

FLAME OF WHITE

a life of Saint Pius X

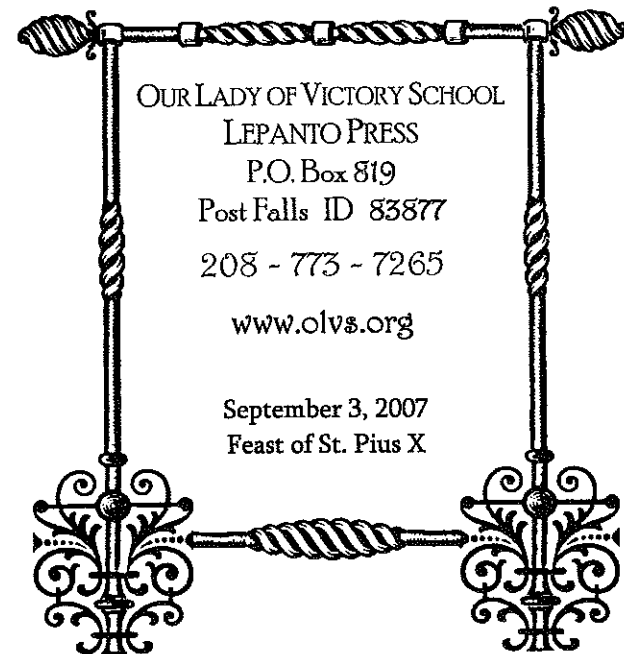
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To
The Most Reverend Charles H. Helmsing D.D.
First Bishop of Springfield-Cape Girardeau

For his love and devotion to
Pope Saint Pius X
Patron of the new Diocese

We respectfully dedicate
FLAME OF WHITE

APPRECIATION
to
Reverend Mother Celeste Hanlon O.S.U.
Provincial of the Central Province
of the
Ursuline Roman Union
Kirkwood, Missouri

FOR HER INTEREST AND ENCOURAGEMENT

Translator's Note

The translation of *Brennendes Feuer*, which is a graphic life of St. Pius X, has been a work of love and inspiration. The lessons given us by the great Pontiff in his poverty, charity and burning zeal for souls should animate all who strive for personal holiness and the saving of many souls.

When Pope St. Pius was a boy, the neighbors called him Beppo Sarto. He was full of fire but he burned with a steady glow. People loved him because he loved people. The purpose of this biography is to widen the circle of boys and girls, men and women, to know him better and to love him the more in gratitude for the unspeakable privilege of daily, holy Communion.

In most translations, the original suffers, due, no doubt, to the loss of national savor which a translation cannot give.

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CONTENTS

I.	White and Red.....	1
II.	The Pilgrimages to Cendrole.....	7
III.	Radetzky March and Heaven's Music.....	13
IV.	Grace After Grace.....	19
V.	The Barefoot One.....	31
VI.	Stormy Years.....	36
VII.	The First Cassock.....	43
VIII.	The Little Cleric.....	51
IX.	Difficulties	60
X.	Sacerdos in Aeternum.....	70
XI.	The New Curate.....	76
XII.	Don Sarto Learns to Use Snuff.....	85
XIII.	A Certain Don Sarto.....	95
XIV.	Don Sarto Bets on His Church Tower.....	107
XV.	The Poor Benefactor.....	118
XVI.	Hunger and Pestilence.....	128
XVII.	Spiritual Director and Chancellor.....	140
XVIII.	Vicar General	147
XIX.	Elevation of the Cross.....	155
XX.	According to His Own Heart.....	164
XXI.	A Shepherd's Care.....	176
XXII.	The Purple	182
XXIII.	Justice and Love.....	192
XXIV.	The King's Feast.....	202
XXV.	Ascent to the Heights.....	208
XXVI.	The Triple Crown.....	217
XXVII.	The Horror of the Household.....	230
XXVIII.	For Freedom and Truth.....	239
XXIX.	Ignis Ardens	245
XXX.	'Forbid Then Not'.....	254
XXXI.	The Bells of the World.....	263

FLAME OF WHITE



I. *White and Red*

IN THE LITTLE VENETIAN TOWN OF CASTELFRANCO, THE POSTMASTER, Paolo Cinna, and his wife were sorting mail that had just arrived. Although it was only the octave of the Ascension, the weather was so hot that the poor man frequently had to wipe his bald head to remove the perspiration.

