

THE HEAVENLY COURT OF SAINT LUTGARDE

who died in the Year of Our Lord, 1246

Translated from the German by E. M. Walker.

Preface by Rev. Alban Goodier, S. J.

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PREFACE

There are many reasons why this translation of St. Lutgarde's Heavenly Court should appeal to modern readers. It is a typical example of that mystical writing and that theology which the Middle Ages found so common in its convents. St. Gertrude, St. Mechtilde, St. Hildegarde, and many more, teach us beyond a possibility of misunderstanding the language of the school; St. Lutgarde, perhaps more than any other, reduces the teaching to a point. The material of this mysticism was, first and last, the Sacred Scriptures. In the upheaval of the centuries, when the Empire was dividing into nations, and blood was being shed on every side, learning, and especially the study of the Scriptures had found a home in the convents of women. It is no empty praise which ascribes to these mystics, notably St. Gertrude, an exceptional fondness for study or an exceptional fund of learning. This necessarily had its effect upon their prayer, and its manner of expression. For prayer is life; and it is precisely the supremacy of life over mere understanding that constitutes what is known as mysticism. When, then, these mystics endeavor to put into words the experiences of their prayer, it is no wonder they adopt the living manner illustrated by the Heavenly Court.

But in another way St. Lutgarde is a matter of interest. Not only does she bring to a point the method of her predecessors and her contemporaries; she almost anticipates that systematizing of prayer which later mystics were to bring to perfection. Over one thousand Paters, as a measure of time, had already found their forerunner in the Rosary; but as a means of Meditation, they rather belong to the methods that were yet to develop. St. Lutgarde is a landmark, a point of juncture between the old and the new.

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Feast of the Annunciation, 1914.

INTRODUCTION By Father JOHANN LUDWIG a MUSIS, Provincial of the Franciscan Order for the Province of Strasburg, 1662.

This Way of Prayer, already so widely known, has brought light and comfort to innumerable human hearts during the long years of its existence.

The blessed and wonder-working virgin Lutgarde it was who made the Prayer, a Sister of the Third Order of St. Francis, the Foundress and first Reverend Mother of the Convent of St. Clare at Wittichen in the Black Forest; but it was I, Father Johann Ludwig a Musis, who gave to the Prayer its written and printed life. This was at Freiburg in the year 1635.

For after the sainted Mother had gone to her heavenly reward, there was no one to keep ablaze the glow from the Heavenly Court which she had kindled; and so the hearts of men grew dark again - for indeed they know not constancy - and the light from the Heavenly Court was veiled.

In 1632, God in His providence drew my attention for the first time to the holy Devotion of the Heavenly Court by means of the following circumstances. It was given to me in that year to recover from the earth where it lay hidden the inestimable treasure of St. Lutgarde's body; and this I did at the earnest request of many pious and saintly persons, alike of the clergy and of the faithful laity, and with the permission of the Most Reverend Prince and Lord, Cyriacus Roku, at that time Papal Legate for Switzerland, and thereafter a Cardinal of Holy Church. To me also it fell, as

Provincial and Visitor of the convent in which the Saint was buried, to prepare for her body a worthy resting-place.

Now when the body of the Saint was found, this was the manner of it: it was enclosed in a coffin of pine, and lay in damp, marshy, watery soil, so that before the holy body could be reached, a great part of the water had to be bailed out and carried away.

And it was found that the skull still contained the brains, fresh and intact, with every little vein and seam just as they had been in the Saint's lifetime; nor did it appear otherwise than as though in that selfsame hour she had been laid to rest.

And thereon were not only Catholic, but also non-Catholic doctors and scientists consulted and their opinion taken: to wit, among others, the celebrated Dr. Kieffer, of Strasburg, Dr. Jakob Hausler of Villingen, and Dr. Freiburger of Rottweil.

They all declared that this incorruptibility of the Saint's skull was to be ascribed rather to a mysterious and heavenly power than to natural causes, the more so because the human skull is by nature cold and the first of all the members to suffer corruption. And through this marvelous circumstance, disclosed by the examination of the holy body of St. Lutgarde, I felt moved to set down the chief facts of the Saint's life in a short and simple way.

This was indeed a difficult task, for all the details about Lutgarde had been chronicled in the Old German tongue, and moreover had been written down in a piecemeal and disorderly fashion. Yet I was spurred on to pursue my project with unwearied perservance by the natural affection, as it were, which from youth up I had felt for the church attached to St. Clare's Convent, and for Lutgarde herself, that great lover of God and foundress of the Convent. And I was most richly helped by the Countess Maria Euphrasia von Fürstenberg, whose maiden name was von Helfenstein, who spared no trouble in bringing to my notice every detail found in the Convent archives.

Among the records of Lutgarde's life, I came upon the fundamentals of the Devotion of the Heavenly Court, and formed the resolve of once more setting this holy Prayer like a clear-burning torch upon its pole, so that Christian hearts today might be kindled and inflamed anew by the memory of the life and sufferings and death of their Savior.

It occurred to me to revive this Devotion at the very time when our dear German fatherland was groaning under the rod of the Divine visitation, and was about to be reduced to ashes by the hot and cruel flames of the Swedish War. Great is my hope that by means of this Devotion much good was worked in many hearts, and many a harm that threatened was averted.

Consider for example, the town of Villingen, one of the most Catholic towns of Austria, in which I chanced to find myself at the time. I can testify with certainty that by the help of God and of Mary it was able to withstand three lengthy sieges by the Swedish troops, and even to drive them from its walls in shame.

These and similar results, brought about by the use of the Devotion of the Heavenly Court, procured that in a very short time, without any effort of man, its fame was spread abroad, and it was used with much zeal in the Courts of Emperors and of Princes and by everyone, clergy and laity, by the lowest as well as the highest in the land. Many hundreds of persons sent me their names that I might enter them in a book kept for the purpose.

