

The Mary-Hearted CATECHIST

THE LIFE STORY OF FATHER LOUIS QUERBES
(1793-1859)

Priest of The Diocese of Lyons, France

Founder of The Clerics of St. Viator

Prepared by the
LOUIS QUERBES COMMISSION
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Louis Joseph Mary Querbes
 (pronounced "curbs")
 1793-1859

I Early Years

Born in France During the Reign of Terror

LOUIS JOSEPH MARY QUERBES was born in the midst of the turmoil of the French Revolution on August 21, 1793. The city of Lyons was at the moment under siege, and the boy's father, an humble tailor, feared for the life of his child. With courageous faith he saw that Baptism was administered on the very day of the boy's birth.

Intensive shelling of the city of Lyons began the next day. During the bombardment which lasted for two months, the Querbes' home received a direct hit, and it is reported that a trembling mother fled with young Louis bundled in her apron. Divine Providence protected

them miraculously, and all escaped without a scratch.

Young Louis grew up in an atmosphere of intense trust in God. His mother was his first teacher, for it was at her feet that he learned his first prayers, his love for Christ and His Blessed Mother.

As the Reign of Terror subsided and the clergy were again able to function openly, Lyons became again a city of peace. Louis was accepted as an altar boy at the parish of St. Nizier, and his sincere piety and prudent judgment manifested themselves immediately. Possessing a tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, he soon expressed his desire for the priesthood. God was asking for the consecration of his soul.

At the Age of Ten Makes Vow of Chastity

Interior promptings were preparing Louis for a life of special election. There is no doubt that he was under the influence of Divine Grace; for

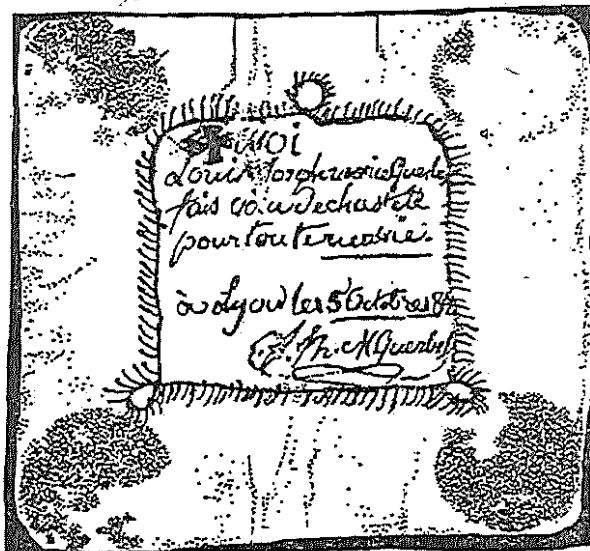
on Saturday, October 15, 1803, when he was only ten years of age, Louis consecrated himself to God by a vow of perpetual chastity.

With reverent piety the Clerics of Saint Viator have preserved the formula of the vow as a precious relic. It is written on rough cardboard in an inexperienced script, and is adorned and framed in a childlike manner. The wording used is exact in its terms with every evidence of precise inspiration. Since this young boy acted directly under Divine influence, we are not surprised at seeing in him an intelligence beyond his years, derived only from the grace that God gives to certain favored souls. Whatever the explanation, Louis' promise was sincere and definite, and he was fully aware of the significant act he was performing. He placed his vow under the protection of Mary, Queen of Virgins. He then covered the cardboard with a picture of the Annunciation, wrapping it securely to protect it against the years. God permitted this treasured document to be found at the time of Father Querbes' death, to

*"I Louis Joseph Mary Querbes make the
vow of chastity for my whole life.*

At Lyons, October 15, 1803.

L. J. M. QUERBES"



Drawing adapted from a photostat copy of the original vow. The dark circles in the corners are wax seals which fastened the picture of the Annunciation as cover on the vow.

serve as historical testimony of his boyhood sanctity.

Seminary Days and Classmates

Two years after making his vow of perpetual chastity, Louis Querbes entered the preparatory seminary at the Clerical School of Saint Nizier. After successfully completing the first four years, he began his course in philosophy in the fall of 1809. Father James Francois Besson, pastor of Saint Nizier and director of the minor seminary, who was later to become Bishop of Metz, placed Louis Querbes and two other select students under the direct supervision of Mr. Guy Deplace, a layman of profound knowledge and great virtue. This eminent professor tutored them skillfully for the next three years, and Louis Querbes obtained the diploma of Bachelor of Letters before the Faculty of Lyons in 1812. Later that year he entered St. Irenaeus, the Major Seminary of the Archdiocese of Lyons.

Louis Querbes was quick to make friends.

His sympathetic understanding, marvelous memory, and amiable personality drew many companions into his company. One was Peter Loras, who was to be the first Bishop of Dubuque, Iowa. It was at St. Irenaeus that his lifelong friendship developed with Donnet, who was later to become the Cardinal Archbishop of Bordeaux, and Dufetre who in future years was to be the Bishop of Nevers. It was in the seminary that the three of them became so inseparable that their classmates rhymed the verse:

*"Querbes, Dufetre, Donnet,
Three heads under one bonnet."*

Louis Querbes received the sub-diaconate on June 23, 1815. This ceremony was an event certainly unique and perhaps singular in modern church history. For among the young men called to receive sacred orders on that day, could be found "four budding saints": St. John Vianney, the future Curé of Ars; John Claude Colin, founder of the Marist Fathers; Marcellin Champagnat, founder of the Marist Brothers; and Louis Querbes, founder of the Clerics of

St. Viator. All this was concentrated in just a small corner of God's earth.