"It's hot again today," he cried. "Pour me a little glass, Clara."

"A letter from the Cardinal is here," said his wife while she filled his glass with red wine. "Just look, from the Patriarch of Venice to his brother." "Master Blacksmith, Castilio Monico, Riese," was written in beautiful letters on the snow-white envelope which had a large red seal. Mrs. Cinna reverently handed the letter to her husband.

"A cardinal is just a man, especially if his father was no more than a blacksmith in Riese. He eats, drinks, and sweats just like any of us," muttered the postmaster, who didn't exactly belong to the biggest church lights in Castelfranco.

"Don't be so sinful," scolded his wife. "You have no regard for anything. The pastor says you are a Freemason."

"I am a kingly-empowered Austrian Postmaster," snubbed Paolo. "I serve my Lord the Kaiser Ferdinand. May the devil take him!"

"Don't let anyone hear you," cautioned the frightened wife, "or you might be deprived of your office."

The door opened and, gasping from a hasty walk, Giovanni Battista Sarto, mail carrier and community servant of Riese, stepped into the postoffice. He removed his cap and wiped the sweat from the leather band.

"Be seated awhile; we shall soon be finished sorting," said Mrs. Cinna.

"I would be grateful if you would hurry, postmaster," pressed Sarto. "I have not much time today."

"Why not today? It is surely as long as any other day."

"Not for me," answered Sarto and a peculiar joy sparkled in his bright eyes. "My wife, Margherita, is expecting a little one; a boy, God willing."

"Oh heavens, you certainly must hurry," called Mrs. Cinna. "We hope it will be a healthy child."

"God grant it," sighed Giambattista Sarto. "The boy born last year was carried to the graveyard within eight days. He died of cramps—poor little Giuseppe."

"Yes, I know." Mrs. Cinna nodded sympathetically.

"If only it will not be so hard with Margherita this time. She is still so young."

"Oh, she is a valiant woman," encouraged the postmistress. "Don't worry Sarto."

"So, here is your mail for Riese," said Paolo as he handed Sarto a bundle of newspapers and letters. "But first of all take a drink on the coming of another member to your family; that you can't refuse. Pour it, Clara."

"All right, but then I must go." Sarto grasped the glass which the lady offered and hastily swallowed the wine.

However, whether the heat affected him so that the wine went to his head, or whether he was worried about his wife, he suddenly became dizzy. As he put the glass on the table his hand trembled so badly that some wine spilled and made a red rivulet across the cardinal's letter which was lying on top of the pile of mail. The poor man became pale from fear.

"I can't drink wine so early in the day," sputtered Sarto.

"Oh, that is not serious," the postmaster laughed. "Red is very appropriate for a cardinal."

Mrs. Cinna, using her apron, tried to wipe off the stain from the paper, but she did not improve matters. Almost beside himself, Sarto stared at the letter.

"That looks like blood," mumbled Sarto with trembling lips. "Like blood on white linen. My God, if, if only that is not an omen."

"Don't be foolish," said Cinna. "Since when are you superstitious, Sarto? But if indeed it should be an omen, then it could just as well indicate that your boy—if it is one—will some day wear red stockings as Jacopo Monico, the son of the blacksmith in Riese."

"You should not mock," retorted Sarto, very much disturbed, as he handled the soiled envelope.

