The Franciscan Sisters of Christ the King

1409 E. Meyer Blvd. Kansas City, MO 64131
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It all began with the American dream. The government of the state of Wisconsin sent pamphlets to Belgium offering large tracts of land for homesteading. One of these pamphlets fell into the hands of a man in a small town of the area of Champion, Belgium. He convinced many of his friends and relatives to join him in becoming the first wave of Wisconsin-bound Belgian settlers who crossed the Atlantic searching to free themselves from the conditions in which they lived. These settlers endured many hardships in the beginning, but they wrote home about their experiences and inspired another wave of settlers. More letters came home, and Lambert Brise made the decision to move his family with the third wave of settlers.

Mr. Brise did not know that his daughter, Adele, had promised the Blessed Virgin Mary that she would dedicate her life to the service of God in Belgium. She and a number of her friends had planned to enter a nearby religious order together. When Adele tearfully related her father's plans to her pastor, he advised her to obey her father and go to America. Adele did just that and her family made the journey to their new home.

Adele and her family lived the pioneer life in the town then known as Robinsonville, Wisconsin. She carried sacks of wheat grains on her head to the only mill in the area, trudging a good distance along Indian trails through the forest. Determined to continue to live her Faith, Adele walked the 22-mile round trip each Sunday to hear Mass at the closest Catholic Church in this Mission territory. Our Lady would not be outdone in generosity. Since Adele could not live out her promise in Belgium, Our Lady arranged for her to live it out in America.

On one of her trips to the mill, Adele saw a cloud appear and a beautiful Lady hovering between a maple tree and a hemlock. At first, the Lady said nothing. She appeared a second time, and Adele sought advice from her pastor, as her family thought that perhaps a soul from purgatory needed prayers. Her pastor instructed her to ask the Lady who she was and what she wanted. At the third apparition, Our Lady, dressed in a white tunic with a yellow sash and blond tresses flowing from under her veil, spoke to Adele, encouraging her to do penance and pray for sinners. She then expressed her wishes for Adele's future:

"Gather the Children in this wild country and teach them what they should know for salvation."

Adele responded: "But how shall I teach them who know so little myself?"

"Teach them their catechism, how to sign themselves with the sign of the Cross, and how to approach the sacraments; that is what I wish you to do. Go and fear nothing, I will help you."

Adele went and feared nothing. She walked miles around the wild country and offered her services to do chores, asking in return not money, but the privilege of teaching the children of the household their catechism. The parents often joined in the lesson, and soon many Catholics began to return to the practice of their Faith that they had neglected in the wild country.

Adele's father, who believed in his daughter's vision from the beginning, built a small shrine at the site. Eventually, Adele's priest encouraged her to open a school to bring all of her catechumens to one location, and she did so next to the shrine. The bishop of the mission territory also approved of the school. A few other young ladies joined her, and they lived the life of Franciscan seculars. Adele, who could not read or write, ran a successful school that eventually earned the accolades of local authorities. As often happens with such an endeavor, jealousies and misunderstandings arose, and Adele suffered through these trials, which caused her great pain.

Twelve years after she started her missionary work, on the same day as the Chicago fire that gained top press, the largely unknown but disastrous series of fires in Wisconsin began to spread. Known today as the Peshtigo fire, it started after a long drought and is considered the country's greatest natural disaster. Area residents poured onto the shrine grounds, bringing their livestock. As the intense blaze grew closer, surrounding them on all sides, Adele led the faithful in a rosary procession on their knees. Suddenly, a great downpour fell from the sky. In the morning, they could see the charred, smoldering ruins of the land all around them. The outside of the fence of the shrine had burned, but the shrine grounds remained lush and green. To this day, on the anniversary date of the fire, the descendants of those who prayed with Sr. Adele participate in an all-night rosary procession on the shrine grounds.

The simple message of Our Lady and Adele's fidelity to her calling as a Sister speaks to our times. It was not hard for God to reward Adele for her obedience to her confessor by creating a community for her here in the United States. It was not hard for God to work around seemingly impossible circumstances (Adele was also once threatened with excommunication.) It is not hard for God to give us the grace to follow her example in our own lives, whatever form that may take. Let us go and fear nothing. Adele Brise, pray for us!

Welcome to our new postulant, Isabella Cook, who comes from Montana. She started her postulancy on February 2nd.

We would like to announce that we have finally taken the necessary steps to change our name officially to Franciscan Sisters of Christ the King. We will still maintain a DBA of Franciscan Sisters of Oregon for those who may have left us in their wills under that name. Our EIN and tax exempt information remains the same. We will no longer maintain an Oregon address.

Historians and Fire Safety Engineers have studied Father Peter Pernin's chilling account of the Peshtigo Fire of 1871 from excerpts of his book, *The Finger of God is There*. The gases from burning trees and houses ignited, causing what is now known as flashover (see photo, right,) so that the sky itself appeared to burn. Flames hissed up from underground, and trees appeared to spontaneously combust. Father described how he and the other townspeople, hardly able to breathe due to the lack of oxygen, splashed water on themselves all night in the river in order to survive. Our Lord allowed the fire to spread, he believed, as a wake-up call to those who lived as if there were no God.

Unable to open the tabernacle door, Father had picked up his entire tabernacle and had taken it to the river in order to save the Blessed Sacrament. After having set the tabernacle into the water, he quickly lost sight of it. A man found it on the bank the next day, upright, the inside dry, and the ciborium undisturbed. Father also travelled to Robinsonville (now Champion) and saw the results of that fire, as well as the untouched green grass at the shrine where Sr. Adele and the faithful prayed for help. Father Pernin later served as the first Vicar General of the diocese of Winona, MN, before taking his final post as the first chaplain of the original Mayo Clinic (St. Mary's Hospital.)

The 9/10 Girls spent a night at the convent to get a taste of religious life.

Thank you to the Kateri scouts who helped us with many chores, including rearranging the basement.

Chino loves to sit next to Sister when she plays the piano.

The kindergarten Sisters took their students on a field trip to the zoo and aquarium.

Some second grade girls are looking through a notebook of photos of Archbishop Lefebvre.

Replacing safety strips on the steps is not exactly a glamorous job, but imagine what would happen if we left it undone to pursue more exciting endeavors. We strive to do even our hidden work with a great love of God, Who only ever looks at our intentions.

We were very happy to receive a short visit from Fr. Goldade and Father Dénes, OFM. Father Dénes comes from Hungaria and discovered tradition during COVID. He has been visiting the seminary in Dillwyn, VA. This year marks his silver jubilee. Please pray for him.

Roofers have completed the re-roofing of two sections of the convent roof. Barring any emergencies, the tuck-pointing project mentioned in the last newsletter will be next. We completed enough of the improvements to our side chapel (named Queen of Angels) to use it on Holy Thursday. Thank you, dear benefactors and all of the contractors and volunteers who helped to make this happen. The pews and frontal screen are coming. We are hoping to put in back-up power to ensure that the elevator and other essential areas can function during power outages.

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