When I had so rid myself of all my copies of the Prayer, I was removed from Swabia into the territories of the League, and became Prior of Soleure. This office made it impossible for me to engage in the spread of the Devotion of the Heavenly Court, wherefore it quickly fell off somewhat, yet only a little. For in Italy and in other far-off lands its light still burned, and yet does burn all bright and glowing: it needs but a little ardour to feed the flames.

Only the other day a letter came into my hands from the Vosgas district, written by the noble and virtuous lady Maria Elizabeth am Rhein to her sister Barbara am Rhein. In it she begs right earnestly for some copies of The Heavenly Court, and tells of her great wish to translate the Prayer into Italian, "for", (so runs the letter), "in many places several hundred persons are waiting and longing for The Heavenly Court. I myself have only one copy left of the little book, and this is ever passing from hand to hand, since all wish information and instruction on the subject." And thereto she adds the following fact, which does indeed inspire the heart and with great confidence in the Prayer of the Heavenly Court:

"There were two unmarried sisters who had lived together for forty years. To these, about two years ago, I showed the Devotion of the Heavenly Court, and gave them a copy of the book which I had brought with me from Germany. Thereupon they set to work in good earnest, and with faith and diligence went through the Prayer, perhaps even twice.

These two sisters have just died and this is the manner of their dying: The elder of the two fell ill on the very day on which she finished the Devotion of the Heavenly Court. On the fourth day of her illness the Lord Christ appeared to her, and with Him His Blessed Mother, and all the heavenly host. She saw Them all full clearly, and spoke of Them to those who were standing around the bed. Some among the heavenly company she recognized, and these she named. Most earnestly did she charge the bystanders to make use of the Devotion of the Heavenly Court, saying that the Wicked Enemy could not approach those who used it, with so great and special a power did the holy Guardian Angels defend them. Lastly, she turned to her sister, who was standing there as yet all cheerful and vigorous and spoke these words: "I beg of thee likewise to finish the holy Prayer, for then thou shall come with me." And the next day the sister ended the Prayer and fell ill and died just as had the elder; and the whole house was filled with a sweet and rare and costly perfume."

Thus ran the writing of the aforesaid noble lady, and her words are of a truth to be believed, for many similar instances are reported in other places from the use of this Devotion.

I myself was present at the deathbed of a devout virgin named Katharina Neidinger, daughter of a burgher-baker of Villingen, whose name was the first to be inscribed by me in my register of the Heavenly Court. While as yet there was no sign of her immediate death, she suddenly exclaimed in a clear voice: "O Joy of Joys! O Grace of Graces!" And in this very outburst of rejoicing did she unexpectedly render her soul to God. Other similar instances I pass over, for indeed those I have given are amply sufficient to show how pleasing is the Devotion of the Heavenly Court to Christ our Lord.

And, moved thereby, I reached the determination to take upon myself once more my former task, and to strive so to spread the Devotion that many might be led by it to the very Heavenly Court where God dwelleth, while by it also the punishments they had deserved might be averted. To this end I once more brought into the light of day what had so long lain hidden in darkness.

Let no one marvel that in this Devotion are naught but simple words and reflections, without subtle and hair-splitting considerations, probings, and praises. For this devotion sprang from God Himself, and He it is Who by His grace moves hearts to use it, because they could not otherwise perchance find so quick and sure an entry into His Kingdom.

And first I tried to obtain for the Devotion a Bull of Approval from the Holy Father, but the unhappy circumstances of the time did not permit this. Whereupon I turned for advice to His Grace the Nuncio Skoti, then Papal Nuncio for Switzerland.

And this was the answer he gave me: that a Devotion must in itself be good and profitable that honoured the Divine Saviour, and had for its end the contemplation of His most holy and bitter passion and death; there was no need, therefore, to give the matter over-anxious thought.

Some Remarks by Father Musaus addressed to all Christians who desire to use this most profitable Devotion.

Know, O Christian reader, that the following graces, which may be obtained through the Devotion of the Heavenly Court, are not granted in order that thou mayest build thereon presumptuously and sin more freely, but rather to the intent that thou mayest bestir thyself so to live as to be worthy of such great graces.

And in the first place, every Christian is bound to use the most necessary means of salvation provided by the Catholic Church, such as the holy Sacraments, without which no form of devotion is pleasing to the Holy Ghost. And therefore only after due reception of these is this prayer to be offered, that we may obtain richer gifts of grace, may contemplate the most holy life of Jesus, and likewise may avert the divine punishment we have so well deserved. And moreover, it will be best for us to leave the whole result of the prayer to the mercy of God. He will best know how to grant our prayer and will give to us, His children, what we most need at the right time.

Even were this Prayer not especially revealed, yet it could not be used without the greatest profit, nor without its being highly pleasing to God. For by it all the holy life and death of our dearest Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and each and every year of His earthly existence, are most particularly honoured and brought home to the heart. Now, in the opinion of all holy teachers, more especially of St. Bernard, the very least and shortest meditation on the life, sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, is incomparably greater than all other meditations and good works, whatsoever.

For in His most holy life, they say unanimously, all our salvation and all our blessedness is to be found.

Mayest thou too, O Christian soul, by devout meditation on the Prayer of the Heavenly Court, gain for thyself and others the grace of entrance to the eternal Court of Heaven, and also appease the just anger of God and turn it aside from poor humanity.

NOTE ON FATHER MUSAUS

Born in Pfullendorf on the 8th of August, 1599, this fair flower of the Minorite branch of the Franciscan Order entered that same Order at Villingen. He became Doctor of Theology at Prague, which honour was solemnly ratified by the General of the Order at Vienna. Already in 1628 we find the friar, at twenty-nine, a Provincial, and he filled this position for three years with distinction. He then went to Speyer as Prior, but was forced to flee by the Swedes, and returned to Villingen. There he took part in the three sieges of the town (1633-1634), and so influenced the inhabitants by his zeal, prayers, and personal example, that they defeated all the attempts of the enemy. In grateful recognition of his services, the town sent him in 1635 with two delegates to the Emperor Ferdinand II, at Vienna, in order to report on what had taken place. So pleased was the Emperor with the loyalty of his burghers of Villingen, and with the services of Father Johann Ludwig a Musis, that he exempted the town forever from the burden of having military quartered in it.

