group of young men dressed as shepherds and angels. One of them carries the "Bethlehem," a representation of the stable where our Saviour was born. They very respectfully ask permission to enter the house and when the permission is given, they come in and recall in song and verse the events of the first Holy Night. After this the family spends the evening in singing Christmas Carols, until it is

time to go to Church for Midnight Mass.

The Feast of Epiphany

The Christmas season for the Slovaks ends on the feast of the Epiphany. On that day the priest visits each home, and with the chalk he had blessed at Mass that morning, inscribes on the door of each home the initials of the Three Kings, Gaspar, Melchior and Baltazaar; and with the water he had blessed on the same occasion, blesses the home, reciting this prayer:

“O Almighty God, bless this home, so that in it there may be health, chastity, victorious virtue, humility, goodness and mildness, the fullness of the law, and acts of thanks to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and may this blessing remain upon this house, and upon all who dwell in it.”

Last, but by far not the least, are the beautiful and colorful customs and practices of the Slovaks during the Easter season. Sunday, Monday and Tuesday before Ash Wednesday are known as *Fasiangy*. They are the days of merriment prior to a long period of abstinence from pleasure and food. On Monday night, during *Fasiangy*, there is a masquerade ball, a sort of “Slovak Madri Gras.” It is said by some, that the significance of this is dispelling Winter’s gloom, and welcoming oncoming Spring. If the ice has already disappeared, people sow seeds as early as the middle of March.

The days of the Lenten Season

are observed by strict fasting and abstinence. Pots and pans are boiled out to remove any signs of lard. Most of the Slovak people refrain from eating meat during the whole season. Some eat it only on Sundays. Dairy products, potatoes, and food made of flour combined with potatoes, or eggs, or both in different proportions, make up most of their meals. Good Friday is a day of the most rigid fasting. Here again, those of the old school eat nothing but dark bread, drink black coffee, or just water.

As on the day before Christmas, so also on the day before Easter, Holy Saturday, every Slovak household is a beehive of activity. The lady of the house again bakes *Kolace* or Slovak pastry, and a special bread eaten only at this festive season, called the *Paska*. This again is not a Slovak word. It is from the Greek *Pascha*, and the Hebrew *Pesah*, meaning “Pass-over.” This bread is probably in some way connected with the unleavened bread used in the ancient Jewish custom of celebrating their great and most joyous feast, the feast of the Pasch, commemorating the great national event of Israel’s departure from Egypt, and at the same time marking the beginning of the harvest.

Busy Holy Saturday

Other foods which are prepared on this occasion are *Klobasy*, which are beef and pork sausages, and smoked ham. Eggs are died in red beet juice, and in colored water obtained by boiling onion skins.

The eggs are decorated artistically with *Batik* work, using wax with a pin point to mark out the intricate patterns. *Sirek* is made of eggs and other ingredients, and pressed like cheese. Horseradish is ground and mixed with boiled, grated red beets. Eggs are boiled separately to be eaten with the ham.

In the afternoon, when the food has been prepared for the next day, the lady of the house places a colorfully woven basket on the table. Into it she puts some lamb meat, signifying the Lamb of God, a small piece of home smoked and home cured bacon, ham, *klobasy*, boiled eggs, dyed and plain, the *Sirek*, the *Paska*, some *kolace*, some horseradish, and a little salt. The basket is then covered with a white linen embroidered cloth, and taken to the church where the priest blesses it, using this prayer:

"Bless, O Lord, this creation that it may be a means of salvation to the human race, and grant that, by the invocation of Thy Holy Name, it may promote health of body, and salvation of soul in those who partake of it, through Christ our Lord." This food is then taken home, and eaten as breakfast Easter Sunday, Monday and Tuesday.

Holy Saturday night, in all Slovak churches, there are very impressive and joyful ceremonies, called the Resurrection Services. These consist of a solemn procession around the aisles of the church, in which the priest, altar boys, flower girls, and young men and women take part. The proces-

sion is led by a man carrying a statue of the Risen Christ, followed by men carrying the paschal and triple candles.

The procession is started by the priest intoning the hymn "Jesus Christ is risen from the dead!" With the joyous ringing of bells, and the triumphant sounding forth of the church organ, the congregation takes up the hymn, and sings it throughout the whole procession.

On Easter Sunday, instead of the usual salutation, "Praised be Jesus Christ," it is "Jesus Christ is risen from the dead," repeated three times. And the answer, also repeated three times, is "Indeed He has risen."

Quaint Custom

The Easter festivities, among the Slovaks, are brought to a close Easter Monday and Tuesday, with a very quaint and interesting custom. On Monday the men and boys spill water on the women and girls, and then on Tuesday the order is reversed, the women and girls doing the same to the men and boys.

This custom is carried out not only in their own homes. After they have done it in their own homes, they go out visiting relatives and friends, doing the same in these homes. Originally the water was only poured on the hands, but abuse crept in, and now the person involved usually gets more water on the head and face than on the hands.

This is all taken in a good, cheerful spirit, the women and girls knowing that they will get their chance to retaliate the next day when they call on the men and boys.

Various explanations are offered for the custom. Some say it refers to the incident of Pilate washing his hands before all as a sign of protest before passing final sentence upon the Innocent Savior. Others say that the soldiers, in an attempt to disperse the multitude which persisted in choosing Barab-

bas and clamoring for Our Lord's crucifixion, threw water at them.

Others again say that the women who came to anoint the body of Jesus received the same treatment when they insisted on seeing Christ, after they had been told by the soldiers He was not there, and they were too slow to realize just what had happened. Finally, still others say that water was used in an attempt to disperse the people crowded in front of Pilate's home, after news of the resurrection had spread.

Polish Family Customs

REV. VALERIAN J. RYKOWSKI and
MRS. FRANCES KACZMAREK

TO the Polish people there is no part of the year that is more sacred than Christmas. Christmas is more than just a holiday for the exchanging of gifts. It is a holiday closely connected with family life and it means *Wigilia* and the sharing of the *Oplatek* (Wafer) with all those that are near and dear to them.

The day before Christmas, the Polish housewives are busy preparing the meatless feast, which consists of five to eleven dishes. The number is always uneven to insure good luck and health for the household during the coming year! It is believed that the more dishes that are served the greater the good fortune that will come to the family. Care is taken that the number of guests at the Christmas Eve Feast be even, for an uneven number means death to one of those present. A vacant place is always left for an unexpected guest. No one is ever turned away from any Polish home on Christmas Eve.

Christmas Eve supper is not served until the first star appears in the sky. In many homes no food is served during the whole day, so the appearance of the first star is eagerly awaited, especially by children.