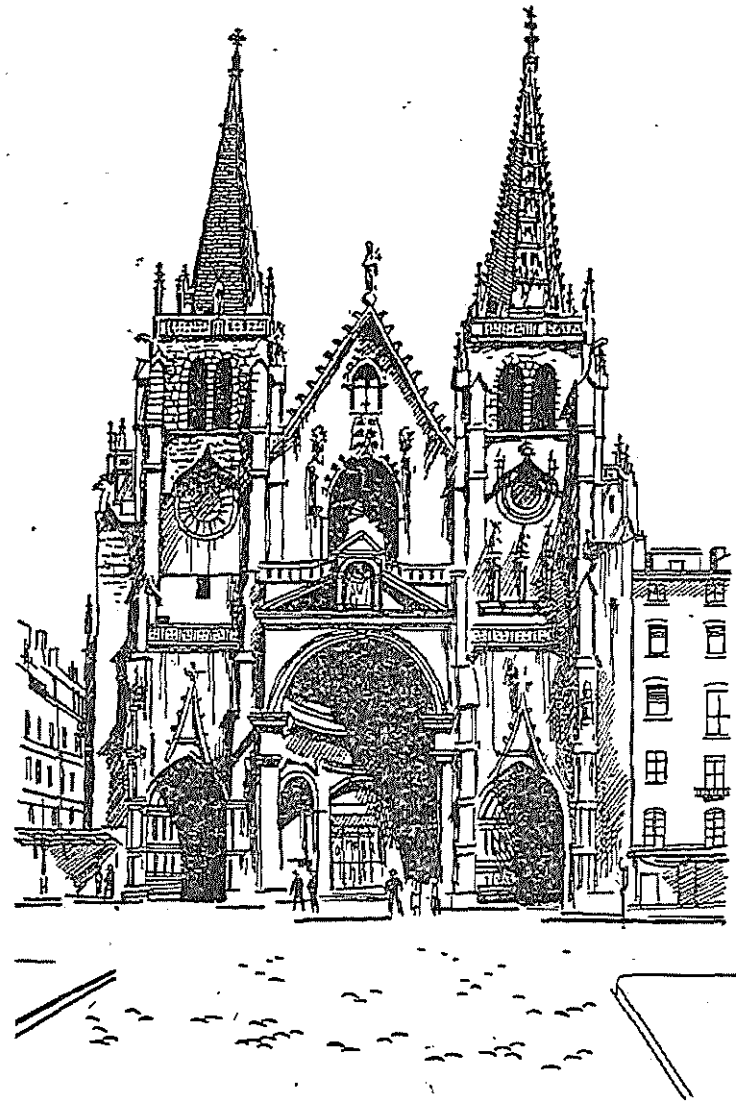
There was an interval between the end of his theological studies and his elevation to the priesthood. During this time Father Besson appointed him a teacher in the Clerical School of Saint Nizier. Only three short years before had he himself completed his own studies there. Louis Querbes was ordained to the priesthood on December 17, 1816.

2 Educator

—Preacher and Teacher

First Assignment to Home Parish

For his first assignment, Father Querbes was appointed assistant pastor in his home parish of St. Nizier. Because he had gained the confidence of the pastor with the work that he accomplished during the time that he was waiting to be ordained, he was charged with the administration of the minor seminary. Records show that he quickly became absorbed in the work. His ardent zeal for the glory of God, his intense piety, keen intellect, and jovial, frank manner were the principal traits that instantly made him “all things to all men!”



Church of St. Nizier, Lyons, France

Natural and Powerful Preacher

From the fullness of his heart Father Querbes always spoke the word of God. On the second Sunday after Epiphany in 1817 he preached his first sermon, and appropriately selected "Devotion to Mary" as his subject. On this occasion he concluded his instruction with these words: "O Mary, I consecrate to you this first effort of my ministry and under your patronage do I make this beginning." It was his habit to speak often about Our Blessed Mother with great love and devotion, and he took as his own the words of St. Bernard, "About Mary we can never have our fill."

After twenty-five years of political and social disturbances, widespread ignorance and careless indifference characterized the people of France. Aware of this, Father Querbes multiplied his instructions, endeavoring by this means to awaken the faithful. He was gifted with a natural fluency as well as a true eloquence, and before long greater numbers began

attending church. Never did any human or worldly considerations cause him to compromise the oftentimes difficult position of truth. This was especially evident when he upheld the divine authority of the Church and defended papal prerogatives, which were under attack at the time in France. He was especially vehement when his instructions vividly pointed out the moral duties of individuals, particularly those of parents toward their children.

Among the many worthwhile sermons Father Querbes left behind, there is one deserving of specific mention. In 1818 he delivered an enduring classic on "The Obligation of Christian Education of Children." Very likely, he was already formulating the ideas, which later were to give life to the Congregation which he was divinely elected to establish.

A Skillful and Resourceful Teacher

The position of director of the minor seminary gave Father Querbes an opportunity to

be in constant contact with children. He had an ease and naturalness about him that spontaneously attracted youth. They loved him deeply, and he understood their whimsical, carefree ways. In a short time he acquired a wealth of classroom experience, and enjoyed a reputation as a resourceful educator.

Despite his youth and inexperience, he exerted a strong influence on each boy under his charge. In the role of teacher, he was as much their friend as he was their master. Deep-rooted piety animated his every action which preached an eloquent lesson to the children around him. They could not escape his natural influence for good when they witnessed his tender devotion to Our Lord and His Blessed Mother.