Father Johann Ludwig a Musis (usually called by his contemporaries "Father Musaus") went after his return from Vienna to Soleure, where he was Prior for many years, until on account of bodily infirmities contracted during his numerous journeys as Provincial, he resigned the office, and lived in retirement, giving himself up entirely to prayer, study, and writing. He died in the year 1662, and lies buried in the Choir at Soleure.

St. Lutgarde is prepared by many ecstasies for her high calling.

Many were the secrets, shown by God, during her ecstasies to the holy and enlightened virgin, Lutgarde.

He wished her to be, as it were, a channel, a trench, along which the stream of the divine graces might flow into the hearts of men. But Lutgarde, in her humility, held herself far too unworthy to be thus used as an instrument.

Over and over did God show to her the dangerous state of the sinful world, and the punishments with which He ceaselessly visits sin, seeking to lead men to mend their ways in time, and thus turn the divine anger into mercy and compassion.

In truth, the saint was given the selfsame mission as was entrusted to Bridget, that holy widow, to the most enlightened Tauler, to the Blessed Father Amandus Suso, and to many others, by whose mouths God likewise told the sinful world of impending chastisements and calamities.

Painful indeed to the saintly Mother were such visions of miseries to come, and in every possible way she strove with all her faculties to avert the divine anger, and to prevent the threatened punishments from falling on the heads of men with so great promptitude and violence.

And thus it fell out that on a day when St. Lutgarde was speaking with a sister in religion on heavenly and spiritual matters, and searching for fresh means to appease the wrath of God, they were both overcome with so intense a longing for the salvation and rescue of sinners, that for very pity their hearts did faint away, and they were consumed with hot and fiery love for God and their fellowmen.

Even as they spoke together quickly and eagerly, they were both overpowered by ecstasy, and in that state lay as dead during four whole days. But while their bodies lay thus, they themselves were led in spirit into the clear light of eternal joy, and they saw the whole heavenly host, and the Most Holy, Undivided Trinity, and heard four Voices sound forth unto the world, three of which issued from the Mouth of the Three Divine Persons, but the fourth from the mouth of the Blessed Virgin.

Of the Fourfold Voice in praise of the Prayer of the Heavenly Court (which St. Lutgarde heard in ecstasy)

During the four long unbroken days when the holy servant of God and her spiritual sister lay on the ground as though dead, they heard first of all, a Voice from the Divine Mouth of the Heavenly Father, and these were the words spoken: "I will send a Prayer into Christendom, a Prayer which shall be uttered in My honour, and of which I Myself

will be the Reward.”

From God the Son, our Redeemer and all our Blessedness, came likewise a Voice, and these were the words spoken: “I will specially guard the bodies and souls of all who seek to honour Me by this Prayer, and will shield them from every transgression and all shameful sins, and fill them to overflowing with My grace and comfort. With the streams of grace that flow from My innocent and bitter passion and death, and which avail for the forgiveness of every kind of sin, I will wash them clean from all their past misdeeds and adorn and enrich their souls with the beauty of goodness.”

Similarly, fiery words came from the Divine Mouth of the Holy Spirit, and the words were these: “I will kindle the fire of My Divine love in all who say this Prayer which I now send into the world, and in all for whom it is said.”

Last of all Lutgarde and the Sister saw a clear light shine out from the Queen of Heaven, the glorious Mother of God, and her lips opened, and they heard these words: “All those who use this Devotion and teach others to use it, will I plunge, by means of my intercession, into the unfathomable ocean of mercy of my most dear Son.”

Moreover, as to David long ago (Psalm 83), to both was given a slight foretaste of the sweet joy of Heaven, with an intimation that the high degree of happiness prepared for all who should use this new Prayer surpassed the utmost comprehension of angels and of men.

Of the further things which Lutgarde and the Sister saw in the Heavenly Court

The two devoted Sisters saw how the Heavenly Court was so exquisitely adorned and ordered with such beauty and regularity that their hearts were not able to grasp it nor their lips to express it.

They saw how the Most Holy Trinity lit up the whole of Heaven with an unutterably clear light; and how the noble Queen Mary, as Mother of the Eternal Wisdom, shone with a radiance incomparably more beautiful than does the hottest mid-day sun.

And this all high and holy Court resounds with the most entrancing music, and with the songs of the dear Angels.

There the holy patriarchs and prophets, who had foretold the coming of the Redeemer and longed after it with so great a longing, lifted up their voices in right merry gladness.

There the holy Apostles sit as Judges, because they forsook all on earth to follow Christ, their Lord and Master; and beside them sit the Evangelists, who did so faithfully transmit to us the teaching, life, and miracles of Christ, leaving behind them a record for all future generations of men.

There the glorious martyrs reign in triumph - they who yielded up their bodies to a thousand kinds of pain and martyrdom for love of Christ, and by the shedding of their blood deserved to win a heavenly crown.

There stand all glad and joyous the holy priests and confessors who witnessed to the Name of God openly and boldly; and by their side are all the holy virgins, who led down here a life austere and upright, chaste and mortified, silent and hidden.

And all these together encircle the vast hall of Heaven like a garland of beautiful red roses and glorious white lilies, filling it with the sweetest perfume, all the while they sing to the Most High God their ceaseless hymn of praise.

Last of all, St. Lutgarde and the Sister saw a great company that no man could number, who by the earnest pursuit of good works had laid hold of salvation, and through the conquest of self, the world, and Satan, had deserved to enter the Heavenly Court, and to enjoy its endless happiness in the company of the blessed.