Hay is placed under the table cloth in commemoration of the

"Manger of Bethlehem." In some homes sheaves of wheat are placed in corners of the rooms; this is supposed to assure a plentiful crop for the coming year. The table is decorated with traditional evergreen and mistletoe. An attractively dressed tree can be seen in one corner of the room where the guests gather to be entertained and sing Christmas Carols. There is a miniature manger in practically every home. Gifts, especially for the children, are distributed on Christmas Eve.

Before supper the head of the family says grace, then shares the Christmas wafer with all, beginning with the eldest and concluding with the youngest member. The *Oplatek* or Christmas wafer is a symbol of Christ and serves as a reminder that in accepting Christ one must love his neighbor. Hence, in the sharing of the *oplatek* all discussions, quarrels and misunderstandings must cease—brotherly love must reign.

No beggar, nor stranger can be refused admittance to the home because it may be Christ in disguise.

Christmas Hymns

After the supper, the family gathers in the living room, exchanges gifts and then sings vari-

ous Christmas hymns or *Kolendy* until it is time for Midnight Mass.

At Midnight the traditional Mass, called *Pasterka* (Shepherd's Mass), is celebrated. Christmas Carols—*Kolendy*—are sung. Two of the most popular carols are *Wzlobie Lezy* (Away in a Manger) and *Przybieżeli .do Betlejem Pasterze* (Shepherds Hasten to Bethlehem). The oldest Christmas Carol dates back to 1624. The two mentioned above were written in the 17th century.

One custom that the children eagerly await is the Manger (*Yaselka*), a presentation of scenes from the life of Christ. Gaily attired minstrels march from house to house singing Christmas Carols and also put on Nativity shows.

There are many legends connected with the Christmas holidays. The most popular one is about the cattle speaking the human language on Christmas night; however only one who is without sin can hear and understand them.

No manual labor is performed on Christmas Day. It is a day for prayer and festivity and the gathering of families, relatives, and friends.

Aside from the strict observance of fast and abstinence during Lent and making the Way of the Cross—there is a unique and exclusively Polish devotion called the *Gorzkie Zale* which means literally, "Bitter Sorrows." This devotion is divided into three parts, consisting of hymns or lamentations and meditations on the Passion of Our Lord.

Lamentations Chanted

Although these lamentations can be recited, their full beauty and true value are to be found in the traditional chant with the entire congregation taking active part. Only when this is accomplished can the real value and effect upon the soul be fully appreciated. Without a doubt, were these devotions to be presented to the American Catholics they would most readily be accepted. (A translation of the devotions with the music notations can be had by writing to the Marymount Publications, 6804 Lansing Avenue, Cleveland 5, Ohio.)

On Good Friday, according to the full liturgy of the Church, the Crucifix is unveiled and presented to the faithful for adoration. After 3 p.m. a replica of Christ's body is laid in a sepulchre and covered with flowers. Groups of people go from church to church to worship at the tomb.

The special religious feature of Holy Saturday is the blessing of various foods, but especially the egg and the lamb. The egg symbolizes Christ in the tomb. At breakfast on Easter Sunday the egg is broken to represent Christ's resurrection and then shared with everyone to show the unity that exists between Christ and His loved ones. The lamb, moulded of butter or pastry, symbolizes the Lamb of God and all partake of the lamb with the full realization that without the Lamb of God there could be no salvation. Because of their

symbolic significance the egg and lamb are given the place of honor—in the center of the table.

Easter is also a holiday connected with family life. On Easter Sunday the dining table is decorated with garlands of periwinkle, bilberry leaves and cress. Before dinner the hostess partakes with her guests of blessed eggs, and greetings are exchanged. Easter eggs are hard-boiled and painted in various patterns called *pisanki*. A center-piece for the table is made in the form of a lamb.

Corpus Christi is a great religious pageant of the year. Impressive pageantry and devotions are part of the Corpus Christi processions.

There are two very ancient customs which still survive in War-

saw and Cracow. One is the celebration of the Festival of Wreaths on St. John's Eve, June 24. Another is the Sea Festival which falls on the eve of June 28. On June 29 the holiday spirit prevails in all Poland and all homes are attractively decorated. (The hopes of the entire Polish nation are centered upon the sea.)

Such are at least some of the outstanding religious customs that are common among the Polish people.

There is another custom which is part of the everyday life of the Polish people and that is the greeting as one enters a home. Instead of a "hello" one greets the occupants with "Praise be to Jesus." The occupants reply by "Forever and ever. Amen."

Irish Family Religious Customs

DERMOND SHEEHAN

DURING their three hundred years or more of religious persecution the Irish people were robbed of the inspiration for home observances that comes from the solemn celebrations of the Church. During that time also, and even for four centuries before, economic and political persecution reduced the Irish family to a life of never-ending struggle for the barest material necessities of life.

External religious observances were, therefore, at a minimum. Yet the spirit of religion and also of family devotion burned always brighter and brighter. Every Irishman today looks with grateful wonder on the miracle of grace worked by our ancestors in that persecuted land.

Faith Is Necessary

In the story of Irish families there is a strong reminder to us of what our most important task is at a Catholic conference on family life. While we can thank God that He has inspired us to work for the welfare of the family through a great effort to promote social justice and charity, we can never say that economic security is the most necessary thing for the family. The one thing necessary is our Catholic faith.

In Ireland family life flourished when material conditions were

worse than one might imagine could be endured by any people. Yet there were always large and devoted families. There was always perfect fidelity. The material bonds were very weak indeed, but the spiritual bonds were unbreakable. The grace of God and the examples of great saints had put into the souls of our ancestors a fear of God and a reverence for all holy things that starvation and the sword could never remove.

The external expressions of the faith in an Irish home are seen best in the sayings that characterize every conversation. The simple expressions, "Thank God," "With God's help," and "God bless you," are continually on everybody's lips. On entering a home one always says, "The blessing of God on you all," or "God save all here."

Many of the sayings really lose their flavor in being translated from the Gaelic, but I will give a few more examples.

When there are worries about paying the debts, the expression that is used is, "The help of God is nearer than the door." In providing for a large family the people say, "God never created a mouth that He did not provide it with food." On seeing the first fruits of the season one would say, "May God bless this year." After the people of a community would

finish the cooperative packing of butter, the parting word to each other is, "May God increase your milk and butter."

The simplest actions are made an occasion of prayer. When the lights are turned on there is the appropriate prayer, "May God give the light of Heaven to our souls."

Abundance of Sayings

In a country so full of sorrow there has always been an abundance of sayings to express the resignation to the will of God that is to be found in a truly Catholic soul.

There was always, too, a sensitiveness to the common sharing of suffering. On hearing of a tragedy one would say, "May God save those who hear or tell of it."