"Well, I meant no evil, Sarto. It was just a little joke. I understand your embarrassment well. But Thursday when you come again, all will be past and you will be a father. And if it is a boy,—the devil get me, Sarto, for I do not belong to the most pious—but if it is a boy, healthy and straight as it should be, then I shall go to Mass on Sunday and light a big candle before the Madonna."

"Then it must be a boy," laughingly said his wife, "so that he will be able to convert so old a sinner as my Paolo."

Sighing, Sarto took his bundle of mail and started on his long, two-hour walk to Riese. The sun burned fiercely and the long road offered little shade. Still Giambattista hurried as fast as he could. He stuck the small package in his mail pouch, and through his fingers he slipped the large pearl rosary which Margherita had given him the evening of their wedding.

Giambattista loved his wife with all the might of his big heart. The seamstress Margherita Sanson was only nineteen years old when he, already forty, led her to the altar of God. There were many well-meaning people who had warned him about the great difference in their ages, but Margherita loved him with her whole heart. During their two years of marriage she had never given him one sad hour.

"Who was born for us in Bethlehem," prayed Sarto while he recalled the miserable stable in which our Lord was born. "Oh no, in such a manner my son will not come into this world," thought Sarto. The little house in which he lived was small and modest, but it was his own, and they had everything they needed. Margherita's industry with the needle brought in extra money and although they were poor, they were content.

"Dear God, I thank Thee for Margherita, but now hold Your hand over her," pleaded Giambattista between the Aves of the rosary.

Again and again the white envelope with red spots danced in the flickering sunlight before his eyes, and he could not escape the fear that it might be a prediction of evil.

"White and red," sighed Giambattista, and with his sleeve he wiped the sweat from his brow. "If only it does not mean something bad."

It was midday when he arrived in Riese. From the bell tower of St. Matthew's church sounded the Angelus. Fervently Sarto's three Hail Marys joined the pleading tones of the bell. "Oh my God, that same bell sounded on that cold February day when I had to carry the newly-born Giuseppe to God's acre." He had carried the little white coffin in his arms and no one had dared to help him.

"God, grant me a healthy child, a healthy boy, if it is Your will."

"Hey, Giambattista," he heard himself called as he hurried along. "Did you bring the *Venice Gazette*? Where are your thoughts? I called twice."

Every time the mail carrier came from Castelfranco, Battiston was waiting to get a peep at the newspaper that was intended for the Countess Maria Loreda-Gardenigo. "That politician" the people of Riese called the young workman. He, more than anyone else in the village, was interested in world events, and he loved to talk about them.

Hastily, Sarto rummaged in the pouch for the Venice newspaper. "I will come for it soon," he said and ran off without allowing himself to be detained.

"That fellow is running as though he is on fire." The politician laughed and gazed wonderingly after the hastening man.

On this day the people of Riese had to wait awhile for their mail, because the mail carrier made long strides toward his own little house, the last one in the village street. With a beating heart he mounted the narrow stairs. Breathless, he stepped into the bedroom where the midwife Frances Zorsan met him.

"Has it already happened?" Sarto whispered.

"Yes, the child is here," said the midwife, nodding her head.

"A healthy, strong boy."

"And she? Margherita?"

"Oh, all went well."

Giambattista stepped near the bed and fondly gazed on his wife. Her face was somewhat paler than usual but her eyes were radiant with joy.

"See, we have a boy," she said in a soft voice and showed the father his new-born son whom she held in her arms.

"Thanks be to God and our holy Madonna," murmured Sarto. Then he took the child as carefully as he could into his rough, worn hands, but the boy began to cry.

"A boy, a healthy boy," repeated the man joyfully. Tenderly the midwife took the child out of his arms and laid him on the pillows. Sarto bowed over his child and made the sign of the cross on the little forehead.

"God be blessed, Margherita; He has again given us a son."

"We will rear him for God." The mother nodded, joy in her eyes.

Sarto could only stay a few minutes for he had to deliver the mail. The letters were distributed in a short time, and everywhere Giambattista announced the news of the birth of his son.