Now it was revealed to our Saints that in one particular quarter of the Holy City reigned the greatest joy of all the Heavenly Court. Here existed, as it were, a very overflow of happiness, for here the all-sweet odor of Divine love and of every conceivable goodness and virtue, was united to the most soul-entrancing music of the great Song of Praise.

The least little gleam from this spot surpasses all the gleam of a hundred thousand earthly suns. So far indeed does it surpass them, that it was quite useless to try to describe it.

THE PRIVILEGES AND LIBERTIES OF THE HEAVENLY COURT

In Heaven many privileges and liberties are enjoyed, to wit:

1. Love without Suffering.
2. Eternal Life without Death.
3. Eternal Youth without Age.

4. Riches without Poverty.
5. Unfailing Health without Sickness.
6. Unspeakable Joy without Grief.
7. Everlasting Peace, and the Perpetual Grace of God.

The holy Mother Lutgarde in her ecstasy sees the Blessed in Heaven under the image of a spiritual Court
 Thereafter Lutgarde and the Sister saw how a Court was held in Heaven in honour of the Most Holy Trinity, the Eternal God and King.

For the Heavenly Father was shown to them surrounded by all the heavenly Spirits; but His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, was in the midst of a company of His dear Saints, who by their valiant lives had deserved to be chosen for His courtiers, and some to be His faithful counsellors.

The Holy Ghost appeared to the Sisters surrounded by those souls who on earth had burned with zeal for the Glory of God, and had been consumed with longing to extend His Kingdom.

Furthermore, they saw the Mother of God as Queen of Heaven reigning over all pure and virgin souls.

And the four-and-twenty Ancients sat there as clerks of the Court, the four Evangelists as chancellors and keepers of the archives, the holy Apostles as judges and privy councillors, and all the holy Angels as attendants and noble stewards.

The holy Mother Lutgarde sees how Mary, the Queen of Heaven, founds a Heavenly Court also on earth

Then (continues Father Musaus) the two devout Sisters saw how the Queen of Heaven held a Court, after the fashion of the great on earth. And they understood that the Court was held in praise of God, the Eternal King, and in honour of the Most Holy Trinity.

And at the same time they were shown what manner of men are to be admitted to the Holy Court of the glorious Queen of Heaven.

These men are indeed diverse:

Firstly, those who give themselves up to contemplating, imitating, and tenderly pitying the all-holy life and sufferings and death of our Saviour Christ, and who have a heartfelt and compassionate devotion to the sorrowful Mother of God, Mary of Many Sorrows.

Secondly, those who lead an exemplary and edifying life, detached from all the passions of earth, whose whole desire and longing, will and heart, are fixed upon Eternity alone.

Thirdly, those who are patient in adversity, and place all their trust and confidence and hope in God.

Fourthly, those who are peaceable, loving, humble of heart, despisers of their own selves.

Such as these are qualified to enter the Heavenly Court. These are they who in the world beyond the grave will merrily come to the Heavenly Court and there be crowned by God with a crown of honour.

And on St. Lutgarde the task fell (as once on St. John the Baptist) to serve her Lord by preparing a path. "It is not enough," said He to her, "that men should learn through thee the excellence of the reward of Heaven; thou must also point out the road which leads to their eternal possession."

St. Lutgarde, before she founds the Heavenly Court, must herself tread the Fourfold Way pointed out to her by God

As, according to the design of God, St. Lutgarde might not teach her fellowmen the four great qualifications for entrance to the Heavenly Court before she had herself obtained a complete mastery and understanding of them, it is no hard matter to divine the Ways along which God led her.

Great must have been His care to give her a most exact and thorough knowledge of these four Ways, and this He did partly by direct illumination and partly by means of His holy Saints, whom over and over He sent down to her poor cell.

With the first Way, indeed, Lutgarde was already so familiar that she lived in unbroken spiritual union with her Divine Redeemer and His most holy life and passion.

In truth, her heartfelt devotion to the life and sufferings of Christ must have quickly prepared her and spurred her on to enter the Second Way. With regard to this, her Heavenly Bridegroom taught her as follows: "Leave all that

perishes, and gather that which is eternal. Renounce all thou canst see, and strive after the things thou canst not see. Grieve not over the things of Time that pass away. I can make whom I will rich or poor. Place all thy hope in Me, then, O My bride!”

Upon a certain Easter Sunday, St. John the Baptist appeared to Lutgarde, and taught her the third Way, the way of Patience. “Sister,” began the holy Forerunner of Christ, “may the Lord be with thee and grant thee a happy Easter! Thou art now in grief and anxiety, but know that on this account a great reward awaits thee. Refresh thyself with this thought, that by tribulation thou shalt gain more merit than if thou wert to win the treasures of the whole world.”

The instruction on the fourth Way began thus. The Saint was made to understand that she should endeavor to accept with humility, gratitude, and holy simplicity, all the graces with which God was pleased to clothe her.

Said Our Lord to her: “A man is on his way to Me and coming to Me when he speaks thus: ‘I have nothing good in me; I can do nothing good without God; I am not deserving of any grace.’ When these are a man’s convictions, they bear him along so far on his way to Me, that with all haste I go forth to meet him.”

The relation of the Heavenly Court to the most holy life and sufferings of Jesus

One of the principal aims of the spiritual society of the Heavenly Court, as instituted by God, was to revive and deepen the devotion of the life and sufferings of Jesus.

And therefore no one was to be received into the society unless he were resolved to contemplate with love and reverence the mysteries of this most holy life and passion.

Jesus Christ is the Beginning, the Middle, and the End of all things. Writ plain on countless faces, St. Lutgarde had seen the bliss that comes to the dwellers in the Heavenly City from perpetually contemplating and reverencing the mysteries of Jesus Christ. She perceived that for the inhabitants of the Heavenly Court, Eternity itself is too short to glorify their Redeemer for all that is glorious in Himself and His mysteries. Lutgarde saw the whole of the Heavenly Jerusalem lighted up by the beauty of Jesus and of His mysteries.

