

Eucharistic Fervour in an Innocent Heart

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During her short life, Nellie was a model of passionate love for God, alive in the Eucharist and suffering in the Passion, demonstrating how innocence is the key to the wisdom that penetrates the most profound divine mysteries.

In the famous evening conversation narrated by St. John in his Gospel, Jesus said to Nicodemus: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the Kingdom of God” (Jn 3:3). Soon afterwards He added that it was necessary to be “born of water and the Spirit” (Jn 3:5).

These enigmatic words, which perplexed that good Pharisee, are easy for us to understand today: they allude to Baptism, the Sacrament by which the soul is “born anew” by being purified of original sin and receiving the life of grace, the seed of glory that will blossom in Heaven.

Those who receive it and remain faithful to the graces it infuses will experience, even in their earliest childhood, the growth in their soul of a wisdom and a supernatural sensibility proper to persons advanced along the paths of perfection.



Ellen Organ, on the day of her First Communion

Perhaps one of the clearest examples of this sanctifying effect of Baptism is little Ellen Organ, a frail Irish child who lived for less than five years in this valley of tears. Her short life is said to have been one of the main reasons that led St. Pius X to lower the admissible age for First Holy Communion.

Infancy marked by suffering

Born on August 24, 1903 in Waterford, Ireland, into a modest family, she was the youngest among four siblings and from the cradle had fragile health. Baptized as Ellen, she soon came to be known by the affectionate nickname Nellie. Her pious mother, Mary Ahern, carried her to the foot of the tabernacle countless times in order to consecrate her to the Sacramental Jesus, who was certainly pleased to receive the generous offering of that maternal heart.

Her father, William Organ, had joined the army, and was assigned in 1905 to the fort on Spike Island, located in Cork Harbour. While there, Mary became ill with tuberculosis and fought the disease for more than a year, while still caring for her young children. When she died in January 1907, the eldest child was not yet nine years old. Nellie, the youngest, was only three.

William tried to reconcile the care of his offspring with military life by enlisting the close support of a neighbouring family. But it was impossible, especially since little Nellie was developing a deformation in her backbone, a consequence of a fall as a baby, which prevented her from standing upright. She had to stay in bed most of the time.

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He then decided to entrust the children to religious establishments where they would be well-cared-for and educated. Nellie and her little sister Mary were taken to the hospital run by the Sisters of Mercy and then transferred to St. Finbarr's School, run by the Good Shepherd Sisters in Cork, in May of that same year.

Guided by the wisdom of innocence

Despite spending almost the entire day in the infirmary, due to her disability, Nellie was a charming child. The nuns admired her precociousness, observing

that “her large dark eyes shone with intelligence and heralded great willpower.”^[1] Attentive to all the stories they told her, the girl had something mysterious and captivating about her, to the point that her nurse often commented: “This child will either be a great saint or a great sinner.”^[2]

When they took her to the chapel for the first time and pointed to the tabernacle, telling her that Our Lord was there, she expressed her perplexity: “Why is Holy God locked up in such a small house?”^[3] Listening to the explanations, she understood, like few souls, the great mystery of love which is the Holy Eucharist. From then on, every day she asked them to take her to be with the “Holy God”, as she began to call Him. At each visit, she fixed her dark eyes on the tabernacle, joined her little hands and whispered her prayers, in an intimate colloquy that must have delighted the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus.

“There is Holy God! But why did they let those wicked soldiers do that? Poor Holy God!”

One first Friday of the month, she was able to contemplate the Blessed Sacrament displayed in the monstrance, which she had never had the opportunity to see before. Without any explanation, she exclaimed: “There is Holy God!”^[4] And when she was helped to make the Way of the Cross, at the eleventh station she could not contain herself and cried out in tears: “But why did they let those wicked soldiers do that?”^[5] And she repeated in a sorrowful voice, “Poor Holy God!”^[6]

Guided by the wisdom of innocence, she soon penetrated into the most profound divine mysteries, revealing a passionate love for Our Lord in the Eucharist and in His Passion. Often, when she was afflicted by terrible pain, she pressed a crucifix close to her chest and said: “See how Holy God suffered for me.”^[7] On those occasions, she endured all the sufferings of her illness with impressive patience, but did not conceal her regret for not being able to visit Him in the chapel...