It was his custom to have special ceremonies both at the beginning and the end of every school year, when the entire student body publicly placed itself under the patronage of Mary. On commencement day the children consecrated themselves to the Blessed Virgin in the presence of their parents. On one such occasion

Father Querbes' words were: "At the start of this year, my dear children, you asked our heavenly Mother to bless the work you were about to begin. Is it not fitting that you now offer her the success that you have attained? Remember how you pleaded before the shrine of her to whom no one pleads in vain. How many times have you found the solution to your problems at her feet! Count if you can the number of temptations overcome, and other endless signs of her protection . . . You are now part of Mary's priestly family. Remain worthy of your Mother. Preserve your modesty. Be as an angel of purity, always in readiness for heaven."

Establishes "The Pious Month"

Father Querbes played an important part in the general spiritual revival of the parish of St. Nizier. He is credited with the restoration of the beautiful ceremonies of the liturgy, which persecution had reduced to a minimum. His well-trained altar boys and young seminarians

helped to restore the splendor and dignity of the Mass, and other Church devotions.

At the time of his appointment the Confraternities of the Blessed Sacrament and of Our Lady of Grace were just beginning to prosper. With his arrival new foundations to care for the spiritual needs of young boys and girls were established in honor of Our Blessed Mother and Saint John the Evangelist. It was at this time also that a Society was founded for the purpose of securing relief and aid for the poor of the parish. The pastor named Father Quérbes moderator of these various societies.

Although these many activities required much time and work beyond his administration of the minor seminary, Father Quérbes was brought directly into contact with the spiritual life of the parish. His goal was not just to make the indifferent fervent, but out of this work grew the desire to encourage certain self-sacrificing souls to greater generosity.

For these carefully select adult souls he composed, *Rules for the Pious Month*, and he ex-

plained his general plan as follows: "Thirty persons, of one mind in their intense desire for spiritual advancement, wishing to assist others as well as themselves, shall devoutly perform certain prescribed exercises of piety in common on each day of the month. They will individually accept special practices of penance and mortification for an assigned day of the month. This act of expiation should be so scheduled that each new day will see a different member carrying out a particular practice of the Association in the name of others."

In unfolding the duties of membership, Father Quérbes was actually fashioning a type of monasticism for his people, adapted to the demands of their life in the world. Among the devotional practices urged upon the members were: frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament; interior and exterior acts of reparation to the Sacred Heart for sins committed throughout the world; a daily and complete consecration to the Blessed Virgin, with full confidence in Mary's powerful intercession.



*Our Lady, Mediatrix of All Grace
in the Church of St. Nizier*

Establishes "The Month of Mary"

Besides offering the practices of *The Pious Month* to the older persons of the parish, Father Querbes diligently began training his pupils in the exercise of a similar devotion. It was *The Month of Mary*, when special devotions to Our Blessed Mother were held each day during the month of May. He would assemble his classes before the shrine of Our Lady of Grace and there he would conduct public exercises in honor of the Queen of Heaven. Before long this tender devotion developed into a parish ceremony, and soon adults, as well as the school children and young seminarians, were gathering in great numbers at the feet of the statue of the Holy Virgin. Within a short time the practice of the "Month of Mary" had spread to all France.* From the church of St. Nizier the

*On November 2, 1952, His Eminence, Cardinal Gerlier, Archbishop of Lyons solemnly blessed a plaque of the Church of St. Nizier inscribed as follows: "To the memory of Father Louis Querbes (1793-1859), curate of the parish of St. Nizier. Later pastor of Vourles and founder of the Clerics of St. Viator, who in 1816, before this altar, with the pupils of his parish about him, began a practice which soon spread to every part of France—The Devotion of the Month of Mary."

devotion soon spread to the other churches of Lyons: and thence rapidly to the rest of France. Historians justly attribute to Father Querbes the honor of having introduced France to this highly popular and greatly valued devotion.

Three hundred years before, St. Philip Neri had composed a work entitled: *Practices for the Month Consecrated to Mary*, and the devotion was promoted in Italy among college students by the Congregation of the Oratory. By the middle of the eighteenth century the Jesuit Fathers had successfully introduced it in their Roman College. Louise of France, daughter of King Louis XV and Prioress at the Carmelite Convent of St. Denis, introduced this devotion in her priory shortly before the French Revolution, but it was never known beyond those convent walls.

His Compassion for Sinners

The care of the many good sheep coming to him did not prevent Father Querbes from cherishing those that strayed from the fold. He

preached: "Come poor sinners—you who despair and lose confidence in God because of your past mistakes . . . You are those who need the remedies of the Great Physician, and I will be only too happy to minister to you His consolations." It was his sincere utterance of words like these that revealed the compassionate depths of Father Querbes' heart to many desolate sinners. He spent many hours daily in the confessional, and often went forth to search for lost sheep.

One night someone knocked at his door. "Father, please come quickly, a man is dying but refuses to see the priest." Father Querbes identified the man as an apostate priest who during the Reign of Terror had sent suspects to the guillotine by the dozens. Immediately Father Querbes spoke to him of the mercy of God. Despairingly, the dying man said, "Forgiveness for me is impossible: I am a traitor and an assassin." Father Querbes quickly rejoined by saying: "Very well, my friend, you have already begun your confession; complete it and absolu-

tion will purify your soul." With the help of divine grace, this lost soul returned to God. Like many another, he received the Last Sacraments at the hands of Father Querbes.

His Charity Flows Constantly

This attempted characterization of Father Querbes as an assistant at St. Nizier is most inadequate; but to neglect saying something about his saintly charity would be a grave omission. Never did he react with feelings of indifference toward the sufferings and needs of others. He gave abundantly of his time, his money, and his energy.

