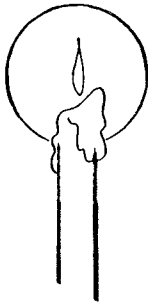


ALL-NIGHT VIGILS

By
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It was not until our own day . . . following the great visitations of Our Lady at Rue du Bac, La Salette, Lourdes and Fatima . . . that night adoration began to emerge from the cloisters and to become an organized movement among the laity. Indeed, it would be more proper to say that only in most recent years, following the appeals of Our Lady of Fatima for reparation, that all-night vigils suddenly became an international phenomenon of faith.

Few Heard

During the forty hours devotion it often had been a custom for parishioners to "take an hour" during the night. But in cities this came to be discouraged because of the danger some persons might face in getting to and from church during late night hours. The plea made by Our Lord to Saint Margaret Mary was heard by very few.

Then it became a custom sometime during the last half century, to have the Blessed Sacrament exposed at Fatima all night on the vigil of the anniversary of Our Lady's appearances. Often hundreds of thousands of pilgrims spent the night in the great natural amphitheater of Fatima while prayers and exhortations before our Eucharistic Lord sounded from the loudspeakers until Communion was distributed in the early morning hours by dozens of priests to tens of thousands of joyfully tired pilgrims.

These vigils at Fatima began as a

matter of necessity. There were no accommodations for the majority of pilgrims to Fatima. Many tried to pray the night through "on their own." So all night devotions were organized. Pilgrims then began to come in increasing numbers to spend the entire night in prayer and reparation . . . rather than to come just for the Pontifical Mass and procession on the actual anniversary of the apparitions.

Mary Drew Them

It seemed that Our Lady, who had appealed here for reparation, was literally drawing people to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and to a night of sacrifice and prayer.

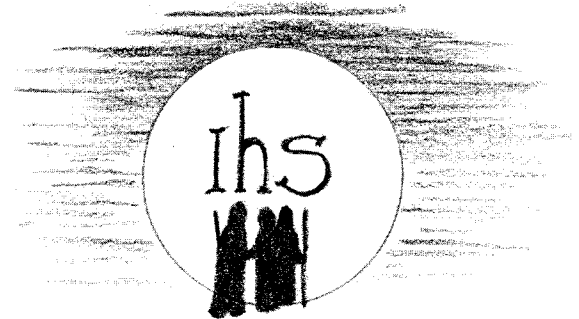
Then in 1960 an "official" recognition of the importance of the vigil came from His Holiness, Pope John XXIII.

This Pope had called Fatima the "Hope of the world" and it was he who had opened the last part of the Fatima secret that same year. Then His Holiness met alone with the Bishop of Fatima and the Bishop subsequently wrote to all the other Bishops of the world to announce a special all-night vigil of reparation at Fatima on October 13th of that year, suggesting that the Bishops might like to do something similar in their own dioceses.

Over three hundred Bishops agreed.

After the vigil, Pope John sent a long, spontaneous cablegram to the Bishop of Fatima expressing gratitude and a special blessing on all who participated in this vigil "not only at Fatima, but everywhere in the world." It is believed that Pope John himself spent that entire night before the Blessed Sacrament in union with the pilgrims at Fatima and in other places where hours of sacrifice and reparation were made.

Meanwhile, even as at Fatima Our Lady seemed literally to be drawing people to reparation before Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, She had already begun to do so in other parts of the world.



"Stay With Us,

for it is getting toward evening..."

LOUIS LAFAYETTE

In 1954, Pope Pius XII proclaimed an extraordinary "Marian Year." This compelled a devout and extremely competent priest in England to organize a national pilgrimage to the ancient shrine of Walsingham which had once been the greatest Marian Shrine in the English Isles. There were inadequate accommodations at the "shrine," which had been destroyed during the reformation. So an all-night vigil became the object of the pilgrimage: A day up from London, a night of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, and a day's trip back.

Those who made that pilgrimage were so overwhelmed with the return of love that Our Lord made to them from the Blessed Sacrament that they were impatient to have an all night vigil again. In 1956 they chartered a plane to Fatima . . . paying all the expenses just to fly to the Shrine, spend a night, and fly back! Since Fatima was so far away, they soon began going regularly to Lourdes. Within ten years after that first vigil in Walsingham, 33,000 vigils were made in Lourdes by Eng-

lish laymen and women who paid for the plane flight and took their weekend to spend a night at the grotto in sacrifice and prayer before Our Eucharistic Lord.

Vigils Spread

The prime "organizer" of the vigil movement in England was a devotee of Our Lady of Fatima, the Honorable Mrs. Henrietta Bower. She is a descendant of the Delawares, after whom the Delaware River is named. Her husband is a former member of Parliament and she's one of the few women of England entitled to sit in the House of Lords.

