

FROM THE FOOT OF THE CROSS



Passionist Nuns, 8564 Crisp Road, Whitesville, Kentucky 42378-9782

Summer 2007

THE PASSIONISTS HAVE A NEW SAINT!

On June 3, 2007, Pope Benedict XVI canonized our Fr. Charles Houben of Mount Argus. Fr. Charles gave a powerful witness to Christ the Healer, whose Heart was moved to compassion whenever He encountered those who suffer in body or in soul. Our new saint is someone we definitely need to get to know.

God raised Fr. Charles up as part of the renewal of the Catholic Church in Ireland after 300 years of persecution. This humble man of God came into the midst of the discouraged, poor and down-trodden Irish people, performing signs and wonders, giving them new hope that God cared about their afflictions and was still in their midst. Charles spent his life easing pain, blessing the sick, and giving courage and hope to those who shared in the Passion of Jesus.

He had grown up in a large family in Holland, as a shy, yet cheerful boy who was known for his love for song. A slow learner, he persevered in school, possibly because his one desire in life was to become a priest. Although he studied hard he barely made it through school.

During a brief tour of duty in the army, Charles heard of the Passionists and decided to enter. When he was ordained a priest, none of his family members were able to attend. This separation must have been very difficult for one from such a close family.

After his ordination, Charles was sent to do parish work in England where he first came into contact with the Irish. This was shortly after the potato famine in Ireland during which four million people either died or emigrated to foreign lands. The poorest fled to England where they found themselves working in deplorable conditions in coal mines or factories. With the compassion of Christ, Charles helped them in any way he could, especially with the consolation of the sacraments.

But God did not leave him long in England. In 1857, Fr. Charles was sent to Dublin where he arrived at Mount Ar-

gus on July 9th, the feast of Our Mother of Holy Hope. In a letter written to his uncle he said: "In spite of the large number of Catholics in Ireland, there are very few priests....We have to hear confessions from morning till night nearly every day....As you know, Ireland is a Catholic country....For more than three hundred years the Irish have

been cruelly persecuted but have remained loyal to the Catholic faith in spite of everything."

The Passionists pioneered Christian Doctrine classes in Dublin, and set about building a monastery and retreat house, the first of its kind in Ireland. Charles spent himself in tireless priestly service to the Irish whom he called "my people". He prayed with and for them, spending many hours in the confessional. He wrote: "Thousands of people neither go to confession nor make their Easter Communion....With all my heart I implore you to pray for them....I shudder to think of how often Our Lord is offended in this large city, crucified by serious sins."

Never really mastering the English language, Charles excelled in the confessional and in comforting the sick. Witnesses remembered his wonderful smile as he spoke words of comfort. Before blessing a sick person Charles usually prayed spontaneously for some time. It is for his miraculous gift of healing of bodies and souls that Charles is

most remembered. It all began when a mother brought her son to the Passionists and asked them to bless him. The boy had lost the use of his leg. The prayer of Fr. Charles brought healing to the boy, and soon hundreds of people were coming to be blessed and healed. Miracles were so common that neither Fr. Charles nor his Passionist community took much notice of them. His fame spread to England where a newspaper recounted the following: there is "a constant pilgrimage of blind, lame and halt" coming to Fr. Charles for cures, and "instances of cures are not infrequent."



SAINT CHARLES OF MT. ARGUS
(1821–1893)

SAINT CHARLES OF MT. ARGUS, PRAY FOR US!



Charles was known as one who always had time to listen to peoples' troubles, ready to comfort those in need and to show them the goodness and mercy of God. Every day he was in close contact with misery and sickness. It would have been easy to become hardened to human suffering, and to begin treating people in a routine, impersonal manner, but to the contrary, Charles remained personable, kind and accessible. Charles him-

self walked with a limp as a result of an accident, but he never complained.

He had a great sense of humor, enjoyed get-togethers, and was happy when called upon to sing. Charles also sang in Church and in the choir. His favorite piece was the Ave Maria. Once he tried to teach some of the students how to sing but one of them who was tone deaf drowned him out and thus ended his endeavor. At times he could be heard humming the Dutch national anthem. On Good Friday each year, Charles took the part of Christ in the solemn singing of the Passion. His very appearance and bearing as he entered into the narrative of the Passion, brought tears to the eyes of many.

Saints are not without weaknesses, and Charles had his share, but he humbly submitted them to the grace of Him whose redeeming death overcomes our sinful inclinations. Fr. Charles was heard often to pray: "O Lord, let your Passion be so realized in me that I may never die in sin." Charles was deeply aware that he was a sinner who must plead for God's mercy. He wrote: "The means to become perfect is to mortify our predominant passion. As a Captain in the time of battle...endeavors to arrange the soldiers at that point where he sees the greatest dangers are to be overcome, so we should do the same. As long as we strive to overcome our little passions, we shall not be easily overcome by the strong ones. What is the means to be used to overcome our passions? It is to meditate on the Passion of our Lord."

Charles used to carry a small crucifix, sometimes placed on top of his devotional book, but more often locked in his left hand palm. From time to time, he opened his hand, looked affectionately at the crucifix and reverently raised it to his lips. Throughout his healing ministry, he encouraged souls to remember the Passion of Christ. As we said, not all were cured physically. Some he simply encouraged to bear their cross in union with Christ, while others he advised to prepare for death. Writing to his own sister, he encouraged her to "bear her illness with resignation because this is God's will, and with devotion, since this will be to her advan-

tage. She must not lose heart in her sufferings and should think of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ...May my sister grow used to saying these words, 'Blessed be God! Thy will be done! I adore your holy will! My God, I thank you for this illness, for crosses,' etc."

Fr. Charles' place of refuge was always at the foot of the cross where his suffering and that of others could be seen in their true light, as he himself had written: "The cross patiently borne for the love of God helps greatly for our eternal salvation....Strive to think every day for a few minutes on the bitter sufferings of Jesus Christ....May Jesus and Mary always reign in our hearts."

After spending himself zealously for souls, Fr. Charles went home to God on Jan. 5, 1893. News of his death spread quickly and brought a constant stream of people to venerate his body. The spacious church was crammed with people, while thousands stood outside in the rain. For five days, people came from every corner of Ireland. One newspaper said tens of thousands of people came to say goodbye to the saint of Mount Argus. As his coffin was lowered into the grave, Charles' mission took on a world-wide scope, no longer confined by space and time. Now his compassion could reach out over the whole world, to all who sought his intercession.

Only in relation to the Passion of Christ can we understand the significance of the life of this holy Passionist. At his religious profession he had committed himself to keep alive the memory of Christ's Passion. Charles understood the intimate link between the Passion of Jesus and the ongoing Passion in the lives of the Mystical members of the Body of Christ. He saw the face of the suffering Christ in all who came for his blessing. His soul responded with love and compassion, knowing that whatever he did for the least of Christ's members, he was doing for Christ Himself. Drawing strength from the Passion of Christ in his own daily sufferings, he was able to mirror Christ's compassion to others. His prayer was centered on the mystery of the cross which he saw continued in the crucified members of Christ in the world of his time. The Passion of Christ gives hope to overcome any suffering. Check out the Mount Argus website: <http://charlesofmountargus.org>

MAKE A RETREAT!

Preached Retreats—2007

Sept 21-23 **Abandonment to Divine Providence**
Fr. David Wilton, Father of Mercy

Sept 29 **Some Basics of the Catholic Faith that are Often Misunderstood**
Bruce Sullivan, Apologist, Guest on EWTN

Nov 3 **One Day Marian Retreat**
Richard May, Mariologist, Guest on EWTN

Private & Group Retreats also accepted.

For available dates and more information see our website: www.passionistnuns.org & contact Sr. Mary at (270) 233-4571 or Email us at retreats@passionistnuns.org

MAKING KNOWN THE BEAUTY OF CLOISTERED LIFE

The Life & Spirit of the Passionist Nuns



Sr. Mary Andrea, Sr. John Mary and Sr. Mary Veronica
as pictured on front of Vocation DVD

Excitement ran high shortly before Vatican Council II. Among the self-proclaimed "prophets" predicting what the Pope and Bishops would do, was a professor in a Catholic college, who said: "The Pope is going to tell cloistered monks and nuns to come out of their ivory towers." A student riding in the car with him and with his daughter, looked out the car window and thought: "Yes, that's what he [the Pope] needs to do. Why don't all those monks and nuns come out here and help us?" Within two years, that student entered the cloistered Passionist Nuns! Her name today is **Mother Catherine Marie** of the Most Holy Trinity. She, like so many others, knew nothing about the place of contemplative life in the Church.