Little soldier of Holy God

As the atrophy progressed, her suffering increased. On one occasion, she was so weak that her nurse – whom she affectionately called “Mama” – commented that she feared she would no longer see her when she returned the next day, because perhaps Jesus would soon come for His dear Nellie. But Nellie answered: “No, Holy

God told me that I am not yet good enough to go to Him.”^[8] She then said that He had visited her, placing himself at her bedside, and she imitated His posture, with her arms crossed over her chest and a serious and recollected countenance.

Since that time, Nellie began to prepare herself for the great encounter with Jesus. She always lived in God’s presence: she only thought and spoke of Him. She memorized morning and evening prayers, and continually made acts of faith, hope and charity. She learned by heart the principal mysteries of our holy Faith and knew how to repeat with precision numerous Gospel episodes.

Learning about the supernatural precocity of this unique child, the Bishop of Cork decided to give her Confirmation, making a personal visit to St. Finbarr’s School. Since she was very weak, unable to kneel or sit, Nellie was carried to the chapel and received the Sacrament in the arms of her nurse. The superior of the house commented that the little girl’s face reflected a heavenly beauty. And when she was congratulated by the nuns and students of the school, she repeated: “Now I am the little soldier of Holy God.”^[9]

“I cannot wait any longer!”

Her burning love for Jesus in the Sacred Species blossomed into a refined Eucharistic sensibility.

When the religious nurse could not be there to care for Nellie, a student from the school was assigned to perform this function, sometimes even spending the night with the little one.

From her sickbed she knew when the Blessed Sacrament was exposed in the monstrance, without anyone telling her

One morning, instead of going to the morning Mass, the young substitute went to the kitchen without anyone noticing and remained there alone during the time of the celebration. On returning to Nellie, she was surprised when the little girl reprimanded her: “You did not receive Holy God this morning; I will tell Mama.”^[10] Astonished, the girl wanted to test her: on another occasion, she did the same thing, not appearing at the Holy Sacrifice, and upon her return she was admonished again.

From her sickbed she knew when the Blessed Sacrament was exposed in the monstrance, without anyone telling her. And on occasions when she could worship Him in the chapel, her face shone with enchantment and her sparkling eyes seemed to penetrate the Eucharistic veils and see Jesus himself. She fervently desired to receive Him in her heart and did not hesitate to beg Him insistently: "I need Holy God, I need Holy God. Oh, how I long for Him to come into my heart! When will He come? I cannot wait any longer!"^[1]

However, Nellie was only four years old! To alleviate the anguish of waiting, she asked her nurse to come and embrace her every day after she had received Holy Communion, because thus she felt that the Eucharistic presence was somehow transmitted to her soul.

The long-desired First Communion

On a visit to the school, a Jesuit priest took an interest in the pious patient and began to talk to her. When he asked her if she knew exactly what Communion was, she answered without hesitation: "It is Holy God. It is He who makes the Saints; and they are Saints because of Him."^[2] Impressed by the wisdom and loftiness of these words, indicative of an interior life already shaped by grace, this priest interceded for Nellie with the Bishop and the latter authorized her to receive the Eucharist.

The news overwhelmed the little girl, who, filled with joy, told everyone of the great grace that she would soon receive. The date scheduled for First Communion was December 6, 1907, the first Friday of the month, when the Blessed Sacrament was exposed.

The night before, Nellie could not sleep, in expectation of the long-awaited encounter, and first thing in the morning she woke up her nurse so she could prepare her.

The whole community, sisters and students, gathered in prayer in the chapel, awaited the solemn moment. Carried in the arms of her "mother", dressed in white and with a crown of roses on her head, Nellie looked like an Angel. There was no one who was not moved to see the piety and emotion with which she received the Eucharistic Jesus. An extraordinary light transfigured her face, giving her a heavenly radiance, a phenomenon that was repeated in other Communion during the short period that followed before her departure for Heaven. At the end

of the ceremony, she was taken back to bed, where she made a prolonged Thanksgiving.

