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THE EUCHARISTIC MIRACLE OF ORVIETO

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Orvieto is a city on tuff, like Siena. It does not remember, like Siena, its origins, so far away they are, but the birth certificate seems Etruscan, clearly written in the temples and tombs, with frescoes that are wonderful, like the one of the myth of Persephone on the tomb of the Escana.

Like Siena, it seems that Orvieto received Christian baptism in the third century from Sant'Ansano. Like Siena and more than Siena in the magic of the warmest color, Orvieto has a cathedral in front of which I did not notice the time passing. Orvieto also dedicated its cathedral to S. Maria Assunta.

Like Siena, it has its Eucharistic Treasure, but older, as a reward for a tenacious religious history, which has resisted invasions and battles that have repeatedly lit up and always kept alive the color of its districts, and as the severe and harmonious Palazzo dei Papi, now the museum of the Opera del Duomo, also bears witness to.

In 1264, Orvieto hosted in that Palace, which he had enlarged, Urban IV, a French Pope, from Troyes, surprised by the election in Jerusalem, where he was Patriarch, and who was an exiled Pope because he never managed to set foot in Rome, which was seething with turmoil.

Those were the times we know, of the great saints, Francis, Dominic, Thomas Aquinas, and of the teeming heresies.

Among these, that of Berengario had weighed on the Church for two centuries, who denied the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, although Berengario had later repudiated it, but it had been revived by Ugo Speroni.

It seems that Jesus, jealous of his Presence in the Eucharist, directly took steps to defeat the deniers with numerous Eucharistic miracles that occurred throughout Europe in that period.

And here the miracle of Orvieto, or more precisely of Bolsena, stands out for its grandeur.

Since the early centuries, long before the first year of the Jubilee, later called the Holy Year, was established in 1300, pilgrims went to Rome to pray at the tomb of the Apostles, and they walked on foot, even barefoot, starting from every Christian nation, with a great spirit of penance and frequent dangers from bandits, who stripped them of the little they had and mistreated and beat them, so much so that the pilgrims, before leaving, made their wills. In 1264, a priest whose name has not even remained had left his Bohemia, with his staff, which was the curved staff of penance blessed by the Bishop and which was used to hold the flask of water attached to it. He went to Rome to implore from the Apostles the certainty of the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, shocked by the gusts of heresy that were hitting the Christian peoples. He was now a few kilometers from Rome and very few, twenty-five, from the Pope. He celebrated in Bolsena, in the Church of Santa Cristina, overlooking the clear lake, one can imagine with what fervor and with what suffering.

At the Consecration, after saying the words of Jesus: "This is my Body", living blood began to flow from the host, which poured onto the Corporal and the Altar.

The poor priest was left speechless and breathless. He was helped by some priests present, who knows for what feelings of modesty or unconscious jealousy advised him to keep the event hidden, but the pilgrim

understood that he had received the desired answer and wasted no time. He immediately set out to go to Orvieto to report what had happened to the Pope.

Urban IV, with all his suffering for the controversies over the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, seemed to be waiting for nothing else and ordered Bishop Giacomo to go to Bolsena to find out what had happened, and to return to Orvieto with those precious relics, a sign that he had no doubts about the authenticity of the miracle.

And he did not even know how to wait for the Bishop's return. He had the clergy informed and the people went to meet him as far as the Bridge over the Rio Chiaro, today Ponte del Sole.

He had the Bishop give him the Corporal soaked in Blood and carried it himself in procession, amid hymns and songs of jubilation. In the Cathedral, before placing it down, he showed it to the people.

It is said that that procession, which took place on June 19, 1964, was the first Corpus Domini procession, because before that it was not customary to carry the Body of the Lord in procession, but this is not exact.

If anything, it was the first in Italy, because in Europe processions were held with the Body of the Lord, that is, with the Eucharist, to combat the heresy of Berengario and to bear public witness to the Presence of Jesus in the consecrated Host. It was Jesus himself who asked this reparation from Blessed Juliana of Mont-Cornillon.