His biographers cite numerous incidents of his great charity. His correspondence is an eloquent testimony, and tradition bears witness to fact. They tell how he sheltered and fed the widow and orphan; how he begged from generous benefactors for the poor; how he supplied dowries for young girls desiring to enter the convent, and financed many young men in

their studies for the priesthood. No child went without a Christian education in his parish because of a lack of tuition. He found work for the jobless. It was often said that "one has to feel only the slightest touch of want, and the abundant charity of Father Querbes is instantly afflow."

Shuns Position of Distinction

Father Querbes had been an assistant at St. Nizier for five years, when his ecclesiastical superiors contemplated his transfer. They had watched his rapid progress and observed the success of his zealous efforts. Finally they summoned him to the quarters of the Archbishop to present him with a flattering proposal.

Seated in the office of the Reverend M. Courbon, Father Querbes listened attentively while the Diocesan Administrator began to speak:

"Father, I am seriously thinking of sending you to the Archdiocese of Tours with Father Dufetre. There is a great future in this work, and much good to be done there. You shall be

superior of the diocesan missionaries with the title of Vicar General."

After some reflection, Father Querbes asked: "Is this an obedience that you give me, Reverend Father?"

"No Father, just a counsel for your consideration."

"Then please permit me," answered Father Querbes, "to decline this honor, thanking you at the same time for the confidence you place in me. My greatest desire would be to remain in the diocese of Lyons where I can continue the work I have begun."

Father Querbes' wish was granted, for the Reverend Administrator did not insist on the appointment. In his place, Father Donnet was selected to accompany Father Dufetre, and both acquired great reputation in their Tours assignment. Donnet, who replaced Querbes, later became the Cardinal Archbishop of Bordeaux, and Dufetre eventually became the Bishop of Nevers. Divine Providence had other plans for Querbes.

3 Pastor — Shepherd and Founder

Welcomed to the Parish of Vourles

One pleasant October afternoon in 1822, a young vigorous priest walked the road that led to the town of Vourles. The stately rhythm of his step betrayed him as a man of distinction, and forced a silent respect from those he passed. As he walked he recited the Divine Office. Arriving at the foot of a rather steep incline, he made a reverent sign of the cross and closed his breviary. At that moment his recollection was interrupted with the greeting:

"Good afternoon, Reverend Father."

"How do you do, my friend. Can you tell me how much further it is to Vourles?"

"About a twenty minute walk: but did you know, Father, that Vourles has no parish priest?"

"Yes, I did know, but the bishop has just appointed another man to take his place."

"Thanks be to God. If you only knew, Father, how much I regretted the loss of our pastor."

"Those are kind words. Good parishioners like you always become attached to their priest. What is your name, my good man?"

"Favre. But I must confess, even at the risk of losing your good opinion of me, that my attachment to our former pastor was not without selfish reasons."

"How is that?"

"I have a son who wants to become a priest, and the pastor had promised to teach him his Latin. Now I don't know what will happen. I have a large family and it is entirely out of the question for me to finance my boy to the priesthood."

"Well, do not worry about your son's future.

I am certain that your new pastor will carry out the promises of his predecessor."

"Do you really think so, Father?"

"I am sure of it."

"Then I take it you must know him?"

"Quite intimately. I am your new pastor."

In this manner he was welcomed to the parish of Vourles. The promise was fulfilled. The boy in the story was Father Hugh Favre, who was to succeed Father Querbes and become the second Superior General of the Clerics of St. Viator.

Rosary Conquers Parish

Vourles is a small village nine miles southwest of Lyons. In 1822 it counted a few hundred inhabitants, whose principal occupation was the care of orchards. In summer this peaceful suburb proved to be a popular vacation resort.

Father Querbes' first impression was very misleading. Christian families, like that of the

man he met on the road to town, were a rare exception, for the Revolution had a profound influence on all the people. The townsmen had so completely supported the Reign of Terror, embraced the new political and anticlerical ideas, and battled the cause of the Revolution that in 1793 the village received the significant name of "Vourles the Courageous." Her citizens remained for the most part indifferent, if not often downright hostile to the Church and her priests. In the eighteen years after 1804 they had broken the spirit of four different pastors. Parish activities were non-existent; the church was badly in need of repair; and the rectory was little more than four crumbling walls. Vourles needed an exceptional priest, and Divine Providence had chosen Louis Querbes.

As a kite rises against the wind, so do zealous souls succeed in the face of opposition. Father Querbes arrived on the 31st of October, 1822, and immediately set to work. Just as he had confided to Mary the works of his ministry at St. Nizier, he again consecrated all his future

efforts to her at Vourles. In one month at the beginning of Advent he enrolled the faithful women of the parish in the CONFRATERNITY OF THE PERPETUAL ROSARY. The men of the village refused almost as a group to attend church. Father Querbes only redoubled his efforts. He began slowly to break down village resistance, and he used the occasion of Lent, 1823, to explain vigorously the basic truths of the Catholic Faith. By Easter there were miraculous changes in the hard of heart, and visible success seemed to be crowning Querbes' efforts. That year there was a resurrection in the faith of Vourles.—A reflection of the first Resurrection in Jerusalem.

Fearlessness in Face of Threats

However, all were by no means won over to Christ. Many remained stubborn and unfriendly, and some sought ways to frighten and discourage the pastor. Anonymous threatening notes were slipped under his door or thrown into the rectory yard. On one occasion he re-

ceived the following: "People are correct in calling you brave, for there now exist very few priests who dare to preach, as openly as you do, against the evils caused by the Revolution. Say what you like now, and find excuses for the clergy. Formerly you clerical prigs kept the world in ignorance, but our eyes have finally been opened. We now realize that the clergy is the source of all our trouble. Continue to say and do whatever you like, but never again will you be able to control the people as if they were puppets."