It is not difficult to understand that after this she could not any longer view with indifference the contemptuous treatment meted out to these same mysteries on earth. Rather was the wish of the Saint quite natural, that on earth too should some be found to imitate the dwellers in the Heavenly Court - some who, by banding themselves together for the more zealous honouring of the mysteries of Jesus Christ, should achieve here below a faithful copy of the Heavenly Court above.

Moreover, Lutgarde realized the deep import to those who would lead a good life, of a greater devotion to the mysteries of their Lord, and in this she found herself at one with all those of her day who had the true welfare of mankind at heart. For all with one accord teach: “There is no knowledge half so momentous as the knowledge of Jesus Christ and of His mysteries, nothing which is of more immediate and lasting practical use to men; nor is there anything that can so deeply interest them (in so far as they retain any interest at all in spiritual things) as a devotion to the most holy life and passion of Jesus.”

The complaints which the Saint heard, and that repeatedly, from the lips of her Heavenly Bridegroom on this subject, leave no doubt as to the sad truth. From these, and from many another testimony left us by history as to the circumstances of the time, we can conclude to what an extent the mysteries of Jesus Christ had vanished from the memories and hearts of a great part of Christendom. Numbers were living as though there had never been a Redeemer, or as though they would gladly push Him quietly to one side.

Lutgarde’s courage, then, was confronted by a hard condition of things, so hard that it had been well-nigh desperate, but for the grace of God. The hardness constituted in that ignorance of which the Blessed Balthasar Alvarez used to say: “Of all the different kinds of ignorance which reign in the world the most fatal is that which neither knows the Person of Jesus Christ, nor the treasures which we possess in Him.”

Against this ignorance, St. Lutgarde was ordered to wage a lifelong fight, by the side of St. Francis, St. Dominic and many another; and marvellous it is with what unresting energy the Saint fulfilled her task, and with what skill she succeeded in bringing back into the lives of men a devotion to the most holy mysteries of Jesus. One of her principal means was the foundation (inspired, as aforesaid, by God) of the Heavenly Court. Was there ever indeed, an earthly object of importance that did not call into existence some society or association? Why, then, should not the mysteries

of the life and passion of Jesus do the same? To this end St. Lutgarde founded her society; and the more its members make a heartfelt, interior devotion to the mysteries of Jesus Christ the main purpose of their lives, so much the more perfectly do they enter into the aims and ideas of the Saint.

THE PRAYER OF THE HEAVENLY COURT

One day, as St. Lutgarde earnestly besought God that He would show the Way of Prayer that pleased Him best of all, a very beautiful Prayer was infused into her, which comprised in itself the whole of the life and sufferings of Christ. And forthwith her memory retained it' so accurately that she repeated it every day with the greatest devotion. The Blessed Virgin told Lutgarde that she herself had begged the grace of this Prayer for her.

The Prayer, as recorded by Father Musaus, runs thus:

O, all-holy and all-merciful Redeemer, Source of all graces, and our most kind Jesus! Out of incomprehensible love for us poor children of Eve, has Thou left Thy seat on the right hand of Thy Heavenly Father, and willed to clothe Thyself with our helplessness and poverty.

Nay, the more surely to win us to love Thee in return, Thou hast made Thyself helpless and poor beyond us all. No possible trouble, no possible toil, has Thou spared Thyself in order to save us from the wicked enemy, and make us the children of Thy Father in Heaven.

Bitterly do I grieve that up till now, I, a valueless and wretched worm of earth, have so little understood the excess of Thy Love, and have given Thee such poor thanks for all the hardships, pains and martyrdom Thou has borne for me.

And therefore do I now offer up to Thee this my unworthy prayer, in honour of Thy most holy life and sufferings and death, and of every year and day and hour Thou didst spend on earth for the salvation of lost and sinful men.

And I offer Thee too, from the inmost depths of my heart, all the myriad acts of praise and love and gratitude of the nine Choirs of holy Angels, and indeed of all creatures from the first moment of their creation until now, and all the acts made by the Most Blessed Virgin Mary with the greatest possible love and devotion since her Immaculate Conception to this very day, together with those she will not cease to make through all the instants of Eternity.

And I offer Thee these acts that I may thank Thee perfectly for all Thou hast done for me:

- 1. For Thy choice from all Eternity of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary to be the Mother of God;*
- 2. For her Immaculate Conception, and her preservation from every spot of original sin, in which all other mortals are conceived and born;*
- 3. For the most pure nativity of Thy Immaculate Mother, which shed alight over the whole world and caused joy in Heaven.*
- 4. For Thine own wonderful Conception by the power of the Holy Ghost in the virgin womb of Thy chosen Mother which was announced by the Archangel Gabriel;*
- 5. For the first journey Thou didst take, hidden in the most pure womb of Thy Holy Mother, a journey over the hills to Thy cousin Elizabeth and her child John-John who., even as Thou didst, then lay hidden;*
- 6. For Thy holy Nativity, when Thou didst come into the world in the greatest poverty and wast born in a stable amid senseless beasts, without even a pillow on which to lay Thy Sacred Head, or clothes wherewith to warm and protect Thy tender limbs;*
- 7. For the great honour Thou didst vouchsafe to receive from the Adoration of the Three Wise Men and from their costly symbolic gifts —gold and frankincense, and myrrh;*
- 8. For Thy first blood-shedding at the Circumcision, which Thou didst suffer for our sakes and out of humble obedience to the Law of Moses;*
- 9. For Thy most holy Presentation in the Temple at Jerusalem by Thy Blessed Mother, in accordance with the Law of Moses;*
- 10. For the bitter persecution which began even with Thy tenderest years, and which drove Thee into the godless land of Egypt and kept Thee there for a long space of time;*
- 11. For Thy most dear Mother's anxious search for Thee, and then her joyful finding of Thee amid the doctors in the Temple, after She had sought Thee for three days with bitter grief and pain;*

