

Our Catholic History  
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as the friars celebrated fifty years since their coming to the U.S.  
(edited by Fr. Lawrence Jagdfeld, O.F.M.)

### **The Labors of the Fathers**

While the lay brothers were busy about the house and garden, the Fathers spent their time in parish and missionary work and in their leisure moments devoted themselves to studying, especially the English and French languages. Near Watson was a colony of French Canadians: hence a knowledge of French was necessary here, and useful (not to say necessary) also in other localities. On October 3, 1858, the Franciscans assumed official charge of Teutopolis. Fr. Capistran preached the first sermon and emphasized that the Fathers had not come to America to seek gold and silver, but to save souls. Their rule, their very exterior, the lowly garb of St. Francis, their way of life, bore eloquent testimony to the truth of the preacher's remarks and could not fail, with the grace of God, to produce in the course of time abundant fruit. For soon Fr. Damian, who became pastor here, testifies that Teutopolis, in a short time, became a model parish. But more on this later.

### **Missions in Southern Illinois, at Teutopolis (December 11-19 at Green Creek and Effingham, 1859)**

Since Teutopolis alone, though numbering at their arrival about 2050 souls, could not give sufficient employment to three young and zealous priests, the Rt. Rev. Bishop recalled the Rev. Thomas Fauenhaver from Green Creek, where he had labored for two years, and entrusted Green Creek and Effingham to the care of the Franciscans. At the latter place, a brick church and a parochial residence, likewise of brick, were just being built. Besides, Pope Pius IX had proclaimed a Jubilee, and Bishop Juncker had assigned the latter part of the year 1858 (three months) for gaining the Jubilee indulgence. In order to prepare the people properly for this great grace, the Fathers thought it appropriate to give a number of missions from November to the end of December, 1858. Rev. August Brickwedde, who, as we have seen, was instrumental in bring the Franciscans to the diocese of Alton, had stipulated, while in Germany, that his parish should have the first mission to be given by them in America. Accordingly, Fathers Capistran Zwinge and Servace Altmicks conducted their first mission at St. Libory's Settlement, alias Mud Creek, where Rev. Brickwedde was in charge. The days of grace lasted from November 7 – 14, and the mission in Breese (Clinton County) from December 5-10, 1858.

Meanwhile the Fathers did not lose sight of the spiritual welfare of their own flocks. They considered it neglect of duty to leave their charges without the great benefits of a mission. Besides this, they were as yet strangers to their parishes, and they themselves could now easily give the mission while later on there might be difficult in securing missionaries. Hence all three Fathers conducted a mission at Teutopolis, the second in the history of the parish. Five hundred persons, i.e. all the communicants, received the holy sacraments. The success afforded the Fathers no small spiritual consolation, as may be imagined. On the very day on which this mission ended, Fr. Servace opened another in Green Creek, which lasted from December 19-24, during which 150 persons made their confession and received Holy Communion. The mission ended, Fr. Servace remained at Green Creek during the Christmas holidays while Fr. Capistran, on

Christmas morning, said Mass for the first time in the new church at Effingham and opened a mission which concluded December 30, 1858. About 120 persons approached the Holy Table.

### **Rev. Fr. Damian's Work at Teutopolis**

After taking a short (but well earned) rest, Fr. Capistran ministered to the spiritual needs of Green Creek and Fr. Servace to those of Effingham. During the carnival days (preceding Lent) 1859, the Fathers, with the approbation of the Bishop, introduced the beautiful Forty Hours Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and the people took to it at once. In fact, the dawn of brighter days of spiritual life dawned upon Teutopolis. The people were no longer without a resident pastor for months at a time<sup>i</sup>; instructions were regularly given, reception of the sacraments became more frequent, and pastor and people were in harmony. No wonder that before long, Fr. Damian writes to the Provincial highly praising the Teutopolitans and reporting that Teutopolis was developing into a model parish. "Before the missions," he writes, "the soil here seemed a barren field. Hardly anyone showed a longing for the frequent reception of the Sacraments. Only to those in danger of death we were frequently called; for just then many were very sick and not a few died. But after the mission new life showed itself. The faithful learned to know us, and we to know them. It is really an impressionable people, susceptible of good. Many a tear have I seen trickling down their cheeks, not only at the ordinary exhortation and in conversation, but also in the confessional." Thus writes Fr. Damian to the Provincial. "Hardly a day now passes without some people approaching the fountains of salvation, the holy sacraments," writes Fr. Servace. In another letter Fr. Damian writes: "It is almost incredible, how great the confidence of the people here is towards priests walking worthy of their calling and proceeding with circumspection and prudence. If the priest says anything, they are satisfied. Here we can discover the intrinsic worth of our holy religion for a Catholic, in spite of the many difficulties which the parish has had with their pastors. But with all their soul they again adhere to the new pastor sent them. This what we experience. The people do all in their power to make our condition as pleasant as possible. They bring us victuals in such abundance, that a larger community could live here. In return we have work in abundance.

In 1860 Fr. Damian writes to the Reverend Provincial, whom he expected for canonical visitation: "You will find how good natured the people here are, whom formerly I was wont to represent to myself as giddy immigrants and whom I now find so serious and full of sympathy, transformed, no doubt, by many trials and severe privations." "In order now to preserve their good dispositions, to accustom them to frequent prayer and religious exercises without overburdening those not accustomed, we proceeded gradually, step by step."<sup>ii</sup> On the eighth of December, Fr. Damian preached on the veneration of the Blessed Virgin and recommended to the people the wearing of her medal. They immediately took it to heart and were much consoled, when I gave them one and explained the inscription. On the feast of the Annunciation, 1859, Fr. Damian explained the utility of wearing the scapular. Immediately his supply was exhausted and the people made their own according to the directions given them by their pastor. On the first Friday of Lent, 1859, Fr. Damian blessed the Stations of the Cross. The following Friday, High Mass was celebrated, a sermon was preached, followed by the devotion to the Stations of the Cross, that favorite Franciscan devotion. The pastor also promised to introduce the "Confraternity of the Sacred Heart of Mary for the Conversion of Sinners" as soon as the new altar of the Blessed Virgin would have been put up.

In one of his letters the zealous Superior makes complaints that in America such a large number lose their virtue and their faith on account of the lack of good and zealous pastors and urges the Provincial to

promote by petitions and representations the plan already conceived (but never carried out) by the Bishops of Muenster and Paderborn, to found a seminary to train missionaries for America, and to win, if possible, Fathers and suitable secular priests, v.g. Rev. Vicar Roehren, for America. He adds that Fr. H. Schaefermeyer, along at St. Boniface's Church, Quincy, Illinois, had charge of 3,000 souls. Fr. Damian in this same letter (May, 1859) also asks the Provincial for teachers, but only for such as were willing to become Tertiaries regular in order that they might be employed at the discretion (without the appearance of seeking filthy lucre) for the salvation of youthful souls and even of adults.

(To be continued)

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<sup>i</sup> Before this there had been about six pastors in two years.

<sup>ii</sup> Fr. Damian, May 9, 1859, to Fr. Gregory.