***Suffering greatly, exhausted and feverish,
with a cavity eating away her jawbone,
Nellie felt close to the Divine Crucified One***

From then on, Nellie received the Holy Species almost daily. If she had the strength, she went to the chapel for Holy Mass. When she could not, the chaplain would bring her Communion. It was not unusual for her Thanksgiving to last between two and three hours, during which time she was absorbed in God.

She was often moved to tears as she manifested her joy at being visited by Holy God in her heart. He was her only thought and desire in this life. Later, it was with good reason that "the Holy Eucharistic League of Milan called her 'the little Violet of the Blessed Sacrament.'"^[13]

Interceding for children throughout the world

The time of departure was approaching. The Holy God who had delighted her with His Eucharistic presence, wanted to have that flower of purity and innocence with Him in the heavenly garden.



During her wake

A few days before her death, she said to the nurse: "I want Holy God! I need Holy God! How much longer must I wait?"¹⁴ And after receiving Communion, she spent from seven o'clock in the morning until five o'clock in the afternoon in recollection. Finally, the superior of the house, concerned, called her name. Opening her eyes, Nellie answered: "Oh, my mother, I was so happy! I was speaking with Holy God."¹⁵

Suffering greatly, exhausted and feverish, with a cavity that was eating away her jawbone, Nellie felt the Divine Crucified very close to her. Whoever came to her crying, left consoled, because the girl affirmed that she would go to Heaven and this was the reason for her happiness.

Her agony passed serenely. On Friday, February 2, 1908, at three o'clock in the afternoon, Nellie fixed her luminous and tear-filled dark eyes on something she seemed to see at the foot of her bed, and twice she extended her little arms, as if to reach for it. Her moving lips indicated that she was talking to someone. Lifting her gaze, she surrendered her soul to Holy God, who received her into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Undoubtedly she was a great intercessor for the approval of First Communion for children, for a leaflet circulating at the time, with the *imprimatur* of a Monsignor of the Sacred Palaces, stated: "During the year following her death, the pupils thought of making a novena to their Nellie to ask her to obtain a 'miracle': to inspire the Supreme Pontiff to grant the privilege of First Communion to all the children throughout the world. A few months later, His Holiness Pope Pius X published the decree *Quam Singulari*, authorizing Communion for all children with the use of reason who wished to receive it."¹⁶ ◇

Notes

¹ DES RONCES, F. Bernard. *Nellie, la petite Violette du Saint Sacrement, morte en odeur de sainteté à l'âge de 4 ans et 5 mois*. Paris: Maison du Bon Pasteur, 1912, p.14.

² DE LUNA, OSB, Joaquim G. *Traços biográficos de dezesseis crianças amigas de Jesus-Hóstia*. Primeira série. Rio de Janeiro: Lumen Christi, 1934, v.I, p.20.

³ Idem, *ibidem*.

⁴ Idem, p.21.

⁵ DES RONCES, F. Bernard. A l'École de "Nellie". La petite Violette du Saint-Sacrement. In: *Le Divin Crucifié. Revue de la Sainte-Face*. Paris. Ano II. N.1 (Jan. 1912); p.23.

⁶ Idem, ibidem.

⁷ DE LUNA, op. cit., p.21.

⁸ Idem, p.22.

⁹ Idem, p.23.

¹⁰ Idem, ibidem.

¹¹ Idem, p.24.

¹² Idem, p.25.

¹³ HAMELIN, Jean. *Le père Eugène Prévost, 1860-1946: fondateur de la Fraternité Sacerdotale et des Oblates de Béthanie*. Québec: Presses Université Laval, 1999, p.263.

¹⁴ DE LUNA, op. cit., p.27.

¹⁵ Idem, ibidem.

¹⁶ CHATELARD, Lucien. Nellie. In: MAUGENDRE, L.-A. *La renaissance catholique. Au début du XX^e siècle. L'Abbé Lucien Chatelard (1883-1916)*. Paris: Beauchesne, 1966, p.112.

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