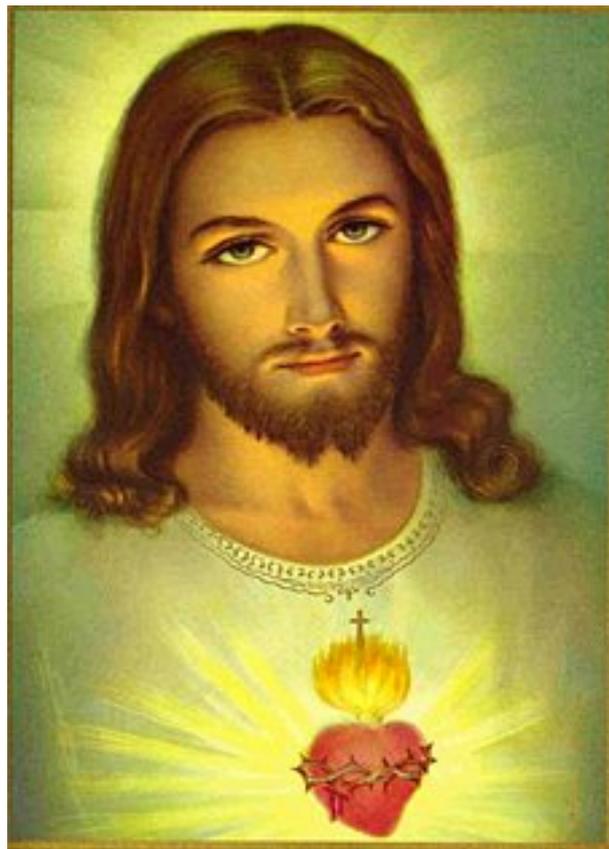


## Devotion to the Sacred Heart in the Irish Benedictine Abbey of Ypres

In 1704, during the Octave of Corpus Christi, a retreat was preached to the Ypres community by Fr. Louis Sabran, S.J. He had been a companion of Blessed Claude de la Colombiere at the court of St. James, and was then stationed at Paray le Monial. He preached on devotion to the Sacred Heart as revealed by Our Lord to St. Margaret Mary. At the end of the retreat, the community made a solemn Act of Consecration to the Sacred Heart and thus the devotion was established. In 1720 the entire community, with the chaplain, Mr. Jeremy O'Donnell, joined a confraternity established with Episcopal approval, by the Jesuits at Bruges. Finally, in 1732, when the Archconfraternity was established in Rome, the community and their pupils were enrolled, and a private association was established in the school to promote the devotion among the pupils, one of whom was Nano Nagle (1728-1734).



About this time, at the request of Abbess Arthur, the privilege of observing the Feast of the Five Wounds was granted by the Holy See. It was not till 1765 that the Feast of the Sacred Heart was authorised by Pope Clement XII, and a proper Mass and Office were approved and granted by way of privilege to Poland and to the Archconfraternity in Rome. In the following year leave to celebrate the feast with this Mass and office as Double Major was obtained by Abbess Dalton of Ypres, who was an ardent promoter of the devotion.

In 1768 the former rector of the Jesuit house at Bruges (the Order had recently been suppressed), on his own initiative, asked and obtained from the Sovereign Pontiff, Clement XII, a plenary indulgence for the Feast of the Sacred Heart and for each First Friday of the year, and 100 days' indulgence once a day to all the faithful who would devoutly visit a picture of the Sacred Heart exposed in the Church of the Irish Abbey at Ypres, under the usual conditions. These indulgences were granted for 7 years. The publication of the indulgences led many people to frequent the Church and the practice of Holy Communion on the First Friday grew year by year.

The nuns looked upon this unexpected favour as a sign which the Divine Heart deigned to give them that He wished to spread the Devotion outside their cloister walls. So far had they been from expecting this favour that they did not possess a picture of the Sacred Heart fit to be exposed in their Church. They had to procure one hurriedly and it remained in use until an Altarpiece had been painted by the artist - Le Ducq; this altarpiece represented Our Lord in Glory as He had appeared to St. Margaret Mary, with one hand raised in blessing and the other pointing to His Sacred Heart; at His feet to one side were St. Bernard and St. Gertrude, and to the other, St. Francis de Sales and St. Margaret Mary, hi 1775 the Indulgence was granted again for 7 years.

For many years the Abbey Church had been in a state of great disrepair and the community were too involved in debt to undertake its restoration, but now benefactors came forward unexpectedly and enabled the nuns to clear the debt and to rebuild the Church completely.