When leaving a home after a visit one would usually say, "May you have good news from God and from over the sea." That last phrase is a reminder of something that loomed large in every Irish family, the leaving of Ireland by so many sons and daughters because of the poor economic conditions.

One privilege that the persecutors unwittingly gained for the Irish people was that the Holy Sacrifice is frequently offered in the homes. This was especially true, of course, in the penal days. After Catholic Emancipation many of the landlords would not allow churches to be built and so the priests came to the homes. This custom has been kept up since the building of the churches, and as a

result, still have there the Stations as they are called.

In each townland or neighborhood in the rural parishes the priest says Mass in one of the homes twice a year, in Advent and at Easter time. In some parts of Ireland it may be more often. Almost all go to Confession and receive Holy Communion at the Station. After Mass breakfast is served and matters of interest to the community are discussed by the priests and the people.

Thanksgiving After Harvest

The preparations for the Station involve a complete job of repairing and cleaning in the house. Out of respect for the priest the roads leading to the house also are repaired. The Station in Advent has come to have a special significance as a thanksgiving after the harvest.

Christmas is the great family feast in Ireland. All those who can do so return home, and it is indeed a wonderful family reunion for those who can gather around the big turf fire. The Rosary on that night is offered especially for those who are in foreign countries.

Every home is given a thorough cleaning for the Coming of the Christ Child. The farmyard and driveways are included in the cleaning-up. On Christmas Night—or Christmas Eve as it is called in this country—three large candles are lighted in the living room and three medium-sized candles in each window. These are for the Divine Infant, His Blessed Mother, and St. Joseph. The door of every Irish

house is left unlocked on that night so that the Holy Family can enter.

There is scarcely any work done until the day after Epiphany. This is especially a time for visiting relatives.

Devotion to one's relatives is an important part of Irish family life and it has been transferred to our life in the United States. We think of the family not only in terms of the father, mother, and children at home, but also of the married brothers and sisters, the uncles and aunts and cousins and all the varied relationships.

Thus there is a very salutary sharing of joys and of trials and a wide variety of normal recreation provided within this larger family group. The excellent moral and religious influence that results from this shows itself in countless subtle and unobtrusive ways.

Family Rosary A Must

No family in Ireland would think of retiring without saying the Rosary together. In many homes the fifteen decades are said on Saturday in thanksgiving for the blessings of the week.

The "trimmings" or intentions take as long to say as the Rosary itself. These express prayers for the honor and glory of God, for thanksgiving, for members of the family away from home, and especially those beyond the ocean. Again, there is a remembrance of relatives, friends, and neighbors, of

travellers who are in distress. For those who do us injury there is the invocation, "May God direct them in the way of salvation." Every departed relative and friend is mentioned. "The man who was killed on the coach road" is not forgotten even though the accident had happened a hundred years ago.

In a country like Ireland where there was so much oppression, many people were forced to beg. But the Irish people never called them beggars. They were known as travellers, or as walking men and walking women. They were welcome guests in every home and were made comfortable for a night's lodging. The prayers offered in return for this hospitality brought many blessings to Irish homes.

We may well end this little account on the note that the Irish home is always open to Our Lord and Our Lady and their poor ones. A very ancient Gaelic poem expressed this spirit very well in the following lines:

Oh King of Stars!
 Whether my house be dark or
 bright,
 Never shall it be closed against
 any one,
 Lest' Christ close His house
 against me.
 If there be a guest in your house
 And you conceal anything from
 him,
 'Tis not the guest that will be
 without it,
 But Jesus, Mary's Son.

Italian Family Religious Customs

MRS. ANNA GUERRIERO

THE practices and customs I shall refer to are those that our parents and grandparents used to observe when we were children. We now find they are worthwhile and that they can and should be observed by us in our day.

Looking Towards Marriage

Preparations for the marriage sacrament are seriously made and there is a great deal of formality. A young girl and boy are taught very early to have regard for the virtue of purity. The Madonna, the embodiment as it were of this virtue, stands for men and women as their highest ideal. The women that men are to marry are set upon a lofty pedestal and have to meet the tests of thrift, of house-keeping knowledge, and by the facing of responsibilities. The parents prepare the young people with every possible safeguard by negotiating preliminary contracts and by holding many consultations.

The religious ceremony of the marriage takes precedence over all other arrangements. High Mass is a "must" in many places. The parish priest is invited to the marriage feast. The rate of successful marriages runs high among the Italians. Careful preparation and the important part played by religion can be said to be the outstanding factors contributing to this.

The sacredness of the family is an ideal to which all of us subscribe very early in life. To the Italian, "family" means not only husband, wife and children, but also grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and godparents.

The father is the head of the family. A child rarely undertakes any new venture without securing the father's blessing. The mother rules the home only as she loves and obeys her husband. Is not this a true observance of the Fourth Commandment and of the marriage vows? Did not St. Paul write, "Let women be subject to their husbands as to the Lord, because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church."

When calamities occur, the strong family loyalty urges the speedy marshalling of resources to ease the sorrow and pain. The relatives more or less cheerfully assume the job of helping. Shall we not call this acceptance of a situation, the cause of which may be beyond their comprehension, the religious practice of resignation to God's will, as we hear the words, *La volonta di Dio*—"It is God's Will"—given to comfort the stricken and to give courage to the helpers. The modern world, of course, might call this a "fatalistic attitude."

The Role of Godparents

No discussion of Italian religious practice and family life would be complete without an account of the unusually high rank accorded the godparents. The baptismal godparents are regarded higher than blood relatives and the names *Compare* and *Comare* are always used in respect. Another godparent is chosen for confirmation.

When a couple plans the details of their marriage, they choose their witnesses, best man and maid of honor, with the greatest care, for these two automatically become the godparents of their first born. They assume their spiritual parent-hood obligations as binding.

First children are usually named for their grandparents. There is real significance in the practice of naming a child. We find the beautiful names of our Blessed Mother handed down through generations, i.e., Mary, Maria, Immacolata, Grazia, Concetta, Carmela, Rosario, Assunta.

Such popular names as Joseph, Anthony, Paul, Peter are repeated over and over. It is not uncommon to find Our Blessed Lady's name, Maria, attached to other names for all members of a family.

The bonds of affection that have kept Italian marriages together are formed after the marriage rather than before, in the making and maintaining of a home and family. To the wife and mother the task of rearing children, cooking, housekeeping becomes a labor of love. Even while preparing

loaves of bread, the housewife makes the sign of the cross on each loaf and blesses herself—a practice which is an all-inclusive way of saying grace.