Urban IV, perhaps while he was holding that divine Blood in his hands, sensed that it was an invitation to break the hesitation, and with the *Transiturus* bull of September 8 of that year, he extended the feast of Corpus Domini to all of Christianity, fixing it on the Thursday after the octave of Pentecost, and over the centuries it has remained the most solemn procession, clearly desired by Jesus himself.

Urban IV had in Orvieto the holy theologian Thomas Aquinas, whose death centenary occurs this year in 1974, and who, after having taught in Paris and refused the nomination as Archbishop of Naples, had retired near the Pope to study and teach theology.

The Pope held him in high regard uncertainties in the choice of who should compose the Office of the Blessed Sacrament, which enriched the Church with that masterpiece of faith and poetry that we continue to enjoy.

The relics of the miracle, taken from Bolsena, where only bloodstains remained on the stones of the altar still visible today, had been placed in the Cathedral, which Urban IV from the nearby residence looked upon with sadness because he saw it crumbling, due to the work of time and perhaps also from neglect.

Certainly he thought of it as new, as more worthy of preserving such a Treasure, but he did not have time to realize his loving plan because he died in the same year, and not in Orvieto, but in Perugia, when the Bohemian priest, after having been in Rome to venerate the tombs of the Apostles and the Martyrs and to suffer from the state of abandonment in which he had found the city that contained them, who knows if, consoled by having immersed his hands in the Blood of Christ, he had still reached his homeland.

It is certain that the splendid construction of the Cathedral of Orvieto is linked to the Eucharistic Miracle. The first stone was placed by Nicholas IV, an Italian and Franciscan Pope of humble origins and great faith, on November 13, 1290. The name of the creator has not been transmitted to us. There is talk of Arnolfo di Cambio, who was in Orvieto in those years, but there are no documents.

The Chapel of the Corporal, so rich and so beautiful, was built in 1356, and frescoed with the stories of the Corporal, the Miracles of the Eucharist, and the Crucifixion. The Tabernacle, curated by Andrea Orcagna, houses the reliquary in gilded silver and enamels of singular beauty, a work of Sienese figurative art.

In the early 1500s, Pope Julius II, immersed in the wars for the restoration of the Papal States and the liberation of Italy from foreigners, found himself passing through Orvieto on his way to reclaim Bologna, and found himself kneeling and moved before the Corporal soaked in divine Blood.

A man of culture and a lover of the arts, he thought that the best way to spread knowledge and honor the Miracle of Bolsena was to entrust it to painting, which despite the recent invention of printing continued to be the great book of the people.

He commissioned Raphael to fresco the event, and Raphael executed the effective pictorial representation in the Room of Heliodorus in the Vatican.

Since the institution of the feast of Corpus Domini, Orvieto has renewed the procession of Pope Urban IV with the Sacred Corporal.

In the Holy Year of 1950, with a solemn "Peregrinatio", the Sacred Corporal was accompanied to Rome, where it was venerated by Pius XII and carried in the Papal Procession to St. Peter's Square. Ten years ago, in 1964, the seventh centenary of the Bull that established the feast of Corpus Christi, the Supreme Pontiff Paul VI participated in the Eucharistic Celebrations of Orvieto, who on 11 August from the Cathedral launched to the world the "Message of Orvieto", more than ever worthy of attention and meditation for all men, which we believe appropriate to report at the end of our brief exposition:

"Let not the man of today believe that he can find other nourishment for his insatiable hunger for life, if not in the faith and communion of Christ the Lord;

let not the man of today believe that in order to conquer the earthly bread, which his temporal life needs, he must pose the alternative to the search for the bread of religious life and fidelity to the Catholic tradition;

let not the man of today believe that the treasure of faith and beauty that comes to him from history and Christian civilization now has a simple archaeological and folkloristic value, and let him not think that he can worthily preserve it, and preserve it as a precious heirloom yes, but extinguished of truth and interior reality; it would become ashes in his hands; but let the man of today believe that whoever seeks on the word of Christ, the kingdom of God first, will have bread, will have abundance of goods too.