Towards the end of 1779, the Lady Abbess, writing to Rome, asked for a confirmation in perpetuity, of the Indulgences. The bearer of this letter finding that the Cardinal Secretary for Briefs was unfavourable to the devotion to the Sacred Heart, bore it direct himself to the Sovereign Pontiff, Pius VI, with the result that a Bull, '*Ad Augendam Fidelium Religionem*' was given, granting a plenary indulgence every day of the year to all the faithful, who, having received the Sacraments of Penance and the Blessed Eucharist should pray before the altar in the Abbey Church for the Pope's intentions. This favour was so remarkable that it greatly increased the confidence of the Lady Abbess and the community in the Divine Heart of Jesus. Assembled in Chapter, the nuns passed a resolution to give themselves anew to the Sacred Heart in a more solemn and public manner than heretofore: to celebrate the coming Feast of the Sacred Heart with the greatest fervour and pomp; and to petition the Bishop Ypres, Most Rev. Felix de Wavrans, for the erection of a Confraternity of the Sacred Heart in their Church. When the Abbess made known to him their resolution, his Lordship at once granted their request. The Abbess then applied to the Holy See for the privilege of celebrating the Feast as a First Class with octave, with the Mass and the Office lately granted to Poland. By a Brief dated March 27<sup>th</sup> 1780, her petition was granted. On June 2<sup>nd</sup> Feast of the Sacred Heart, 1780, the Bishop celebrated the conventual Mass in the Abbey Church. Before receiving Holy Communion, the Nuns, as the Sacred Host was held aloft in the Bishop's hand, made a solemn act of Consecration which the Abbess read aloud in the name of all, whereby they made "*an entire donation of our house and all we possess, our community and each of its members forever, ready at all times to serve as victims in order to repair the outrages to which the Divine Heart is daily exposed for love of us in the most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.*" In the afternoon the Bishop assisted at Vespers and Benediction and then solemnly erected the Confraternity. He subsequently supported the petition of the Abbess to the Holy See, and confirmation was given by Pope Pius VI on November 14<sup>th</sup> of the same year.

The nuns were soon to experience in a very special way the protection which Our Lord had promised to St. Margaret Mary would be granted to those in whose homes the picture of His Sacred Heart would be exposed for veneration. In 1781 the Josephite Terror began in Belgium, but during the 9 years it lasted the Abbey was never molested. Then followed the French Revolution. For 5 years the revolutionary soldiers occupied the Abbey. The nuns refused to leave and continued to carry out the regular observance, claiming exemption from the law which did not apply to aliens. During all the time Holy Mass was celebrated daily and the Divine Office was punctually recited in Choir. When at last the troops withdrew, everything, including the Nuns' beds, had been looted, but the Church remained intact, with the picture of the Sacred Heart above the altar.

During the century that followed, and until the First World War, the Community kept up the traditional devotion to the Sacred Heart. The nuns had the happiness of knowing that from their Convent, which for many years was the only one left in Western Europe, the devotion was spreading through Flanders, and even to Ireland. As mentioned above, Nano Nagle was at the Abbey school when the first Association was established among the pupils. She gave the devotion to the Presentation Sisters and to the Ursulines, both of whom carried it wherever foundations were made. Another pupil, Judith Browne, (1767-1774) was Foundress of the Brigidine Sisters in the Diocese of Kildare. From her the Sisters received the devotion and their Mother-House was the first to have granted the Mass (Egredimini) in Ireland. Soon there were branches of the Confraternity in all the parishes of the Diocese of Kildare.

*Note given by Dame Bernard of Kylemore Abbey - now deceased.*

I was first told of Nano's connection with Ypres in Autumn, 1908, when I first went to school there, by Dame Josephine Fletcher an Irish nun, professed on 21<sup>st</sup> November 1851, who knew nuns who had known nuns professed before the French Revolution.

***The following letter was written by Dame Bernard to Sr. Camillas, a Presentation Sister from Fargo, North Dakota, author of "From Acorn to Oak" 1969, a study of Presentation Foundations 1775 -1968.***

*Kylemore Abbey 1969*

*Dear Sister Camillus,*

*It is only now I can answer your letter. I have been ill. The doctor said I was completely run down and ordered me a complete rest. This is the first letter I write. I hope you will not be disappointed with my reply. The only written evidence I have ever seen on Nano Nagle having been at school at Ypres was in an article which appeared in the "Irish Rosary" over forty years ago. That article was by myself. However, I can give you some more satisfactory than that. You know that tradition is the basis of history. Well, when I went to school at Ypres in October 1908 Dame Josephine Fletcher told me that Nano Nagle, the foundress of the Presentation nuns, was educated there. Nano was hardly known in those days. But I still remember that fact distinctly. Nano was born in 1718, and received her early education from a hedge school master, no other Catholics dared to teach. The penal law forbade it.*

*In 1730 she was sent to school at Ypres, being twelve and remained four years till she was 16. The Constitutions laid the age limit for "Pensioners" down. Dame Ignatia Goulde was Mistress of Pensioners. She was related to the Nagles as were several of the Community. I give you with dates the names of some which make an unbroken tradition about Nano. Dame Teresa Butler Professed 1718, died 1781; Abbess Scholastica 1852-1916; Dame Josephine Fletcher 1861-1914; Maureen Stewart now Dame Bernard 1912. There is also a tradition that Nano entered but remained only a short time as a Jesuit Confessor advised her to return to Ireland and give herself to work for the poor of that nation.*

*In 1704 the devotion to the Sacred Heart was officially established and the pupils were enrolled. Nano established the devotion in Cork. The Presentation was the school feast at Ypres. Apparently Irish was the language of her primary education. It was what the hedge schools used. English was the language of the school in 18<sup>th</sup> Century. During World War 1 the Abbey was completely destroyed, as was the whole town. We escaped under shell fire. Founded in 1665, it withstood all the wars till then, the French revolution included. It was the only monastery left in Europe, the Divine Office recited daily all the time. "The Irish Dames of Ypres " by Dom Nolan, published by Browne & Nolan gives some of the History. If there is any thing more you wish to know you can write to me...*

*I had better add that nothing remains of the archives, with the ruin of our Abbey.*

*With best wishes,*

*Yours very sincerely in Corde Jesu*

*M. Bernard Stewart O.S.B*

*From the South Presentation Archives, submitted by Sr. Rosario Alien*