The continual repetition of ejaculations such as *Madonna, aiuta a me* (Our Lady, help me) during the day's work is a common practice, *Grazie a Dio* (Thanks be to God) whenever something nice happens or a danger is averted, and *Se Dio vuole*, (If God Wills) are heard over and over again. It is said that the English expression, dear me, is of Italian origin, from the oft repeated ejaculation, *Dio mio*—My God.

Religious Festivals

The Italians see to it that the holydays lose none of their religious significance through adoption of modern methods of celebrating and continue in ways sanctioned by the usage of generations. A church holyday, a youngster's First Communion, a marriage, a baptism, confirmation, becomes an occasion long to be remembered, so sacred is the preparation.

A baby's birth in the neighborhood used to bring generous baskets of provisions to the new mother from all her neighbors as well as help with the chores. This is a religious practice of real love of neighbor and charity which should be revived and made more forceful in the face of today's threat of family limitation.

Christmas Eve means a real welcome to *Il Bambino*, a whole family gathering around a Crib,

singing *Il Pastorale*. The exchange of gifts comes on the feast of Epiphany.

The Feast of St. Joseph means the gathering of the poor around a festive table and the distribution of St. Joseph bread.

Palm Sunday—wearing and distributing palm to those we may have offended to bring about peace.

Holy Thursday and Good Friday—in the home country, visits to the Seven Basilicas, the Vigil, silence, recitation of the Seven Last Words.

Holy Saturday — securing holy water, making ready the home, sprinkling holy water prayerfully in each room.

Easter—use of the lamb—reminding us of the Paschal Lamb. Feast day celebrations with special Mass and processions through the streets are occasions of interceding with the saints for favors or offering public thanksgiving for favors received by laying of gifts at the Saints' feet during the procession.

Anniversaries

A delightful practice is the use of names' days for celebrations and exchanges of gifts instead of birth-days.

The Italians remember friends

or relatives who have died by having Masses offered for the repose of the soul continuously for many years after their death.

All the warmth of his emotions, his love of color and beauty find expression in the oft repeated practice of burning candles both in the home and Church, giving places of honor in his home to Christ on the Crucifix, to the Madonna in her shrine and to the patron saints, having Masses said in petition and thanksgiving, making personal sacrifices for Christ crucified, giving the first fruits of the garden to the parish priest and sisters and using his talents making beautiful articles for adorning the Altar.

Many of these practices, common to the Italians, stem from Bible stories, taught by the priests in many, many villages in Italy where they have their origin. Since they are translated into action in different ways, it is almost impossible to present all of them in their many variations.

Such are some of our religious practices, particularly as they relate to the family. We, as Italians, may practice our religion in ways that may seem strange and different to some others. But they grew out of our religious beliefs and are to this day expressions of these beliefs.

Religious Practices In The Portuguese Home

REV. LUIZ G. F. MENDOSA

JUST a few introductory words about Portugal and its people. The profound religious spirit of the Portuguese family is one of its foremost and outstanding characteristics. The historic background of the Portuguese people characterizes them as a genuinely Christian nation. St. James and St. Paul themselves spread the seed of Christianity on the Iberian Peninsula, part of which was to become the independent nation of Portugal, 1100 years later. Early in the fourth century, the first Plenary Council held on the Iberian Peninsula, the Council of Elvira, established the practical basic principles of all phases of Christian life. The defenders of the Faith on the peninsula struggled for centuries to keep intact and preserve these principles from pagan invaders, and it was upon them, that, in the course of time, the Portuguese family was to be founded. In the year 1140 Portugal became an independent nation. Its founder and first monarch, Alfonso Henrique, consecrated his country, his crown, and his people to the Immaculate Mother of God. A nation that was Christian in origin, born amidst the struggles for the defense of the Christian Faith, and placed for the future under heavenly tutelage, could not but give to the world families that would be equally Christian.

A Sacred Sanctuary

The Portuguese home has ever remained faithful to its Christian heritage. In this domestic church and sacred sanctuary, all its members in hierarchical subordination render devotion to the unity and mutual interests of the family. Not only the lives of the individuals who constitute the home, but the very atmosphere of the home itself reflects its religious spirit. The presence of sacred images, pictures and other religious emblems contribute highly to the creation of such an environment. Only on very rare occasions will one find a home in which the crucifix is not exhibited in a prominent place. While such symbols are a positive factor in developing the spirit of Christianity that prevails in the household, all demoralizing elements are strictly banned from the home. Licentious or suggestive ornamentation, for example, even when only slightly offensive, has never found a place in the Portuguese home.

Family prayer, in one form or another, is no innovation to the home life of the Portuguese people. Their deep rooted and traditional devotion to the Blessed Mother has made the recitation of the rosary a standard form of family evening prayer. In almost every village and town, the silence of eventide is

broken solely by the choral refrain of families at prayer.

The historic events of the home are frequently marked by family Communion. Such events would ordinarily be the First Communion, confirmation, marriage, or death of some member of the household. On these occasions father, mother and children oftentimes approach the Communion rail together. In some places the Pascal Communion is received collectively by the entire family.

The religious consciousness of parents in the upbringing of their children is quite manifest even from the selecting of their baptismal names. In this regard parents have, as a rule, remained faithful to the spirit of the Church, applying to their children names of Catholic tradition. Out of devotion to the Blessed Virgin, in many families the name of "Mary" is affixed to the name of all the girls.

Child Training

The mother is always the central figure in the home. The role of educator is regarded by her as her own sacred duty. The first religious training of children and their preparation for First Holy Communion is generally the exclusive work of the mother.

The entire training of children in the home is built around a profound respect for parental authority. One of the most noble practices arising from this attitude is the reconciliation of children with their parents prior to receiving the sacrament of Penance. This almost

heroic act of humility of a child kneeling before its parents is a beautiful interpretation of Christian Charity and a true comprehension of the forgiveness of sins. Far reaching in its effects, this noble act places before the mind of both parent and child an understanding of the proper dignity of each.

Another display of filial respect and reverence for parental authority is the custom of all children asking the blessing of their parents. This is a universal custom amongst the Portuguese families. A son or daughter, regardless of age or condition, always asks the blessing of its parents when greeting them upon arrival or departure—a gesture that is simple in form, yet extremely rich in significance. There is nothing more beautiful than a parent, at the asking of his child, invoking from Almighty God blessings upon his earthly charge.

