

Bertha Baumann, "The Little Guardian Angel of Priests' Saturday."

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"(...) This dear child was born on the feast of the holy Name of Jesus, January 2, 1922. At baptism she was given the name "Bertha," which means "the radiant one," but everybody called her Bertl. When Bertl was still a baby her mother noticed with anxiety that her spine was slightly crooked. She took her to the doctor. The doctor tried to stretch Bertl's crooked little legs and spine by fastening her legs to a board and placing a twenty-pound bag of sand on her knees. This was very painful and caused poor little Bertl much suffering, but she bore it patiently. The doctor kept this up for a whole year, but it did not help the poor child. When Bertha was four years old her mother took her to a clinic. Her legs were put in splints, and though most children cry and fight against the doctor when this is done, Bertl remained quiet and patient, so that the doctor and all the Sisters were greatly astonished. Once when her mother visited her, there were tears in Bertl's eyes. She begged her mother to take off the bandage. When her mother did so, she found that the splints were pressing deep into the flesh. But Bertha had never complained. Finally her mother took her home without being cured, but it was not for long; Bertha's mother had to be away from home most of the day because she had to work in order to support herself and her little girl. So since Bertl could not go out to play with the other children, she was alone most of the time. She would spend the long hours happily, thinking and praying. Already at the age of two, she knew many prayers and pious verses which her mother had taught her. She was always careful to say them well, because, as she said, "Only if one takes pains to do it well can it give joy to the good God." She was always very reverent in mind and body when she prayed, even when no one saw her, for she knew that the good God always had His eyes upon her.

Bertl loved to have her mother read to her. She especially liked to hear the lives of the saints. It made her very happy too when her mother would bring her a holy picture. She was always very grateful for everything that others did for her. Sometimes bad children made fun of poor little Bertl. They called her "a crooked little witch." This hurt Bertl very much, but she said to her mother: "Mother, I can do more for God this way. I have more time for God than if I were well." It was always a happy event for Bertl when her mother took her to the church. She would sit there very quietly and pray for a long time. She was only sorry to leave the good God. But she knew that she had God in her heart all the time.

When Bertl was seven years old, her mother decided to place her in a Home for crippled children, so she could go to school and learn some kind of work which would help her to earn her living when she grew older and no longer had her mother to take care of her. It was a great sacrifice for Bertl to leave her dear mother, but she was always cheerful and happy, and soon felt quite at home among her companions. Bertl had a wheel chair in which to go about. She had to sit in it all day. She now also wore a steel brace to support her spine. This was a hard penance, especially on hot summer days, but it was the only way that she could sit up, and she did not complain about the suffering it caused her. She offered it all to Jesus for souls.

Poor Bertl was so, helpless that she had to be dressed and fed. Eating was an act of mortification for her, for she did not have a good appetite. But after she had been at the Home for some time she learned how to help herself a little. How glad she was to be able for a time to put on her own stockings and to raise a spoon to her mouth with her weak little hands; Bertl and the other children had classes in the Home. Their school was quite different from ordinary schools. All the children were crippled. Some went to the classes in wheel chairs, or carriages, or on crutches, so there was always a commotion when the bell rang. Bertl, of course, went in her wheel chair. She was diligent and very attentive at school. She showed herself very grateful and respectful towards her teachers. In spite of her pains, Bertl was so gay and happy that she was like a ray of sunshine warming and cheering others. She liked to sing the

many songs she learned in school. In her spare time she liked very much to read. At first she read fairy tales and stories, but later she cared only for the lives of saints and saintly children.

On the feast of Christ the King, in 1930, Bertl began instructions for her first confession. She was then nine years old. When the day came at Christmas time, she was not afraid. The priest had told the children that to be sincere and truthful were the main things in telling their sins. On the feast of the Epiphany, January 6, 1931, the priest gave the children a sermon which touched Bertl very much. It was on the sufferings and poverty of the poor heathen children, whose lot was even harder than that of crippled children. He told them that they could help these heathen children by filling the hands of God with their little sacrifices and sufferings, offered up with love and patience for them. In this way they could be little missionaries. After that Bertl prayed much for the missions. She also made many sacrifices and offered up her sufferings for them.

During this time Bertl was preparing herself for her First Holy Communion, which was to take place on Easter Monday. How happy she was to receive Jesus into her heart on that great day! Her eyes shone with a heavenly light. Her heart was filled with grateful love as she made her long and fervent thanksgiving. In the evening she told the maid who helped her undress that it had been the happiest day of her life. She made a resolution to remain "Always like today," and she kept it faithfully, as her later life showed.

Bertl was often ill. Once when she was very sick it was feared she would die. She was not afraid to die, for her life had been pure and good. She edified all who saw her by her patience in her sufferings. She would spend the whole time praying. But Bertl did not die. The children prayed hard for her and she recovered.

Christmas 1935 came, and among Bertl's gifts was an almanac. She enjoyed the good reading in it. Near the end she found a puzzle for which a prize was offered. Bertl tried to solve it. She sent her answer to the editor with a little letter she had written. Before a reply came she was again very sick. Then one day a beautiful long letter arrived. It suggested that she would perhaps be glad to offer up her sufferings for the sanctification of priests. Enclosed with the letter was a folder about Priests' Saturday. It explained about offering up Holy Mass, Holy Communion, prayers, works, and sufferings on the First Saturday of the month for this intention. How thrilled Bertl was with the idea! She felt at once that this was her mission in life: to suffer and pray for priests! She counted the days until the First Saturday. It was then January 24, 1935. The First Saturday would be on February 2: just nine days away. Bertl decided to make a novena. Every day she would offer her sufferings and good works for priests. Many times a day she prayed: "O Lord, accept all I have for priests. Bertl wishes to give the last she has for priests. Yes, O Lord, accept my life for priests." No one thought otherwise than that she would soon be able to attend her classes again, as she had only an attack of grippe. But Bertl felt sure that God would hear her prayer and accept her life for priests. She felt that she would soon go to heaven.

When the First Saturday came, Bertl had grown worse. Sometimes she could not retain food, so she could not receive Holy Communion. She felt this very keenly, but she made a spiritual communion instead and offered up her deprivation as a sacrifice. Bertl's fever rose alarmingly. She had a heart attack. Late in the afternoon it was decided to call the priest to administer Holy Viaticum and Extreme Unction. Bertl could hardly wait for the moment when her Savior would come to her. She looked like a little angel in her white bed.

Everyone who saw her was deeply moved by her devotion. After receiving Holy Viaticum, Bertl lived only two hours longer. She lay on her bed peacefully praying. The Sisters saw that she was growing weaker and weaker, and could not last much longer. Suddenly she opened her eyes, raised up, and

exclaimed: “O Sister Superior, look, many, many...” but she fell back upon her pillow without finishing the sentence. Her soul had taken its flight to heaven to be forever with God. She had given her life as a sacrifice for priests on her first Priests’ Saturday.

What had Bertl seen? Angels? or children? We do not know. Perhaps it was the many priests and missionaries who would be helped by her sacrifice. And so it was that Bertha Baumann came to be called the Guardian Angel of Priests’ Saturday. May her beautiful life inspire each of our dear Little Lovers to imitate her zeal in praying for priests. If you are faithful to Priests’ Saturday, you too can be a little missionary like Bertl, and in heaven one of your greatest joys will be to have helped priests to become holy and to save souls by your prayers and sacrifices.

Practice: In reparation for sins profaning the Holy Name of Jesus, make a practice of repeating this Holy Name very frequently with reverence and devotion.”

Spirit & Life 1947-01: Vol 42 Iss 9 Benedictine Publications Center