



THE RELEVANCE OF PESHTIGO

In cost of human lives, two fires — the Great Chicago fire and that at Peshtigo (Green Bay, WI) — tragically exceeded all those recorded in North America. Started the same day (October 1, 1871), within relatively close proximity of one another, the fires were wind-whipped to maximum tornado-like intensity by the same eastward weather front moving across the upper Midwest. The Wisconsin fire bears its name for the town hardest hit; its survivors describing a mile-high wall of flame reaching an intensity of 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit. Observed traveling at 100 miles per hour in tornado-like fashion, it literally leaped across the Green Bay, pouncing on the east peninsula, scorching and devastating 1.5 million acres (an area the size of Rhode Island). For those in its path there was no escape. Further south, the Chicago fire claimed 300 lives, while Peshtigo's killed 2,000 men, women and children. Martha Newbury Coon survived, and wrote to her sister just days afterwards:

“Oh! What a horrible death. There was a tornado of fire swept over the farming district and on the Peshtigo village; it came on us very suddenly... Oh Mary, it was truly a night of horror. It rained fire; the air was on fire; some thought the last day had come ... Oh it is too horrible to write about or to believe. Oh if they have only gone to heaven, they had time, they must have prayed. Grace [a survivor] said Jessie and Frankie prayed. Eddie said, ‘Pray Mama to God’ and Oh how we did pray. Those who never prayed before prayed that night.”(October 10, 1871)

Our Lord responded to many such desperate entreaties with the greatest of mercies: the grace of reconciliation with God at the moment of death. At the same time a particular group of people were spared altogether from the deadly flames through the intercession of the Blessed Mother. These were devoted clients who had huddled near the base of a statue of Our Lady of Good Help in her shrine at Robinsonville, and beseeched her



succor. Led by Adele Brise with her fellow religious sisters, and accompanied by area farmers with their families, the statue was lifted, as it were, in defiance of the inferno descending from the very sky across the Bay. They proceeded to pray and process on their knees for hours into the night along the picketed perimeter of the sanctuary. When the raging fire and suffocating smoke pressing in from one direction, they turned their procession in another until, after a heavy early morning rain, they knew it was over. But the dawn revealed an awful aftermath to be seen far and wide. Miraculously, nothing within the sanctuary grounds had been in the least bit scathed, except that the surrounding picket fence was charred on the outside.

In 2009, a grace must have been moving Bishop David Ricken of Green Bay, WI to ponder these cataclysmic events, especially from the perspective of our own spiritually tumultuous times. Apparitions of Our Lady to Adele Brise in 1859, alleged to have taken place (to the very day) twelve years before the fire, now seemed to bear a keener significance. He decided to establish a Diocesan commission to carefully re-examine all records of these hap-

penings which, though favorably acknowledged by all his predecessors, had never been formally approved by any of them. The result was that, on December 8, 2010, during a special Mass at the Champion (formerly Robinsonville) Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help, he made this announcement:

“I declare with moral certainty and in accord with the norms of the Church that the events, apparitions and locutions given to Adele Brise in October of 1859 do exhibit the substance of supernatural character, and I do hereby approve these apparitions as worthy of belief (although not obligatory) by the Christian faithful.”

Wonderful news as this was, it was almost bewildering when in 2016 the USCCB designated Our Lady of Good Help at Champion as *America’s very first National Marian Shrine*, raised (catapulted may be the better word) to a status on par with that of Fatima. It could only be Our Lady’s handiwork. But for a reason.

She directs our attention to the terrifying holocaust, and what it portends for us, namely, similar dire consequences for our country perhaps because our present moral malaise is far more serious today than that of Green Bay of earlier times. Twelve years before the Peshtigo fire, Mary appeared to Adele Brise to warn her that if her country folk failed to “return to the flock,” then her Son might punish them. Twelve years later, on the very anniversary of the apparition, the horrible conflagration occurred, in spite of Adele’s heroic efforts to catechize per Mary’s requests. It is difficult to evade the conclusion that there was wanting a much greater “return to the flock.”

Hindsight highlights the record of how, particularly through Mary, God has exhorted us to turn back, be converted, or face the consequences. From just among Church-approved Marian apparitions, we take excerpts from three more recent ones:

To Sr. Agnes Sagakawa at Akita (in 1983), Our Lady said:

“As I told you, if men do not repent and better themselves, the Heavenly Father will inflict a great punishment on all humanity. It will definitely be a punishment greater than the Deluge ... Fire will plunge from the sky and a large part of humanity will per-



Above: Our Lady of Good Help.



ish ... The good as well as the bad will perish ... The survivors will find themselves plunged into such terrible hardships that they will envy the dead. The only arms which will remain for you will be the Rosary and the sign left by my Son (the Eucharist). Each day recite the prayers of the Rosary."

To Gladys Quiroga de Motta in St. Nicholas, Argentina, Our Lady said (in 1988/1989):

"My heart is all powerful, but it can do nothing if hearts are unwilling. The means to save souls are prayer and conversion. Every soul must prepare so as not be imprisoned eternally by darkness."

Lastly, for eight full hours in 1982, seven Rwandan visionaries together were shown the terrifying vision of what would happen to their country if the people did not come back to God: a "river of blood." As predicted, in 1991 the Rwandan civil war did take place as it took the lives of one million persons. To the seer Marie-Clare, later a victim of the impending slaughter, Our Lady had said: *"I am concerned with, and turning to, the whole world. The world is on the edge of catastrophe."*

Sadly, up to the present time her tearful requests to return to the Lord along the road of conversion of heart and of life, of prayer and penance, have been ignored by a great many. Satan's domination of the past century appears to remain uncontested into the present: Bringing all humanity to the rejection of God and His Law of Love; spreading far and wide division, hatred, immorality and wickedness; legitimizing everywhere contraception, divorce, abortion, pornography, same-sex unions and so-called gender-changes, etc. If anything, the ever-rising tide of immorality conjures a malevolent spiritual inferno, the fiery winds of which we may say are whipped to their hellish fury by all forms of modern media.

Considering Bishop Ricken's inspired scrutiny of those past events leading to his proclamation for a major Marian Shrine in America, would it be prudent to assume God is only bluffing that there is an impending chastisement? It would not seem so, given that the clouds have been gathering for some time. To St. John, Our Lord said, "Those whom I love, I reprove and chasten; so be zealous and repent" (Rev 3:19).

What has been announced again and again points to a purification, which is a term implying the greatest good coming through a path of trial and suffering, and which, elsewhere, Our Lady has referred to as "the eleventh station" of the Way of the Cross. When Martha Coon realized the Peshtigo tempest was unstoppable she responded with prayer and entreated those around her to do the same.

We must do as Adele also did: to fly to our Heavenly Mother and beg her for the graces to remain ever more faithful throughout whatever transpires. In other words, to ask for the precious gift of final perseverance. ❖

Note: Our next issue will be in September.
Thank you for all your support and prayers!