With but slight variations, these practices are essentially the same wherever the Portuguese people may be found. It should be noted that in Portugal, as perhaps everywhere else in the world, religious life in the home is much more intense in rural areas than in the city. The urban district provides an atmosphere more favorable to the spirit of secularism than to good family life. Since, however, 76 per cent of the people of Portugal live in rural areas the standards of Christian living have remained quite constant within the homes. Religious persecution and decadence have no doubt exerted

their full influence upon the family, but again in times of religious renaissance the spirituality of the home is greatly strengthened. The apparitions of the Blessed Mother at Fatima have brought about a tremendous revival of Marian devotion in private life and in the homes. Organized Catholic Action in Portugal has, for the last two decades, contributed highly to the restoration of the ancient patriarchal family life, so seriously affected by the Portuguese liberalist revolution of 1911.

The Portuguese people away from the fatherland, conservative as are all Latin peoples, have maintained in family life the principles of their Christian ancestry. The necessity of adaptation to foreign surroundings and the abnormalities of the present times, while not altering the essential principles, have admittedly detracted somewhat from the fidelity of observance of the ancestral religious practices of the Portuguese home. It might well be said that it has been such practices that have made the Portuguese family loyal to the primary purpose of all families, that of filling the heavens and the earth with the vast multitude of human souls. From a small country of a few thousand square miles, the Portuguese nation has grown to the third colonial empire of the world and the eighth in territorial extension. Out of the Portuguese family emerged the great St. An-

thony of Padua, the Queen St. Elizabeth, a St. John of God, a St. John Britto and over one hundred forty other saints of God whom, to this day, the Church has canonized or beatified.

Missionaries

Thousands of heroic children of the Portuguese family, nurtured and bred amidst its spirit of true Christianity, have made of Portugal a gigantic missionary of the Catholic faith. To all five parts of the world Portuguese missionaries have carried the word of God and conveyed Christian civilization.

The world owes an enormous debt, not only to the Portuguese family, but to all good Christian families. The practice of religion within the home is a tremendous source of influence for the whole of society. Serving as a unifying bond between all members of the family, the practice of religion makes the home a sound and solid front, united through God. As a builder of character, religious practice in daily family life awakens in the individual a sense of duty toward God and toward his fellow men, vivifies his appreciation of the moral values, enkindles in his heart the fear and the love of God. Through the individual, God is made to be the dominating influence and Master of the home. It takes many homes to make a world. It will take many Christian homes to win the world for Christ.

Religious Customs Among The French Of Louisiana

REV. J. ALBERT LE BLANC

SINCE the coming of La Salle in 1682, Louisiana had become French and it was destined to remain so. It became French in its tastes, views, preferences and even in religious matters. The stamp of French influence has never been removed to this day, even though the government of the colony became Spanish and later American. The subdivisions of the State are called Parishes instead of Counties. They bear the name of the Church in the locality; St. Mary, St. Landry, St. Martin, St. James, Assumption, Ascension, etc. Half of the population is Catholic. The southern part, settled by the French, retained its Catholic influence while the northern part, occupied by the Americans of English and Scot descent, is mostly Protestant.

Sources Of Culture

The French population has two sources of culture: the Creole and the Acadian. The true Creoles were the descendants of the intermarriage of French and Spanish. No true Creole ever had colored blood. They were the elite of the population. Accustomed to wealth and luxury, they lived in the cities, built large plantation homes, owned slaves to work the large tracts of land or do the household duties. Education of the

children was supplied by private tutors. The family was the very core of their life. Better educated than the Acadians, they followed the directives of the Church, molded their lives according to Her teachings and kept faithfully the religious practices and customs brought over from their native France.

The Acadians, cruelly uprooted from the land they and their forefathers had settled for over one hundred and fifty years in Nova Scotia because of their loyalty to their religion and to their motherland, suffered exile under the harshest treatment, and were scattered unwanted among the American colonies. After much hardship, more than four thousand of them made their way to Louisiana and settled in the interior, the undeveloped parts along the Bayous that form a network throughout the southern section of the State. They remained in this back country, living in peace and contentment, developing the land, adjusting themselves to new climate and new surroundings. They prospered in spite of the tremendous odds that were against them, and that would have weakened and discouraged others of lesser character. Family life was their treasured possession and though they preserved the customs,

the language and the religious atmosphere of their life in Acadia, some new customs and habits were added. In Acadia, their lives centered around the Church and they looked upon their priest as their counselor, their guide, their shepherd in material as well as in spiritual matters. In the new land, living in isolation with little communication with urban centers, the Acadians saw the missionaries only periodically. With the growth of the population, new lands developed, towns flourished, wealth and prosperity brought about better living conditions for them.

The French influence has suffered little today, in spite of more modern ways of mechanized labor and better educational facilities. We find among the French people who speak nothing but the French language, Spanish, German, Italian and Irish names; for instance, O'Connor, Johnson, Miguez. The distinction between Creole and Acadian or Cajun is no longer stressed. The passing of the Plantation era and the Civil War have greatly reduced the wealth and prestige of the Creole families, so that anyone speaking French may be called indiscriminately Creole or Cadien.

Religious Practices

Many religious customs among the French in Louisiana may be traced to the times of the first settlers when Missionaries were rarely seen. Most homes have a shrine in the corner of the living room of the house. A crucifix occupies the center; holy pictures

adorn the wall; holy water with a blessed magnolia leaf and two blessed candles are kept on a shelf. Night prayers are said before this shrine with lighted candles. Long before the second World War, which increased the practice, families in rural sections gathered once a week to recite the rosary, praying for good crops, successful harvest, the sick and the dead. People in the towns and cities have adopted this practice and all the families living in the same block gather for the recitation of the rosary at least once a week. Holy water and blessed candles are in much use. Candles are lit and holy water is sprinkled during storms. Every member of the family wears a medal. In cases of serious illness, children are promised to Saints by their mothers. If St. Ann will intercede, the child will be hers. Later when the child recovers, she will carry the Saint's colors in shoulder straps or cords until she is fully grown. Children must faithfully attend the catechetical instructions until they have received the sacrament of confirmation. Unfortunately many parents feel that the obligation toward the religious education of their children ceases on the day of confirmation.

Sickness brings families closer. Neighboring families and relatives will remain entire days and nights by the bedside of the sick and dying. The beads are recited at certain intervals. In the second part of the Hail Mary, special words are substituted for the bene-

fit of the sick person. Instead of the customary words "*Priez pour nous, pecheurs, maintenant et a l'heure de notre mort,*" they will say "*Priez pour lui(elle), pecheur, maintenant et a l'heure de sa mort;* pray for this sinner now and at the hour of his death."

Death and Burial

Death in the family is accepted calmly and with resignation among the more educated. But among the uneducated in certain sections it is made an occasion for the release of pent-up emotions. Loud lamentations are expected. They are a sign of deep affection for the departed. Clocks are stopped at the exact hour of death. Mirrors are turned toward the wall or are covered. Water found in vases is thrown out. Candles are lit and kept burning during the *Veille* or *Wake*.