Insults and threats didn't disturb Father Querbes. He gained the respect of the faithful by answering these attacks from the pulpit. We find this reply among his sermons: "Each morning, for quite some time now, I have discovered letters in my yard, obviously thrown there during the night. Since they do not bear a signature, I am unable to reply privately to those who honor me by taking time to write. On the chance that the author might possibly be in this audience, I offer him my reply publicly."

He then read the letters, pausing occasionally to clarify and comment on the principal accusations. Organizing the whole matter in an orderly discourse, he refuted skillfully and truthfully their erroneous arguments, pointing out in every-day language the false logic of their conclusions. The opposition was disarmed. The anonymous letters ceased. From that moment the conversion of his parish was under way, for he had achieved the esteem of all. In less than a year he was complete master of the situation.

First the School and Then the Church

On arriving at Vourles, Father Querbes found the buildings in a deplorable state of repair. After serious study he decided on a plan of restoration. First, he would undertake to destroy the hostile anticlerical feelings. When this was accomplished, he would tackle the problems of school and church in that order.

So completely had he won the parish over in those first twelve months that Divine Provi-

dence continued to bless his zeal in sending two generous benefactors. Ignorance laid upon the village, like a plague. Vourles had no schools or teachers worthy of the name. As Father Querbes prayed for some solution, two parishioners, the Comte sisters, came to his aid. With the funds they supplied, he opened a school for girls and confided its direction to the Sisters of St. Charles. The year was still 1823. He devised a temporary measure to give some education to the boys of the parish. He was fortunate to secure the services of a young, well-trained teacher. The rectory became a classroom in the day and Father Querbes' bedroom at night.

The pastor next turned his attention to the temple of God. The church of Vourles, in its dilapidated condition, reflected the religious indifference of the people. In derision it was at one time referred to as the "Stable of Bethlehem." Temporary repairs were first made in 1825. After the reform was generally accomplished, the population received with favor Father Querbes' program of rehabilitation. The

village mayor lent his active and pious cooperation. A subscription drive was opened, the parish trustees voted funds, aid was solicited from the civil authorities, and work was begun. On May 5, 1828, the Archbishop of Lyons blessed the newly restored church. Apart from Almighty God, it is impossible to explain the incredible work that was accomplished by Father Querbes in these six years.

News of the success at Vourles began to circulate about the Archdiocese of Lyons. Then came rumors of the possible transfer of Father Querbes. Unknown to the pastor, the parishioners hurriedly circulated petitions, which were signed by nearly every person in Vourles, requesting the Archbishop not to reassign their priest, and he was allowed to remain in Vourles. This is most significant if you recall that these were the very same people who previously made life so miserable for Father Querbes and his four predecessors.

About the time that these rumors were at their height, Pauline Jaricot, the zealous Foun-



dress of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, visited Vourles and Father Querbes. She regularly sought his advice and direction, but on this occasion it was she who did the informing. She was a lady of great piety, who we know was often favored with exceptional graces. She foretold that Father Querbes would never be moved from Vourles, and so it turned out.

Providence directed the Archbishop to accede to the wishes of the people. Father Querbes would remain their pastor. At the time of his death he would have given them thirty-seven years of life.

The Seed of a Religious Community

The schools of France were deplorable in the early nineteenth century. The disorganization and confusion following the Revolution caused indescribable neglect. Few centers of education existed, and practically none in areas outside the larger cities. Teachers were ill-prepared, and always poorly paid. Teaching was an undesir-

able occupation, cautiously avoided by all except the radical and anticlerical, who sought it only to undermine the Church's influence and paralyze the pastor's ministry.

Father Querbes reasoned that ignorance destroys faith and morals, and even in the seminary he tangled with those problems and their solutions. At St. Nizier and again in Vourles he observed that pastors could not go it alone. They needed help in the care of souls. Willing assistants must be found to teach catechism, to care for sanctuaries and sacristies and to aid in the proper carrying out of liturgical chant and ceremonies.

Saving children's souls became his chief obsession. "Suffer the little children to come unto me," became the burning motto of his days in Vourles. He sought the solution to the evils of his time in prayer and meditation. He relates that the "first ideas came as an inspiration, while in the presence of God." An interior voice kept repeating: "Time is flying, souls are being

lost; begin, generously and without delay, heroic work to save them."

This was the plan: A PIOUS ASSOCIATION OF LAY AUXILIARIES. He would train devout Catholic men to serve first of all as teachers and then help as sacristans, masters of ceremonies, choir directors, and all-around assistants. It was not to take the form of a religious congregation. There would be no vows, and membership was open to married men as well as the unmarried. The association would guarantee spiritual, intellectual, professional, and material benefits. The training program would engender complete cooperation with the clergy for the glory of God and His Church.⁶ This plan was a concept that would be realized one hundred years later in the form of *Catholic Action*.

The problem of putting this plan into execution was not easy. Father Querbes began by making use of the facilities he had at Vourles. His one teacher and rectory school for boys must be developed into a Catholic Normal School for the training of pious and well-in-

structed teachers. With childlike confidence he sought alms from a certain number of charitable persons, whom he interested in his work. Fellow priests of Lyons began recruiting young parishioners who appeared to possess the desired aptitude. The Archdiocesan authorities gave their tentative approval, and all initial efforts met with immediate success.

It was then agreed that steps should be taken to obtain the approbation of the French Government. Father Querbes personally carried the first articles of the association to the civil authorities in Paris, bearing the name of THE CHARITABLE SOCIETY OF THE SCHOOLS OF ST. VIATOR. The Royal Council of Public Instruction approved these articles in a decision rendered August 8, 1829. A Royal Ordinance of January 10, 1830, sanctioned this decision and gave the society a legal existence.