12. For the submission Thou didst show to Mary and Joseph at Nazareth rendering them all manner of humble, filial services;

13. For all Thy teaching and preaching, for Thy hard and dangerous journeys, and especially for all the fatigue and toil Thou didst undergo for our salvation;

14. For Thy most holy fast of forty days, and Thy constant, fervent prayers in the desert;

15. For Thy great and glorious miracles, worked to convince the stubborn Jews;

16. For Thine agonized prayer and bloody sweat in the Garden of Gethsemane, when shuddering and sorrowful unto death, Thou wert yet perfectly resigned to Thy Father's Will;

17. For the false kiss with which the faithless Judas betrayed Thee and delivered Thee into the hands of wicked men;

18. For the painful bands and cruel cords of Thine infamous captors, and for their grievous dragging and pulling of Thee over stones and through water and briars;

19. For the many false accusations devised and brought against Thy most holy Person before Annas and Caiaphas, Pilate and Herod;

20. For the most painful treatment meted out to Thee when Thou wast ignominiously drawn from one unjust Judge to another;

21. For the hard and worse than blasphemous blow Thou didst receive on Thy most Holy Face from a servant of the High Priest;

22. For the copious and most painful blood-shedding when every part of Thy most holy Body was torn by the rods and scourges of the executioners;

23. For Thy nakedness, and the bitter shame Thou didst experience when most of Thy garments were torn from Thee and Thou wert thus bound to the pillar before all the crowd;

24. For the jeering, scoffing, and mock genuflections by which godless Jews ridiculed Thee to Thy holy Face;

25. For the sharp pressure on Thy sacred Head of the crown of thorns, which caused Thy Precious Blood to flow down over Thy Face;

26. For Thy piteous appearance before Pilate, who by his exclamation *BEHOLD THE MAN* tried to move the people to compassion;

27. For the sentence pronounced on Thee by Pilate, for the manner in which Thou wast led forth to die, and for the heavy weight of the Cross;

28. For Thy dolorous meeting with Thy sorrow-stricken Mother and the other holy women who had followed Thee on the Path to Calvary and shed tears of pity over Thee;

29. For the painful removal of most of Thy clothing to the renewal of Thy wounds, and for the merciless nailing to the wood of the Cross, as also for all the priceless words spoken on the Cross, and the final surrender of Thy Spirit;

30. For Thy glorious Resurrection on the third day after Thy sufferings, when Thou didst appear to Thy Mother, Thy Disciples and Apostles, and after that to many others;

31. For Thy wonderful Ascension into Heaven and glorious return to Thy Heavenly Father, when Thine earthly pilgrimage was ended and Thou hadst triumphed victoriously over the world and Satan;

32. For the wonderful fiery Descent of the Holy Ghost on Thy Disciples and Apostles and Thy most beloved Mother on the holy Day of Pentecost.

33. For the lordly triumph Thou didst celebrate when Thou didst assume Thy beloved Mother, body and soul, into Heaven;

34. For Thy festival of joy, in which were associated the Father and the Holy Ghost, at the exaltation of Thy most glorious Mother over all the Choirs of Angels, and at her Coronation as the Queen of Heaven;

For all these, and more especially for every beat of Thy Heart and every act of love, for all Thy thoughts and desires, for all the silent and the uttered prayers which Thou didst offer while on earth, and still dost offer in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar - for all these I tender Thee a thousand thanks, and ask Thee most humbly that Thou wouldst grant to me and to all who have commended themselves to my prayers, or for whom I ought to pray, perfect contrition for our sins and a firm determination never again to offend Thy Divine Majesty, together with the grace of

final perseverance. Grant that I and all men may enjoy Thy grace here, and after this toilsome life is over may be received into the company of Thine elect, and be united with them to the Source of Eternal Joy - which is none but Thou Thyself, O dearest Lord. And may we be permitted to gaze at last on Thy most holy Face, Who with the Father and the Holy Ghost livest and reignest, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Of the manner of praying the Prayer of the Heavenly Court

St. Lutgarde used to exhort those whom she instructed as to the aforesaid God-revealed Prayer, to say a thousand Paters and as many Ave Marias, and Glorias, in honour of each of the thirty-four mysteries, and this too she doubtless had from God. But because the Prayer thus said might easily degenerate into an empty, mechanical repetition, the Saint advised that with every thousand Paters, Aves and Glorias, a short meditation be made on one of the thirty-four mysteries into which she had divided the whole of the life and sufferings of our Lord: and she wished these mysteries to be contemplated in the selfsame order in which she had arranged them. (While your lips pronounce the words of the prayers, let your mind picture the Mystery.)

This contemplation of the mysteries of Jesus was repeatedly enjoined on the Saint in her intercourse with Heaven as being the very soul of the Prayer of the Heavenly Court. "If a man would take the direct path to my treasure-room," said the Lord to her once, "let him exercise himself in meditating on My life and My love, and give up his own will. If a man would but consider what I have done for him and all I have given him, never again would he so rouse My anger."

The Blessed Virgin revealed to our Saint that what she desired before all else in this Devotion was that men should contemplate therein the mysteries of her Son. And with these words did she begin her discourse: "Daughter, put on thy clothes, and fasten on thy collar—that is, the passion of my Son."

"Do thou fasten it on for me," begged Lutgarde.

"That will I do," replied the Mother of God, "and I will tell thee of the sufferings wherewith my Son was clothed:"

And forthwith Mary began to relate to the Saint all the mysteries of the life and passion of her Son in the very same order which Lutgarde, remembering her words, afterwards adopted, and at the end of each she added: "Contemplate this mystery, O my daughter, and keep it ever before thine eyes." The Saint was also shown a soul who by meditating on the mysteries of Jesus Christ had been fired with a little spark of the Divine love, and had thereby attained to eternal happiness.

It followed as a matter of course that Lutgarde should before all things demand an inner, spiritual activity, before the Prayer revealed to her in honour of the mysteries of Christ could find favour with God. This spiritual activity on the part of those who said it, was to find its outlet in considerations and loving contemplations. And in this way the outward form and construction of the Prayer could by no means be called superfluous or insignificant. Again and again had the Saint heard various oral prayers offered aloud and in common by members of the Society of the Heavenly Court, such as the Te Deum, Pange Lingua, Glory be to the Father, with many another; she could not possibly, therefore, have attributed a purely subordinate importance to the oral prayers or outward form of the Devotion revealed to her.

Moreover, the Saint permitted an alteration to those who used the Devotion more frequently. Instead of the continued repetition of each thousand Our Fathers, they might either assist at a Holy Mass, or give an alms, or follow the Way of the Cross, or say the Psalter, or make a Novena; and in this wise, thirty-four Masses, gifts of alms, days of fasting, Ways of the Cross, Psalters, Novenas, and so forth, made with heartfelt devotion, would serve to merit the favors attached to the Prayer of the Heavenly Court.

Some wonders narrated by St. Lutgarde and others of the Prayer of the Heavenly Court

Once the holy Mother Lutgarde saw our dear Lord Jesus Christ in a vision after the following manner: He hung on a Cross, and fresh Blood was streaming from all His Sacred Wounds. And men were turning towards this stream of the Precious Blood, in such fashion that some received That Which flowed from the Heart, and others again That Which flowed from the Feet of the Saviour. By means of this picture God taught the Saint that through the Prayer of the Heavenly Court many men should be saved and brought to eternal blessedness.

But a number of men despised these rivers of grace and turned away from them, and these the holy Mother saw hurled with ignominy into a deep abyss.

A nun of the Order founded by St. Francis, presumably attached to the Convent of Wittichen, had grave doubts of the Prayer of the Heavenly Court and of its efficacy, and she besought God to enlighten her on the matter and to remove the temptation. And in truth her doubts were soon resolved by a secret and Divine communication, which she did indeed keep hidden, but which had the result that she afterwards took every opportunity of seeking out persons who would follow in common with her the Devotion of the Heavenly Court. She even made an occasion of speaking of this Prayer, so rich in graces, to the Abbess of a neighboring Convent, who, however, gave but little credence to her words. "In good sooth" (so ran her answer), "we have a number of more beautiful and more spiritual prayers in our Convent, and, my daughters can make use of these at choice; nor have we any time to devote to so long and troublesome a Prayer."

But during the ensuing night, the Holy Mother of God appeared to the Abbess, reproved her for those words, and herself instructed her as to the great power of this Prayer.

The result was that not only did the Abbess and all her daughters make use of the Prayer from that day forth, but they did all that in them lay to induce others to do the same.

The Prayer of the Heavenly Court has extraordinary power and efficacy

Quite remarkable are the words in which our Lord revealed to His servant Lutgarde the merit and power of the Devotion of the Heavenly Court, and the exceeding great pleasure which He Himself took in it.

"Whosoever," said He to her, "shall piously and devoutly recite this Prayer, to him will I in My great mercy give thirty-four human souls; that is to say, for his sake I will rescue from everlasting death, thirty-four human souls who had otherwise died in sin.

"For his sake too, I will release thirty-four souls from Purgatory. But as for the man himself who had made this Prayer, his reward shall be multiplied as the grass of the field, whose blades no one can number.

"And even should such a man have always acted in times past against My Will, yet as soon as ever he begins this Prayer with grief and contrition for his sins, and a firm purpose of amendment, I will forgive all his iniquities; nor will I ever remember his misdeeds in Eternity, but will utterly remit and forget them.

"And if such a man, during the course of this Prayer, should be called to depart from this transitory life, then will I come with My Angels to accompany him on his last journey, and to the sound of celestial music will conduct his soul to the threshold of Eternity, where I Myself dwell, and where he shall rejoice for ever in the company of My Mother, the constant Advocate of Sinners, and of all My Saints."

THE PRAYER OF THE HEAVENLY COURT IS REVEALED TO OTHERS ALSO

It fell out that certain pious persons had banded themselves together for the serving of God with zeal. They cherished a heartfelt devotion to the Crucified Jesus, strove to follow His footsteps, and were indeed not only filled with care for their own salvation, but also with deep concern for the souls of their fellowmen. On this account, they sought by all manner of good deeds, and by humble and persevering prayer, to appease the anger of God aroused by the sins of the world, and to restore to all poor sinners the grace which they had lost.

Untiringly, they begged the Queen of Heaven to show them a means by which her beloved Son might be appeased, and the punishments so well deserved averted from men. And presently the Mother of Mercy heard their fervent, loving request, and obtained from her Son that one of that pious company should seem for a time to all appearance dead, though in reality she was rapt in ecstasy.

When she was come once more to herself, she sought out her companions and told them as follows: "Great is the wrath of God against all misdeeds and transgressions of men, and right severely does He intend to punish the world. God has shown me the pains and torments reserved for those who without confession or repentance sin on until their life's end and die impenitent. And so great are these pains and torments that it were little wonder if they caused the hard rock itself to split in pieces and to sweat blood.

"But it was also given to me to see the joy of those who depart from this life in true penitence. So great is their joy

that no Angel nor man can possibly understand it. And I have likewise seen how the Mother of Mercy never ceases to intercede with her Son for all mankind, and how once again her prayer is even now about to be granted.

“For last of all God spoke to me: ‘Thou shalt go back into thy body out of which I have called thee, and this shalt thou tell to men: That in My praise, in honour of My all-holy life and sufferings and death, and in grateful remembrance of all the insults, shame and scorn I bore from sinners—in honour of all this, they are to say thirty-four thousand Our Fathers, and as many Hail Marys, and Glory be to the Fathers. They may, however, instead of each thousand Our Fathers, etc., say or cause to be said a Holy Mass, or give an alms according to their means, or fast for a day with contrite devotion’.”

HOW THE HOLY EXERCISE ALREADY SO OFTEN REVEALED IS ANNOUNCED TO YET ANOTHER RELIGIOUS

From the time that God thus revealed the Devotion to one of the holiest of its members, the Prayer of the Heavenly Court was generally adopted by the aforesaid devout Society. Now there chanced to be in its number a certain nun of eighteen years standing, who served the Lord in all fervour. After she had for a long time known the Prayer of the Heavenly Court, and had used it with the greatest devotion, she also (as St. Lutgarde before Her) was favored with a revelation from God and was commanded to teach and explain the Prayer to others.

Accordingly, she addressed herself to a good friend and faithful, and besought him, since she herself was now very aged and severed from the world by her vows, to take upon himself the furtherance and propagation of the Prayer of the Heavenly Court. He promised her to do so, yet forgot, as it seems, to fulfill his undertaking, or was indeed little reminded to trouble himself about the new Devotion, which seemed to him overly difficult.

But one day, when he was assisting at an early Mass, all his strength suddenly left him, so that those around deemed him dead. In this state he remained until the hour of Vespers; but meanwhile, being of a truth in ecstasy and all astounded, the Prayer of the Heavenly Court was shown to him by God after this manner. It seemed to him that he saw an Altar, sparkling as it were with beautiful dark red gems, and at the Altar stood a Priest. A great company of people, some of whom were clad like Kings and Potentates and victorious Knights, others like Bishops, but very many like ordinary lay persons drew near to the Priest, who, standing at the Altar, gave his blessing to each division, and each, as it advanced, was greater than the preceding one.

The “good friend and faithful” of the holy nun was astonished beyond measure at this unexpected sight; but, at the bidding of God, his Guardian Angel thus explained the vision to him: “The Altar thou didst see is the Most Sacred Heart of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Which is ceaselessly filled with deepest longing and unquenchable thirst for the salvation of souls. From out this Most Pure Heart sprang the prayer which men call the Prayer of the Heavenly Court.

“The Priest Who stands at the Altar represents the Eternal and Divine Being Who blesses mankind. And they who draw near to the Altar signify those who use the Prayer. Among those are some who have gone through the Prayer once, others who have gone through it twice, others again who have gone through it many times. Therefore did these last bear themselves as Kings and Princes and the Mighty of the earth; those who have prayed it once as victorious Knights; while those who wear the guise of ordinary lay people, signify all who did indeed begin the Prayer of the Heavenly Court, but never reached the end.

“Those clad as Bishops are such as have applied themselves to spread the Devotion of the Heavenly Court, and to instruct others therein.”

Now, when the person to whom this befell came out of this ecstasy towards the hour of Vespers, he related all that he had seen and heard, adding: “The Prayer which the Lord God deigns to reward in such diverse ways is called in God the Father, ‘A Flowery Paradise’; In God the Son, ‘A Crown of Chivalry’; and in God the Holy Ghost, ‘A Benign and Ever-Open Place of Refuge and Consolation’.”

And henceforth this same man, once so full of ill-will and vexation concerning the Prayer of the Heavenly Court, busied himself in explaining to all, as far as lay in his power, the right manner in which to say it, and the glorious profit to be drawn from its use.

How by means of this Prayer a women frees her mother from Purgatory

Among many others to whom God disclosed the Prayer of the Heavenly Court, a certain woman who had undertaken it on behalf of her own mother, did most particularly experience its holy and wonderful power.

For after she had finished the Prayer, she saw in spirit her dead mother in the midst of a great company of people, walking in a fair and spacious meadow wherein grew all manner of beautiful and fragrant flowers. And when she accosted her mother, she got this answer: "Speak to her who walks last of all in the company." The daughter therefore, let all the happy crowd pass by, until she perceived at the rear of the procession a marvelously beautiful Queen, who shone with greater brilliance than the sun.

"O most wonderful and beautiful Queen!" cried the woman, with deepest humility, "let it not anger thee, I meekly pray, if I beg thee to tell me what people these may be whose footsteps cause no hurt at all to flowers or grass."

And the Queen of Heaven made answer: "These are they who have been saved by the Prayer of the Heavenly Court, and I conduct them myself into the Land of Eternal Life where their joy shall never end."

"And, along with this vast company, I will come to the deathbed of every soul who has said this Prayer, or for whom another has said it. All such souls will I protect from evil spirits in their last hour, and will lead them to my dearest Son in the Land of Eternal Bliss, and He Himself will be their Everlasting Reward."

To this, the Reverend Father Musaus adds: "O, if only men would prize as they deserve to be prized the merits of this Prayer and the joys which flow from it! Then, indeed, would they hold it in right high honour, nor would they so easily let slide many a time an opportunity of using it."

The main purpose of this devotion then is to make Christ live in the lives of men. By contemplating the 34 Mysteries over and over again, the Life of Christ becomes a Reality, the main focus-point and a pattern for our lives. For subject matter on the 34 Mysteries, use the Sacred Scriptures, especially the Gospels, "Way of Divine Love," "Divine Mysteries of the Most Holy Rosary," "The Path to Glory," etc.

THE HEAVENLY COURT

In giving this prayer to St. Lutgarde in 1246 Jesus said, "Whosoever shall piously and devoutly recite this Prayer, to him will I in My great mercy give 34 human souls; rescue from everlasting death 34 human souls who would otherwise die in sin . . . For his sake too, I will release 34 souls from Purgatory. As for the man himself who had made this prayer, his reward shall be multiplied as the grass of the field whose blades no one can number."

Dividing His life and suffering into 34 Mysteries Our Lord requested that we say 1000 Our Fathers, Hail Marys and Glory be's for each Mystery and for the most spiritual merit picture in our mind the Mystery as we say the prayers. No time limit was set but our intention must be to complete it in our lifetime.