The funeral takes place twenty-four hours after the death of a person. Mourning must be worn. This ranges from full black to half black and white or blue depending on the degree of the individual's relationship and intimacy of friendship. The immediate family goes nowhere for a time. When they do visit again, they go to places at which no music is permitted. Mourning lasts from one year to three months, depending on the degree of relationship. When speaking about a departed member of the family, the word "Defunt" must always precede the name out of respect. In the days when the distance to the Church was too great, and the scarcity of priests

was such that they could not take care of outlying districts, the more educated officiated at the funeral, saying prayers for the deceased in the home and at the cemetery. At the burial some still have the custom of dropping a handful of earth upon the lowered casket after the Sign of the Cross has been made over it.

Respect and devotion for the dead is kept alive in the family for many years. No matter how poor a family may be, the anniversary Mass for the departed member of the family is always said. Pictures of the deceased adorn the tombstones. These are fixed on the the cross or inserted in the shadow-boxes with small statues, crucifixes or other holy objects. The boxes are peak-roofed, and the front is covered with glass.

All Saints and All Souls

Possibly nowhere in America is All Saints' Day observed so strikingly as it is among the Louisiana French. For days preceding it, each family will clean, whitewash or paint the tombs, prepare artificial flowers, design wreaths and place these on the tombs. Among the financially better fixed, chrysanthemums and dahlias are used in decorating the graves. Before the expansion of the Church as we have it today, family and neighborhood cemeteries were common. In our parish, St. Ann's at Mamou, La., we have six cemeteries besides the Church cemetery. In the afternoon of All-Saints' Day, the blessing of the graves takes place.

A procession is held around the cemetery. The priest is at the head; the people follow. The beads are recited while the blessing is taking place. The ceremony ends with a sermon and the singing of the Libera. In some sections where the priest cannot assist, candles are lit at dusk, one for each member deceased and an all night vigil is held. Where out-door altars exist, Mass is celebrated in the cemeteries on All Souls Day.

Other days of the year, too, are celebrated with zeal and devotion. During Lent, no dancing is permitted; family prayers are increased. No one must work in the field on Good Friday. Many families still fast till noon on Good Friday.

In the Shrimp fishing centers, the big day of the year is the annual blessing of the shrimp fleet. Between two hundred and three hundred boats or luggers take part in this ceremony. The families attend Mass and receive Communion; then, after Mass, each family boards its boat and the procession begins. It is a singular honor to lead the procession and the family selected to do so will treasure this honor for years to come. From the flagship decorated with fluttering pennants, the priest in full vestment blesses with holy water each boat as it passes. All members aboard must genuflect and make the Sign of the Cross as he does so.

Marriage Customs

The reception of the Sacrament of Matrimony is still linked with old customs handed down by the

first settlers. In the early days, when the marriage ceremony could not be performed by the priest, the consent was given before the parents of the bride. Then a broom was lifted a foot or so off the ground, the man and woman jumped over it together and they were considered wed. This custom was known as "Saut-ballet." Formerly there was much noise-making, much shooting and shouting as the bridal party went to and from Church. Today there is the sounding of auto klaxons and horns. The reception for the bride and groom must take place at the bride's home first, then at the groom's. Charivaris are sometimes given to widows and widowers who remarry. Tin pans are beaten; cowbells are rung. As much noise as possible is made. The newlyweds are supposed to treat the celebrants to refreshments. If they fail to do so, the charivari may continue night after night.

The French people believe in large families. It is less than two hundred years since their expulsion from Acadia. Yet the Acadians in Louisiana today number more than 500,000. In large families, names for baptism are selected for uniformity regardless of whether such names exist in any language. If the names are not found among the Saints, Saints' names are added. Thus one finds the following: Octave, Octavia, Olive, Oliver, Olivia, Ophelia, Onezime, Onezia. The god-parents play an important role in the family. The parrain and the marraine or Nainane give ad-

vice to their god-child, take deep interest in the teaching of the catechism, send birthday presents every year till the child is grown, and give appropriate gifts for first Communion and confirmation.

Catholic education is doing much to overcome the ignorance in which the people of Louisiana long lived. Louisiana is mainly an agricultural State. The rural people, living in isolation, have been self-sufficient, supplying their wants and their needs from the land they cultivated. Until recent years access to the Church and school was very difficult. Roads hardly existed or were very inferior. Pressing work on the farms kept many children away from school. Though the Faith was deeply implanted, ignorance caus-

ed many to adopt, and stress as important, certain practices that are of little if any intrinsic value. It has been rightly said that, just as the French people adhere strongly to their language and to their family traditions, so too do they remain steadfastly attached to the Catholic Faith. Meigs O. Frost has put the matter this way:

“Louisiana was French from the beginning—French of blood and tongue, of heart and courage. And so fiercely in them burned the fire of their heritage that French they are today after more than two centuries in which the influence of other races and of another speech have beat against their thresholds. French, but loyal Americans.”

Religious Family Customs Of The Russian Germans In Ellis County, Kansas

SISTER MARY ELOISE JOHANNES, C.S.J., Ph.D.

THE Russian-German people whose ancestors came to Ellis County, Kansas, about seventy-five years ago have a background rich in folk lore that is in many ways unique and interesting. Theirs is a culture that is being rapidly lost because of the impact of the American way of life. If one is fortunate enough to spend some time with an occasional "old settler" much that is valuable may be gleaned from a conversation about "old times."

The five settlements—Catherine, Herzog (Victoria), Munjor, Pfeifer, and Schoenchen—made in Ellis County in 1876 and 1877 were founded by Catholics, descendants of the Germans who had settled on the farming region around the Volga River about a century previous to their immigration to the United States.

As a result of general dissatisfaction, caused by compulsory military training, which prevented them from attending their religious duties during the six-year period of training, the Catholics among the colonists on the southern plains of Russia began a general migration. The United States was chosen as a suitable location in which to establish a colony. Many of the Russian-German peo-

ple, desiring to farm rather than to live in the city, went as far west as Kansas and there selected sites for their villages. Today, the five original settlements are thriving villages which have helped to people Hays, the county seat, the largest city in Ellis County.

As Catholics; the chief concern of the early settlers after providing a shelter for their families was to provide for religious services. At this time, the nearest Catholic church was located in Salina, Kansas. Reverend Adolph Wibbert, pastor in Salina, was the first priest to visit the colonies in the spring of 1876. In October of the same year, Reverend Valentine Sommereisen, first resident priest in Ellis County, took up residence in Hays and ministered to the colonies until the Capuchin Fathers took charge in May, 1878. In the meantime, the people, not being content with religious services conducted by a priest who visited them only about once a month, planned practices of devotion which they carried out with greatest fidelity. Before any churches were built, the people in each colony erected a large wooden cross and gathered about it on Sundays and holidays for services conducted by the *Schulmeister* (schoolmaster).