The Germination

Time brought about growth, and growth demanded changes within the newborn organiza-

tion. A number of members desired to give themselves completely to the service of God, for they felt called to a state of higher spiritual perfection. There were three types of membership in the society by 1831:

BROTHERS, who privately bound themselves with simple vows of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience.

CONFRERES, who were trained in the Normal School and desired to fulfill the objectives of the society, but were not inclined to pronounce the vows of religion.

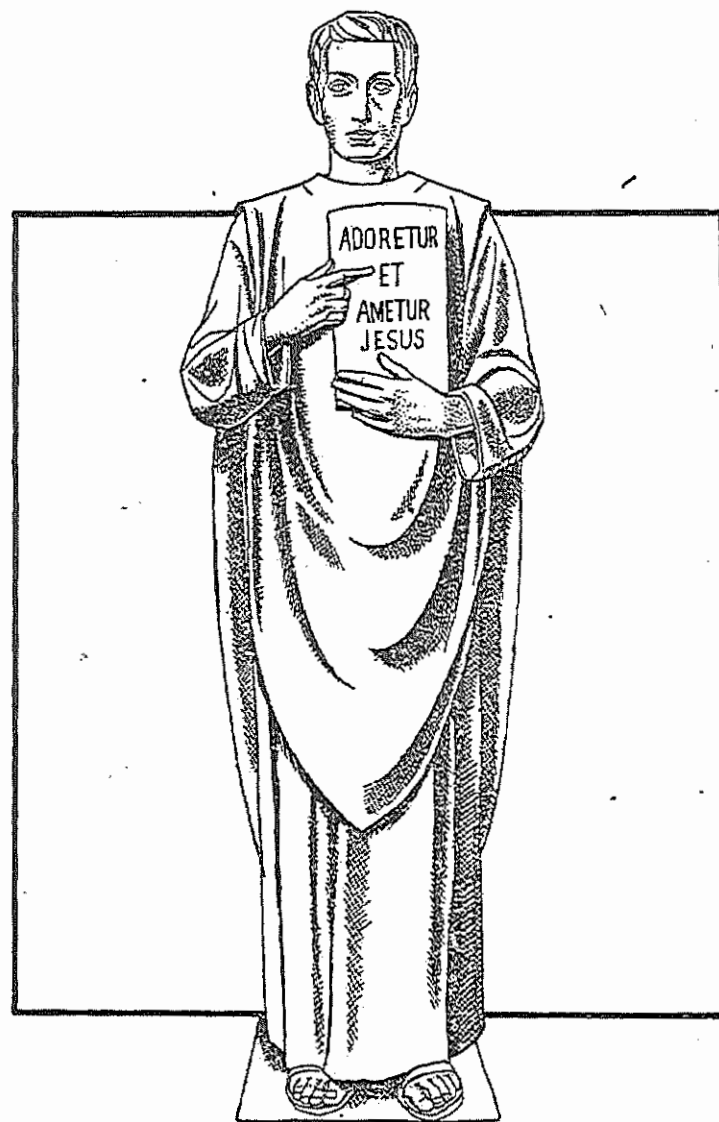
AFFILIATES, who had not gone through the training program, but wished to share in the spiritual and material benefits of the society.

These developments indicate that the society was quietly attaining the structure of a religious congregation, and it was certainly necessary to receive explicit approbation from the Archdiocese. Numerous difficulties were overcome before the statutes, with the title of the SOCIETY OF THE CLERICS OF ST. VIATOR, were officially sanctioned by Archbishop de Pins

on November 3, 1831. Viatorians everywhere observe this as the date of their foundation. Father Querbes was only 38 years of age when his religious society crystallized into an approved Congregation. It was a youthful age for one to bear the title of *Founder*.

Father Querbes Chooses St. Viator as Patron

Father Querbes had a special reason for choosing St. Viator as the patron of his newly organized band of Catholic teachers. St. Viator had lived in Lyons, France, about the year 360, and his memory had been an object of special veneration for fifteen centuries. As a lector in the cathedral church and under the direction of his bishop, St. Just, Viator was called upon to translate and read to the faithful such portions of the Sacred Scripture as his bishop judged useful. To him were entrusted also the instruction of the catechumens and most particularly the education of the children. It was a holy thought that inspired Father Querbes to



St. Viator, by Vittorio Moroder, Sculptor

place his society of catechists under the patronage of St. Viator, the model catechist of the glorious early church of Lyons.

Anxious Days

At the beginning of 1838, the newly established Congregation had expanded into five dioceses. Prudent spiritual advisors outside of his Society urged Father Querbes to seek approval of the Rule and Constitutions from the Holy See. The Jesuit Fathers made preliminary inquiries of the Sacred Congregation in Rome, and wrote him to take immediate action.

As a rule, Rome is hesitant to grant its approbation to a young group with only six years of history. With the realization that the hand of God was directing the course of events, Father Querbes composed a final draft of his constitutions. He spent long hours in prayer and meditation, seeking the aid of the Holy Spirit in the preparation of the documents.

He departed for Rome on the eighth of May,

encouraged again with words from Pauline Jaricot: "God Himself accompanies you in order to grant your desires . . . Jesus and Mary are ever present. How wonderful it is to travel in their gracious company!"