Mrs. Bower had raised funds in England to give a room to the Blue Army International Centre in Fatima . . . making England the only country outside the United States to do so. In 1952, when the founder of the Blue Army of Our Lady went to England to found a center there (which was done with the cooperation of Cardinal Heenan, then the Bishop of Leeds), it was Mrs. Bower who introduced Msgr. Colgan to influential English Catholics and became a Blue Army apostle herself.

So the very capable Canon Hulme, and the "never-take-no-for-an-answer" lay apostle, Mrs. Bower, became one of those famous priest-layman teams who have made ecclesiastical history. From their beginning in Walsingham in 1954, the Vigil movement has spread through the entire English-speaking world. Inspired by their example, the Blue Army magazine in America (SOUL) published an article in 1961 in which the present writer editorialized:

I have seen a wide spectrum of many terrible and wonderful things in the past twenty years, during which I've written half a dozen books, personally escorted more than a thousand pilgrims to the major Marian Shrines, held key positions in two of the major apostolates of our time. But I have never come in contact with anything more wonderful than the "All Night Vigil."

We often say that perhaps the

very next person to sign the Blue Army pledge may be the LAST person needed. But also we can say, in a larger sense, that the work of this or that particular apostle may be the last GREAT effort that is needed . . . to balance the scales of God's Justice and mercy. And when I saw Mrs. Henrietta Bower and the "All Night Vigil" at Fatima, in 1956, somewhere deep inside I felt that here was that last great effort which might weigh the scales in favor of Mercy.

That was the FIRST All Night Vigil . . . It was a planeload of Englishmen, led by a humble and unassuming woman remarkable perhaps for nothing but an absorbing faith which might seem a little frightening to one who did not have such faith. The whole planeload, with the exception of Mrs. Bower, seemed a little frightened by the idea. They had shared the cost of a flight from London to Lisbon, and the trip up to Fatima, just to spend a whole night without sleep . . . praying, in reparation . . . where Our Lady appeared.

Three Years Later

But three years . . . and many, many "all night vigils" later . . . we met them at Lourdes. I was with two priests and Mrs. Bower asked us to join her in the Stations of the Cross. She had deeper rings under her eyes than before, and looked even more wrinkled. And I sensed in the two fathers the same feeling of awe and suspicion of sanity that I had once felt. But all three of us knew that this humble woman, wife of a member of the British Parliament, had caused HUNDREDS of persons to make the sacrifice of a sleepless night of prayer and penance because of the message of Fatima. And we joined her.

When we began that very long, and very rocky ascent, Mrs. Bower took off her shoes . . . and walked barefoot. So did we. And somehow we knew that, after a night of prayer and almost two days without any regular sleep, she was doing this with the fervent prayer that we might somehow extend the message

of the All Night Vigil to America.

Americans are not less courageous than persons of any other land, and sooner or later . . . no matter how many persons may look askance . . . there will be American Blue Army members like Mrs. Bower who will, from time to time, give Our Lady of Fatima a little more than she asked . . . to speed the day of Russia's conversion.

The Whole Night

As we have said, the idea of all-night vigils was not new. The famous Easter Vigil was kept from earliest Christian times. And various churches have held vigils where people at least took turns during the night.

But the present form of the All-Night Vigil is very different. Now a full night is given by each person who participates, from the opening evening Mass the night before to the closing Mass in the morning.

One member of the all-night vigil group from England, Mrs. Gladys Towers, said:

"It is no small thing to remain without sleep during and after a long journey by plane across the sea and most of France; all day and the entire night in Lourdes; the next morning, until the pilgrims finally reach home. Yet it has been done by thousands, even with enjoyment and in spite of adverse weather conditions; fear of accidents; irregular meals and the gift of all one's time in Lourdes to Our Lady. 'It was wonderful' is the usual comment to which is often added the story of a personal favor granted to pilgrims who put themselves and their requests last."

Penance With Love

Mrs. Tower sums up all the reasons which have compelled her and an increasing number of thousands around the world to give such a night of prayer:

"It is said that the penances the devil really fears are the curtailment of food, drink and sleep. We know the little Seers of Fatima did all three, while St. Bernadette

humiliated herself to the dust, when commanded by Our Lady to wash in the muddy water which is now the famous miraculous spring. Mrs. Bower has referred to the crying need of 35 million Catholics behind the Iron Curtain that they may hold fast to the Faith. We may add to them the millions more behind the Bamboo Curtain in China in similar grievous circumstances faced with death or apostacy. ”

Some of these all-night vigils are interesting, even historic. Rarely are any a “bore.” If some excitement isn’t generated by the organizers during the night, Our Lord Himself comes into action almost as tangibly as the night He came out of the monstrance and showed His flaming Heart to Saint Margaret Mary.

But we will go a long way to match the excitement felt by the first all-night vigil group which flew to Russia, on the Russian feast of the Assumption, in 1965. It took a year for Mrs. Bower to complete all the arrangements, and among the forty who went were several Anglicans, including an Anglican minister. The need for prayers for Russia proved a greater ecumenical bond than any dialogue.