They recited the rosary and litanies, and sang religious hymns.

As soon as possible each little colony built a church which was always, and still is, the central point of community activities. Church feasts were so closely interwoven with social customs that a discussion of one necessarily includes the other. For these people, the home, the church, and the school—three great bulwarks of society—answered all their needs. This correlation is constantly noted in their various family customs which so often begin at home, continue with church services, and conclude in the home. Some of the customs observed by the Russian Germans in celebrating the feasts of the Church are retained until the present day but many have given way to the never-ending cultural adjustment.

In reviewing religious and family customs, at what more significant time of year could we begin than with the birth of our Lord? Preparation is made for Christmas during the four weeks of Advent by abstinence from amusements, and by the recitation of additional prayers. The German custom in connection with the *Christ-Kindlein*, the Christ Child, was popular with the Russian Germans for about fifty years after they went to Ellis County, and is still retained by some individual families. On Christmas eve the children waited for *Christ-Kindlein* who was to bring them presents and good things to eat. Finally, a bell was heard tinkling at the door and a

lady dressed in white, with a blue girdle and with veiled face, appeared as the herald of the *Christ-Kindlein*. She entered the room with the greeting, "*Gelobt sei Jesus Christus*" (praised be Jesus Christ). She inquired for the youngest child and asked him to say a prayer. Then she inquired about the conduct of the older children and punished them if they had misbehaved during the past year. Finally, she threw nuts on the floor and as the children scrambled for them she disappeared, promising to return the next year. This custom has been supplanted in great part by the traditional American Santa Claus.

After the children had seen the herald of the Christ Child the younger families, following a custom practiced in the family of the Czar of Russia, met in groups in the home of the parents or grandparents and settled any disagreements which might have arisen during the past year. Any debts contracted between the different members of the family were paid by the father. With old grievances forgotten and old debts paid, the entire family went to Midnight Mass.

The week between Christmas and New Year's Day carried a holiday air and New Year's morning found the children of each village going to visit their relatives and friends, the first visit usually being made to godparents. The customary greeting is still, "*Ich wuensche Euch ein glueckseliges Neujahr, langes Leben, Gesundheit,*

Friede und Einigkeit, nach dem Tode die ewige Glueckseligkeit" (I wish you a happy New Year, long life, health, peace and harmony, after death eternal happiness). The children are rewarded for their good wishes; formerly, candy and cookies were the customary treat, now, money is frequently given.

Previously, the young men celebrated the New Year by shooting, *Neujahr anschießen* (shooting in the New Year), before the houses of their friends and relatives after which they gave the above greeting. They were given refreshments and the girls pinned ribbons to their coats. A young man's popularity could be judged by the number of ribbons he had on his coat. In some of the colonies, in Catherine for one, a band composed of brass instruments used to march through the village streets stopping first at the home of the priest and then at the homes of each family to greet them with music. Today the *Wuenscher* (well-wishers) are not confined to the children and young men. The men and women frequently visit neighboring families, wish them a happy New Year, and partake of refreshments. The "well-wishing" is kept up by the children until the sixth of January.

On Shrove Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday, the people celebrated *Fastnacht*, similar to Mardi Gras, by card playing, dancing, and recreations of a similar nature. A sweet bread, *Fastnacht Kuchen*, was served to guests who

called to visit the homes during the evening. *Graebbel*, a kind of fried pastry, made of flour and eggs, rolled thin and cut in narrow strips and fried in deep lard, was likewise served. During Lent the people refrain, today as in the past, from recreation and spend more time attending church services. It is not at all unusual to see practically the entire congregation attending daily Mass.

It has always been the custom on Palm Sunday to place pieces of blessed palm in the barns as a protection against fire and to bury small pieces in the fields as protection from lightening and severe storms.

During Holy Week, since no church bells are rung from Mass on Thursday until Mass on the following Saturday, a unique method of announcing services was used in the colonies. The altar boys, *Klepperer*, went through the villages several times a day, singing and striking clappers to announce to the people the Angelus or the hour for services. After Mass on Holy Saturday the *Klepperer* went from house to house collecting eggs as pay for their services. They walked through the streets chanting,

*Klepper, Klepper, Eier 'raus,
Wenn ihr mir kein'
Eier gibt, so schlag'
Ich euch ein Loch ins Haus.*
(Clapper, Clapper,
Out with the eggs,
If you don't give me any,
I will knock a hole in your
house.)

After the long Lenten season of fasting, on Easter Sunday morning it is customary in the villages to take foods to the church to be blessed, fancy cakes or breads, eggs and fruits being chosen for the occasion. These foods are placed on the Communion rail or on a convenient table and are blessed by the priest. The significance of this is that the delicacies which the people have denied themselves during Lent are given back to them by the Church with her blessing at Easter.

Another Easter custom, popular with the children, is that of the Easter Rabbit. This custom is found in many cultures but the Russian Germans have a few distinctive variations in connection with it. On Holy Saturday evening, the mother of the family arranges plates in a room which is later locked, where the Easter Rabbit is to place cookies, candy, and Easter eggs for the children. After Mass on Easter Sunday, the children, led by their father, armed with clubs and pepper shakers line up in front of the locked door to capture this "Santa Claus" Rabbit, so as to have him provide them with sweets through the year. Unfortunately, the good Rabbit is never caught and, after the father has explained its strategic escape, the children enter the room exclaiming, "*Der Has hat schon (gelegt)*" (the rabbit has laid).

On Saturday before Pentecost or on Pentecost, the young men of the villages frequently planted a tree, a *Pfingstbaum*, before the

homes of girls they liked. It was considered an honor to have a "Pentecost tree" planted before one's home but occasionally a young man, in a spirit of fun, planted a dry stick in the yard. This custom is no longer in vogue.

Among the favorite forms of devotion common to the people in Ellis County are processions. These processions add dignity and solemnity to a number of feasts celebrated by the Russian Germans and, although they have been modified considerably within the last generation as to length and frequency, they are still a distinctive part of the culture of the people.

The 25th of April, the Rogation days, and Corpus Christi were three occasions for processions from village to village or within each village. As a rule, the members of the church choir led, singing hymns, chanting litanies, or saying the rosary, and the people joined in the responses. On the Rogation days after Mass the altar boys, followed by the priest, led the procession from the church to the nearby fields. The priest blessed the fields and asked God to give a bountiful harvest to all the farmers.

On Corpus Christi the preparations for the feast occupied several days. Three conveniently located homes were chosen and a temporary altar erected on the porch of each. Handmade wreaths and garlands woven of garden flowers made suitable decorations. After the last Mass the priest, vested in cope and humeral-veil, and carry-

ing the Blessed Sacrament exposed in the monstrance, formed a procession headed by the altar boys, carrying a processional cross and lighted candles, and followed by the choir and the faithful. The procession stopped at each altar, the priest rested the monstrance on the altar, and the choir sang Latin hymns appropriate for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. The final Benediction was given in the church.

On the occasion of a patronal feast of the church in any of the villages, the celebration was considerably bigger than that of an ordinary Sunday. These feasts were a holiday from school and from farm labor. The day began with Mass followed by picnic lunches or by a dinner prepared and served by the ladies of the parish. Today the patronal feast of each parish is kept as a holy day and a holiday; often the bazaar and dinner furnish diversion and a school play gives entertainment.

Being rural minded the Russian Germans have a particular regard for seeds, flowers, and plants. From time to time they have these plants blessed with the prayer of the Church. On August 15, the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Mother, flowers and herbs are blessed in the church. On the eighth of September, the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Mother, the blessing of seed wheat takes place.

On the feast of All Souls', November second, the priest and people go in procession to the

cemetery and pray for the dead buried there and for all the faithful departed. The priest sprinkles the graves with holy water and the people frequently do likewise.

The family bond is very strong among the people and they have great love for children. Babies are always baptized as soon as possible, usually on the second day after birth. A "baptismal banquet" is sometimes given upon the occasion of the child's baptism, especially if it is the first child in the family. The god-parents are respected by the children and highly esteemed by the entire family. They remember the child's birthday with a gift. First Communion days are celebrated with much devotion. The same is true of confirmation days.

Some of the most interesting customs, both social and religious in character, center around courtship and marriage. When a Russian-German youth wished to marry, he asked two of his friends to act as *Freiersmaenner*, matrimonial agents, for him. With them the young man went to the home of his prospective bride where they visited with the girl's parents for a short time and then the *Freiersmaenner* presented the parents with the request of their client. This was a mere formality as the matter was usually settled before this time by the couple themselves. On the other hand, however, marriages were not planned without asking the parents' advice; and it frequently happened that the parents of the young couple

had already discussed the marriage possibilities of their children.

As a rule the period of engagement was not long. Formerly the most popular season for marriages was during the autumn months after harvest; and it is still a favorite time despite the fact that many marriages take place in June and the summer months. In former days when both of the young people were from the same village the marriage was always performed in the parish church of the groom. On the second Sunday of the publication of the banns the young couple separately would visit the homes of their friends in the village to invite the unmarried members of the families to the wedding festivities. On the Sunday of the last announcement it was customary for two men, friends of the bridal pair, to go through the village with invitations known as *Noetigen* or *Einladen*, asking relatives and friends to the wedding. The men carried canes and as they went from house to house someone in each home tied a ribbon to the cane as a mark of acceptance. The invitation was usually in verse, sometimes impromptu. The following one was popular in Schoenchen:

*Wir kommen nicht hergeritten,
Wir kommen sicher geschritten;
Braut und Braeutigam, sie lassen
Euch bitten,*

*Sie lassen Euch laden insgemein,
Ihr sollt auch Hochzeitsgaeste
sein,*

Zehn Gaens-die muessen dran,

*Neunzehn Huehner und der alte
Hahn,*

*Die sind gefuettert und so fett
Wie ein altes Wagenbrett.*

*Dann kommt auch gleich die
Kathrin Woes,*

*Und kocht auch gleich die dick-
en Kloess;*

Sie kocht sie nach Belieben

*Und kocht auch gleich die roten
Rueben.*

*Poetz Blitz—Was faellt mir ein—
Ich hab' ja vergessen den Brann-
twein.*

*Wenn Ihr Uns unser Stoecklein
ziert,*

*So sagen wir auch wo Ihr hinge-
hoert.*

(We do not come on horse
astride

But lusty foot it side by side;
To speak to you for groom and
bride.

And beg of you without delay:
"Be with us on our wedding
day."

Ten geese, they say, and many
a hen

In numbers round of nine and ten
Are fattened for the festive meal
And rounded like a wagon-
wheel.

Remember, too, good Aunt
Katrin

Will cook the dumplings thick
and lean

And serve them with the choic-
est meats

Together with the reddest beets.
The deuce! We nearly did for-
get—

Good brandy will be there, you
bet.

Now tie a ribbon on this cane

And we'll invite you all again).

On the wedding day, the groom and his attendants walked to the home of the bride. Upon reaching the bride's home, the young man and his bride knelt on a white cloth spread on the floor to receive the blessing of the young lady's parents. The young couple and their attendants returned to the home of the groom's father where the bridal pair received the blessing of the young man's parents. Then the entire group walked to the church for the Nuptial High Mass which was attended by all the friends and relatives of the bridal couple. Today much of the early festivity is omitted and *Freiersmaenner* and *Noetigen* are merely familiar terms among the older people but the bride and groom still ask the blessing of parents and the Nuptial High Mass is always performed.

Formerly the wedding feast was held at the home of the groom. The newly-married couple stood at the door to receive the congratulations of all. The common greeting was, "*Viel Glueck und Segen zum Ehestand*" (happiness and blessing on your married state). The wedding festivities, the *Hochzeit*, often lasted two or three days but now a one-day celebration is the most common.

When a person dies in any of the colonies it is customary to keep the *Totenwacht*, the wake. If the deceased is a man, the different men's organizations, such as the Knights of Columbus, or the men of the Third Order of St. Francis,

meet at the home and recite the rosary each evening until the funeral. If a woman dies, the women of the Altar Society, or the Christian Mothers, do likewise. The rosary is recited every hour by different groups as long as the body of the deceased remains in the home. On the day of the funeral, the priest, vested in a black cope and accompanied by the altar boys, goes to the home where he blesses the corpse and recites prayers for the dead. After the Requiem Mass has been celebrated in church, the body is taken to the cemetery. En route, the people pray aloud together. Before leaving the cemetery, many visit the graves of their deceased relatives and friends. The deceased are remembered by many Masses; on the thirtieth day after death and on the yearly anniversaries Requiem High Masses are usually offered for the repose of their souls.

And thus we have gone through the year's activities, showing how closely the church and the home complement each other. Much of the success of the colonies, both spiritual and temporal, is due to the untiring zeal of the Capuchin Fathers. Work among the common people is a tradition with them and in Ellis County they found a fertile field for their labors. It was under their guidance that churches were built and schools established. Their untiring zeal has been largely responsible for keeping alive the strong Catholic faith of the Russian-German people.