Father Querbes was met in Rome by the Very Reverend Father Roothaan, the Superior General of the Jesuit Fathers, with whom he lived for the next four months. Two priests were assigned to give Father Querbes every assistance and advice. Father de Villefort, S.J., became his constant companion and used his good offices and experience in directing every transaction. Work began at once, and the proceedings lengthened from hours to days and from weeks to months. At times everything seemed dark and hopeless. Fervent supplication arose from the Community at Vourles, and prayers were offered by the Society of Jesus. Pious lay people offered to God fasts and alms with their prayers so as to obtain a favorable result. There were several original objectives which Rome was cautious to approve. Some modifications were in-

evitable. With the wisdom of a Holy Mother, the lay element in the organization was completely eliminated. The Holy See directed that it should be a congregation of vowed religious whose objectives would be the teaching of Christian doctrine and the service of the holy altar.

- Father Querbes had at first planned to have his religious receive Minor Orders and be called parochial clerics. This was a desire expressed by the Council of Trent to enable the Church to return to the discipline of the early centuries. It was thought that this detail could not be realized in the complex organization then existing within the Church. However, the spirit engendered by Father Querbes would be preserved with a community of religious priests and brothers founded to aid the diocesan clergy. They would staff their schools and assist them in the administration of the sacraments. They would teach catechism and care for their sanctuaries and sacristies. They would direct choirs and promote the liturgy.

Papal Approval

During the lengthy negotiations Father Querbes became seriously ill, and was confined to bed. At one point the Jesuit Fathers feared for his life. He passed the crisis, however, and was slowly regaining his strength in September, 1838. At that time he received the encouraging news of the approval of his Community by the Holy See. A trustworthy account tells us that Father Villefort rushed into his sick-room and joyously exclaimed: "I have wonderful news for you, my good friend. The Holy See has just now officially approved your Congregation." Father Querbes instantly arose from his bed, and both men fell on their knees, and together thanked God for the singular grace that He had just bestowed on the newborn Society. Father Querbes then wrote his religious family in Vourles the good news in these words, "Sing the Te Deum, for all has been accomplished." He commented on his health by saying, "I am cured."

After a last visit to the tomb of St. Peter and a final audience with His Holiness, Pope Gregory XVI, at which time he pronounced his religious vows, he hastened to return to Vourles. He decided not to wait to receive the Apostolic Brief in person. It was issued on May 31, 1839, while Pauline Jaricot was in Rome. She was authorized to carry the document to the Founder and his Clerics of St. Viator.

4 Father Querbes —and The Church Universal

Increase and Multiply

Father Querbes was Superior General of the Clerics of St. Viator for twenty-eight years. During his lifetime he received into the congregation 440 members, of whom 278 were living at the time of his death. There were then three provinces in France, with motherhouses in Vourles, Cantal, and Rodez. It has always been felt that this rapid growth was due to the blessing pronounced on the rising society by His Holiness, Pope Gregory XVI, when he commissioned it to "Increase and Multiply."

Works were multiplied following the papal approbation. Bishops and pastors were begging for men to help them. At this time various local ordinaries were organizing diocesan commu-

nities to accomplish the same objectives, but with little success. When the Bishop of St. Flour discovered that the Viatorians existed, he requested the little group he was struggling to establish in his diocese be affiliated with the community of Father Querbes. The Brothers of St. Odilon were officially received as Clerics of St. Viator in 1846. Government restrictions prevented Bishop Crozier of Rodez from admitting another religious community into his diocese. He reached a solution by establishing the Brothers of St. John according to the Viatorian Rule, and charged the Clerics with the training of his novices. In 1854 the two foundations were joined, and a new province was soon to flourish in and around Aveyron with headquarters at Rodez.

Man of Great Confidence

It would be wrong to create the impression that this early growth of the Community was free of trials and difficulties. There were many, but Father Querbes reached their solution by

completely abandoning the problem to the Providence of God. At the times of his greatest material distress, he even went to knock at the door of the tabernacle to remind Jesus Christ of his word: "Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." Many examples could be cited, but the crisis of 1840 will best illustrate his great confidence in the power of heaven.

Postulants arrived in greater numbers this year, but shortly after their arrival a great disaster struck the city of Lyons. The River Rhone overflowed its banks and the flood waters caused great misery and suffering to a large section of the town. The alms of charitable persons, whom Father Querbes had so heavily depended upon, were diverted to the care of flood victims. In a short time his community funds were completely exhausted, but he was determined to continue his novitiate. He succeeded in acquiring food by begging over several months, but finally it was decided that all the novices would have to be sent home to their

families on December 8, 1840. On departure day, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, he celebrated Mass and begged Mary Immaculate not to abandon him in this cruel trial. The routine of the day was not changed. As was his custom, he opened the mail box later in the morning and he found the answer to his hopeful prayers there. Four one-thousand franc bank notes had been placed therein by an anonymous donor. The author of this providential gift was never discovered. The novices remained and Father Querbes continued his work, more than ever confident in divine assistance and in the powerful protection of Mary.

Foreign Missions

Father Querbes interested himself in the foreign missions shortly after obtaining papal approval in 1831. One would think that a young struggling community would find it impossible to sacrifice man-power and render them financial assistance in distant lands, when there were

so many requirements at home. But it would appear that the impossible was a challenge to Father Querbes. His first foreign mission was established in Afghanistan from the mother province of Vourles. He personally journeyed to Algeria, North Africa, to study the possibility of opening a mission there. Although he decided against it, he elected in turn to send missionaries to the United States in 1842 and to Canada in 1847.* The mission to the United States did not immediately result in a permanent foundation, but that established in Canada rapidly developed into a flourishing religious province which in 1865 sent a group of religious to the United States to lay the foundations of the Province of Chicago.