"I have a boy," he called to Luigi Parolin, as he laid a letter for him on the counter.

"Congratulations! That is good news, we must have a drink," responded the tavern keeper and grabbed the bottle. But Sarto was already on his way.

"No time; I'm already late," he called as he was leaving. Neither could the proprietor of "The Hind" delay him.

"I have a boy," he also announced jubilantly in the rectory where he handed the Archpriest Giuseppe the paper *La Marca*.

The aged pastor extended his hand with a heartfelt wish. "God gives and God takes," he said. "May God make him a courageous man."

"Santa Marianna," said Mastella, a former Austrian soldier. "How wonderful! I must tell that to the Lustrissima. But where's the *Gazette* from Venice?"

"Good heavens," sputtered Sarto involuntarily. "The politician still has it. I will get it at once."

"Well, now I know how those lime spots get on the paper. Lustrissima has often wondered about them. Boy, that is a good joke."

"I will tell Battiston that he's not to read the *Gazette* in his workshop," answered Sarto, very embarrassed. For a long time he heard the laughter of the domestic servant.

"I have a boy," called Sarto to the smith Monico as he handed him the letter from his brother, the cardinal.

"Well, I surely wish you good luck," said the blacksmith and gave the deliverer a hearty handshake. "But what a sight this letter is! Have you already been celebrating?"

Full of embarrassment Sarto apologized and explained the mishap. But the smith responded with a hearty laugh.

"Never mind, no harm. See, now there have been added a few black spots. In my hurry I forgot to wash my hands."

Happy and relieved, Giambattista told Monico how much anguish he had suffered on account of the stained letter.

"Well, those things will happen," replied the smith laughingly. "You know, I never would have believed that Jacopo would someday be a cardinal. We used to fight all the time. Even after he was a cleric, he would often hammer about in this smithy."

The next day the baby was baptized in the parish church in Riese. The sacrament of Baptism was administered by the Chaplain Paolo Pellizaro, and the godparents were the father's brother Antonio and Francesca Zorsan, the midwife. The boy was named Giuseppe Melchior after the two grandfathers.

Giambattista Sarto proudly carried his son home and laid him in the arms of his mother.

Thus it happened in the little Venetian village of Riese on June 4, 1835.

The postmaster at Castelfranco remained true to his word and actually appeared the next Sunday in the house of God and offered the Madonna a big candle. He even resumed his former custom of attending holy Mass every Sunday. His wife Clara confidentially told Sarto that his little son had at his birth converted a half pagan.

II. *The Pilgrimages to Cendrole*

YEARS CAME AND WENT, GOOD AND BAD; SOME BROUGHT HAPPINESS, others misery. Rain and sunshine would provide a rich harvest, but then there would be a severe summer with a terrible drought or a destructive hail, and all the work in field and vineyard was done in vain. There were times when the workers had little grain to thrash; then hunger appeared as an uninvited guest at the table of the people.

The Austrian government, which controlled the Lombard-Venetian territory, tried to mitigate the suffering, but Italians took help very unwillingly from a conqueror.

Uneasiness spread over the unhappy land. The people dreamed of their past greatness and could not reconcile themselves to the fact that the "blond barbarians" should be their lords, although secretly one had to acknowledge Austrian good order and administration.

Again and again revolt against Austria flared to a bright flame; the bloody uprisings would be put down quickly in a ruthless manner, and the leaders imprisoned or beheaded. The Austrian garrisons were fortified and the despised uniforms became more numerous.

Political unrest extended even to the little village of Riese. Often enough, heated words were heard in the tavern. The waiters and patrons of the "Two Swords" seemed to be deserving of their name, and in the coffee house, "Harmony" by name, there was by no means as much harmony as one might expect.

Pietro Battiston, the politician, usually led the arguments; and when wine had added fire to his intellect, he would recite with melodramatic pathos verses from the unhappy poet-philosopher Giacomo Leopardi: