

A Great Miracle

AMSTERDAM AND THE BLESSED EUCHARIST.

[In view of the interest created by the coming International Eucharistic Congress in Amsterdam, the Fathers of the Blessed Sacrament have prepared the following article on the special miracle of the Eucharist with which the name of the city of Amsterdam has been associated for several centuries.]

Since the eyes of the whole Catholic world will be centred on Amsterdam in the month of July, when the 27th International Eucharistic Congress will be held there, it may be interesting to know the facts concerning the Eucharistic Miracle that took place in that city almost six centuries ago.

In 1345, on the Tuesday before Palm Sunday—that is to say, on March 15—a pious inhabitant of Amsterdam, being very sick and having expressed his desire for Holy Viaticum, piously received the Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ from the hands of a parish priest. Soon after, however, he was greatly distressed, and the persons who were attending him cast into the open fireplace what he had vomited, without thinking of the Blessed Sacrament, which he had not had time to digest.

Very early the next morning a servant who was watching by the sick man's bedside approached the open fireplace to poke the fire. To her amazement she saw a brilliant Host, complete and entire, in the midst of the flaming hearth. She was frightened, naturally, but nevertheless she was brave enough to withdraw the Host from the fire without burning herself! As soon as she touched the Sacred Species she felt her hand become cold. Then she took the Host with the other hand, and the Host changed color miraculously and became brown as though it had been burnt by the fire.

Very much upset, the servant hastened to the lady of the house and said to her: "I have the Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ in my hand." Immediately she handed to her employer the precious burden. The lady drew from the cupboard a linen cloth of fine baptiste and wrapped the Host in it and deposited it in this way in a clothes-bin. The sick man himself wanted to see the Miraculous Host. He took it in his hands to examine it, but at the same moment it slipped through his fingers.

Taken in Procession to Church.

We are not told why these good people acted thus, but it seems they had no bad intention, because the woman began to tell all her neighbors in the street what had happened. The news spread like wild-fire and reached the ears of a priest very quickly. He came in haste to the house where the miracle had taken place. He took the Sacred Host, put it into a ciborium, and transported it to a nearby church. Three days later, the lady of the house, to her great surprise, found the Host in the trunk again. She ran to tell the clergy of this event, and they saw in this a sign of Providence desiring that greater honor should be paid to the Miraculous Host. Consequently all the clergy of Amsterdam came solemnly to this house to take the Blessed Sacrament and transport it in procession to the parish church.

In the meantime the sick man had become well, and he grumbled at his wife for not having held her tongue and for having aroused the population of the whole city. Two days before the Sacred Host was transported in procession to the parish church, the man, in a fit of temper, was bitterly abusing his wife, when his young child, who was on his knees near the open fireplace, suddenly fell into the fire, and he had barely time to pull him out. The unfortunate child had frequent epileptic fits thereafter until the day when his father, who had come back to his senses, atoned for his sin by going with his whole family, barefoot, to the church to adore the Miraculous Host.

This event was carefully examined and submitted to the Bishop of Utrecht, who declared that God should be looked upon as the Author of the miraculous events which had happened at Amsterdam.

Veneration for the Miraculous Host spread rapidly not only in Amsterdam but throughout Holland, especially because many miraculous cures took place and many favors were granted. A chapel was built on the spot where the

miracle had taken place. It was destroyed by fire in 1421, and a second chapel built in its place.

On May 25, 1452, a fire broke out in one of the houses of Amsterdam, and spread so rapidly from house to house that in a short time the whole city was an immense conflagration. The chapel of the Blessed Sacrament of the Miracle was soon reached. The faithful did all they could to save the chapel from destruction. They tried to open the doors and to save the precious Host at least, but to no avail.

They were beginning to deplore their loss, when God performed another miracle. As soon as the fire was put out they hastened into the midst of the smoking ruins, and found the vase which contained the Host intact. The fire had not even left the slightest trace on the linen veil that covered the ciborium! This miraculous preservation was soon known throughout Holland and other countries. Devotion to the Most Holy Sacrament increased, and a new chapel was soon built to take the place of the other destroyed by fire.

Many Favors Granted.

Many miraculous favors were granted to this chapel. The Emperor Maximilian, Archduke of Austria and Count of Holland, was taken very sick in 1479. Human means could not cure him. He promised that if he were cured he would go to Amsterdam and venerate the Miraculous Host. He was restored to health, and accomplished his promise in 1484.

The cult of this particular miracle of the Blessed Sacrament of Amsterdam reached its height in the 16th century. In 1504 the Bishop of Utrecht ordered that a feast be celebrated every year on the 15th of March with a solemn octave, during which the Blessed Sacrament of the Miracle would be carried in procession through the city. Fifty years later his successor in the Episcopal See of Utrecht confirmed the feast and the solemn octave.

The apotheosis of worship of the Miraculous Host took place when the Emperor Charles V. came as a pilgrim to venerate this Miraculous Host. Soon after the Reformation set in, and the Protestants did all they could to destroy devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. They went so far as to attack the church where the Sacred Host was kept; tore the paintings to pieces, broke the stained glass windows and profaned the altars. This was in August, 1566.

For the first time since 1345 the procession of the Miraculous Host did not take place in March, 1567. The church was closed to the faithful in 1588; transformed into an orphanage the following year, and rented out for various purposes until 1616. Then the Protestants took possession and have remained there ever since. The Miraculous Host exists no longer. It is thought that the Bishop of Utrecht consumed it during the troubled times of the Reformation.

Nowadays, every year Amsterdam witnesses the clandestine procession, which takes place at night around the church—the Oude Kerk, as it is popularly called—where the Miraculous Host was formerly kept and which is now in the hands of Protestants.

Women Unite in Prayer.

This procession takes place during the solemn octave in the month of March. Only men may take part in this nocturnal procession, while the women remain in prayer at home. As many as 50,000 men at a time march in silence along the streets whereon the solemn procession formerly took place. When the procession is over, they separate into various churches of the city where all hear Mass and receive Communion.

This solemn procession, this magnificent manifestation, so calm and so majestic, every year by a whole population, full of faith and love for the Divine Eucharist, is very impressive. It is easy to understand, then, why the torch of Catholic truth could never be extinguished in a country where the faith of the inhabitants knows no human respect, no matter what sacrifice it may demand of them.

There is no doubt but that the coming International Eucharistic Congress, which will be held from July 22 to the 27th this year at Amsterdam, will bring out once more the sturdy and loyal faith of these Catholics of the Low Countries. Those who can go to this Congress will witness one of the most remarkable demonstrations in honor of the Blessed Sacrament that the world has ever known.

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