The Spirit of the founder causes the Clerics of St. Viator to continue that interest in the for-

*Before sending his religious to Canada, Father Querbes took them to the shrine of the Blessed Virgin at Fourviere in Lyons to consecrate them and their work to the Blessed Mother. On May 26, 1952, a plaque was erected in the chapel of Fourviere to commemorate this event. It bears the following inscription: "The Reverend Father Louis Querbes, 1793-1859, Pastor of Vourles, Founder of the Clerics of St. Viator, here found light, force and consolation and here consecrated to Mary his religious departing for distant foundations."

eign missions. In 1931 missionaries were sent to Szepingkai, Manchuria, where they prospered well until World War II and the Communist aggression that followed. The last of the Viatorians were expelled from Manchuria in December, 1953. In 1947, the Congregation entered the diocese of Kyoto in Japan, and again the growth has been rapid. They have constructed a middle school to instruct 1000 boys, and St. Viator church, a large city parish, was dedicated by Bishop Paul Furuya of Kyoto on February 7, 1954. They also conduct a language school, catechetical center, and novitiate. In 1953 they sent the first group of missionaries to Taichung, Formosa, to establish a middle school for boys of the Vicariate. Viatorians are proud to point out that native Japanese and Chinese priests and brothers are today true sons of Father Querbes.

Persecution Creates New Fields

Father Querbes was born during days of religious persecution in France, but during the

time that he directed his newly-founded community it lived and thrived in relative peace. It was not until sometime after his death that the picture began to change. The Ferry Laws of 1880 in France expelled religious teachers from all public schools, and by 1903 the injuries done to Christian education had reached tragic proportions. One hundred and twenty-five Viatorian schools—which trained thousands of students—had been shut down and their religious teachers dismissed. At the direction of the superiors, many assumed secular disguise and some schools were reopened, but as the persecution became more violent new fields of labor had to be cultivated elsewhere. The religious of the Province of Vourles migrated to Belgium, where they were able to continue in the work of teaching Christ's youth. Those from the Province of Rodez found their way to Spain, and carried on as a vice-province for years. They have grown to full stature, for in 1948 they were canonically established as an independent province. As time unfolds itself, the spiritual sons

of Father Querbes take on a character as universal as the Gospel of Christ.

The Death of Father Querbes

Only in brief have we seen a true apostle of Christ at work, never giving way to evil, never lax in regard to duty, and never flinching in difficult situations. His love for the things of God was intense. Never did he spare himself, nor refuse a burden that might promote the glory of God. He literally burned himself out in the Master's service. In January 1859, Father Querbes was confined to bed, weak and exhausted from his heavy burdens. His once robust constitution was little by little undermined by a disease that deprived him of his strength and brought him to the point of death.

Countless prayers were offered for his recovery. His parishioners at Vourles and his Clerics everywhere joined prayers with those of their students to beg Almighty God to spare

him. Four months later he wrote to one of his religious, "I wish to tell you that I am able to get out of bed, and ask that you sing a good 'alleluia'. I am out of danger, although still far from recovered. I owe this turn for the better to the Blessed Virgin, for it was on the first days of May that I felt this great improvement..."

For several weeks he was able to return to his work but he dragged himself painfully along. The disease soon regained the upper hand and he was again forced to remain in bed. On August 25, 1859, the feast of St. Louis, a large number of his religious gathered at the motherhouse in Vourles to extend greetings to their beloved Father on his patronal feast. With difficulty he rose from his sick bed that he might meet with them on the terrace. Suffering had altered his countenance, but he smiled as he addressed what he knew would be his last words to them. He bestowed on them his priestly blessing, and left them with these words: "A few

days more, and I shall be acquainted with death."

From that moment he grew weaker. A great peace came over him which gave evidence of his complete resignation to the divine plan. Father Favre, the Vicar General of the Community, administered the last sacraments as he saw death approaching. At nine o'clock in the evening of September 1, 1859, he commended his soul to God. With his priests and brothers kneeling in prayer about his bed, he gave them one last counsel, "My children, be faithful to obedience."

FAVORS

MRS. P. FORTIN, aged 72, suffered an injury to her leg in June, 1947. X-rays showed a fracture of the femur. Her leg was put in a cast under traction. A picture of Father Querbes was applied and a novena of prayers begun. Within a few days Mrs. Fortin's extraordinary pains ceased. Fifteen days later her doctor noted a consolidation of the fracture and removed both the cast and the traction. Documents on file signed by the two attending physicians state: "This cure cannot be explained naturally."

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MRS. J. PILON, the mother of four children, underwent abdominal surgery in the fall of 1950 for disorders caused by a diseased liver. Her post-operative condition was critical. Fistulas opened in both large and small intestines and peritonitis set in. No treatment was effective, and in February, 1951, the end seemed near. It was suggested that the sick woman

make a novena to Father Querbes. She did so with great fervor and confidence. She showed signs of improvement on the fourth day and was discharged from the hospital at the end of the novena. There is every evidence that her cure is permanent.

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The details in this pamphlet are published in entire submission to the decrees of Urban VIII.

The Clerics of Saint Viator

AMERICAN headquarters of the Clerics of Saint Viator are located in Chicago, Illinois. The principal end of the Community is the sanctification of its members by observing simple vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. The secondary end is the salvation of souls of others in the teaching of Christian doctrine and the service of the holy altar. They accomplish this in sixteen archdioceses and dioceses of the United States, teaching in eleven high schools and nine colleges and universities in twelve states from Massachusetts to Nevada. They administer thirteen parishes and serve as chaplains in six hospitals, in addition to assisting diocesan clergy in numerous capacities. Men are also permitted to volunteer for the home and foreign missions.