What happened to change her mind so radically? Her spiritual director gave her the autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux, the cloistered nun who became co-patroness of the missions alongside the St. Francis Xavier. Riveted by what she read in those pages, Mother's soul soon understood how the Church sees contemplative life: "A monastic community may be compared to Moses who, in prayer, determined the fate of Israel's battles (cf. Exodus 17:11) The monastery represents what is most intimate to [the] Church—its heart, where the Spirit always groans in supplication for the entire community, and where thanksgiving rises unceasingly for the Life which He sends forth each day. It is important that the faithful learn to

honor the charism and specific role of contemplatives." (Cf. Verbi Sponsa)

Over the years, we have noticed that many do not honor the charism and specific role of contemplatives. It is not uncommon for Catholic parents and even priests to attempt to dissuade a woman from entering our community, the notion being that she would be burying her God-given gifts. Some believe ours is a very stale existence, out of touch with the challenges faced by the Church and society. Others imagine that contemplative life involves staying on one's knees all day (the poor knees!), or that it is psychologically unhealthy. Even religious from another tradition asked if there was danger of becoming depressed by being devoted to the Passion of Our Lord!

Such misconceptions convinced us of the need to make known the beauty and value, as well as the challenge, of Passionist cloistered life. The dream of a "vocation DVD" rested in our hearts for a long time, before God's providence made it a reality.

While two of our Nuns were waiting in a doctor's office at Vanderbilt, a gentleman asked them to pray for a relative. The man then gave them his business card - **Mac Pirkle**, the Vice-President of *Earnhardt Pirkle, Inc. Film, Video and Event Production*. Little did our Nuns realize how God was going to use this "chance" happening. Some months later we received an e-mail from **Jennifer Orth**, a producer at *Earnhardt Pirkle Inc.*, inviting us to take part in a video program called "Awareness". Thus began a relationship that eventually led to the production of our vocation DVD.

Warmest thanks to **Jennifer Orth**, **Jenny Tucker**, **David Earnhardt** and **Mac Pirkle**, as well as to **Brett Johnson** and **Ron DiCiani**.

VOCATION DVD AVAILABLE

for \$10.00 donation. These can be used in college & youth ministry, adult catechesis programs, by Serra Clubs, etc.



Our video crew: **Brett Johnson**, **Jennifer Orth** and **Ron DiCiani**

The esteem which the Christian community has always had for cloistered contemplative women has deepened with the rediscovery of the contemplative nature of the Church herself and of the call addressed to every Christian to enter a grace-filled encounter with God in prayer.

~ Verbi Sponsa 1

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Dear Family and Friends in Christ,

This is probably the shortest newsletter you have received from us in a long time! The first six months of this year were so deeply blessed by God, that we will have **lots of good news** to report in our fall newsletter. Our late summer newsletter, however, was kept to a minimum since we are requesting an address correction from the post office, which is very expensive. We like to keep our database current, and so we deeply appreciate it when you let us know your address changes. We don't want you to miss a single issue of "From the Foot of the Cross!"

Before we visit you again, we will be having the first profession of vows of **Sr. Mary Andrea Niehaus**, from Newburgh, Indiana. Please keep Sister in prayer as well as our **postulant Jill**. And we count very much on your continued vocation prayers for our community.

Know that we continue to keep your intentions in our prayers, works and sufferings each day, and we thank you warmly for your continued support of our community.

With gratitude and prayerful best wishes, in Jesus crucified and risen,

Mother Catherine Marie and the Passionist Nuns



The Sisters are all "ears" at the corn-shucking party!

*Our prayers for a good harvest were abundantly blessed by God.
May the Lord reward all our wonderful donors who shared their harvest with us!*