

Offices de l'Union de l'Europe
de l'Est en Portugal

A GRAIL LETTER FROM PORTUGAL

This letter, which to many of the readers of the Grail Review comes as a wonderful surprise, needs a little introduction.

It was in 1952 at the Chartres Pilgrimage in France, that a young student from Lisbon, Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo, met Rosemary Goldie (who was working with Pax Romana at that time) and heard from her for the first time about the existence of a movement called the Grail ! She was immediately deeply interested in it, especially as her own searchings, next to her scientific studies, has brought her to a more profound understanding of the role and the apostolate of the woman. She kept contact with Rosemary for several years and finally in 1956 and 1957 Maria came in closer touch with other members of the Grail : a short visit to the Tiltenberg, December 1956, a meeting with Rachel in Paris, April 1957, and then a journey to America (for Pax Romana of which she is the International President!) where she visited the Grail -New-York and Grailville. Maria was accompanied by another student from Portugal, her secretary at the same time, Theresa de Santa Clara, and this Theresa stayed in the U.S.A.-Grail a little longer. Maria de Lourdes herself travelled back to Europe, via Holland and stayed a week at the Tiltenberg in August.

It all sounds rather dull, but I can assure you that none of these meetings or visits was a dull affaire, on the contrary : it was a real enkindling and sparkling one, and from then on the fire has been cast! You can read about that yourself in this beautiful letter, written by a group which we could call : our Grail bud in Portugal!

Let us keep that wonderful little group in our prayers, that they may all live up to Gods great expectations and that the promise which the bud still holds may unfold itself in abundant blossoming!.

R.

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Lisbon, 28th December 1957

Dear all of you,

What a joy, to have been asked by Rachel to write something about the Grail in Portugal for our Review! And what a grace to share our experience with all the family throughout the world - even if it is such a short experience (at last in time, only 2 months old!).

But now, when we try to make it clear to you how actually there is a Grail in Portugal, we feel it tremendously difficult and do not know how to find the beginning!

How was it born ?
How did it grow ?
Which was our part in it ?

Every time we talk to one another and ask these questions we find no answer and no explanation for this atmosphere of miracle in which we are living! The Spirit works, that is all!

And here we are, the five of us :

Maria - the root of our Grailbud (as Rachel calls us) is a celebrated chemical engineer, who works in scientific research for 9 hours a day and still finds time to be the President of Pax Romana - the International Movement of Catholic Students - and to do lots of other important things....

She lives by herself at a lovely house with a magnificent view on the Tagus and Lisbon and here we made our home (the porter herself has not found out yet which of us is in truth the lady of the house!). She is the only of us who is a member of the nucleus and was for each one of us the best of means to have known the Grail! It is difficult to say much more about her because she is too much of everything. Those who have met her will perhaps understand what we mean by that. We find no words to say it better ...

There is Teresa, the second to meet the Grail. (And what an enthusiasm!) She went with Maria to the Interfederal Assembly of Pax Romana in San Salvador, last August. On her way back she dropped in at Grailville for a weekend, but... (not necessary to tell what happened...) she stayed for 6 weeks, visiting the Grail centers in New-York, Brooklyn and Philadelphia and came back "transfigured" by all she had lived and seen ... And mainly for the discovery she made, of a community where she found all for which she longed and was so far from "thinking possible in reality" -as she usually says.

If we had not so many things to say about Portugal we would let her say - what she always so willingly does...- what she found in people like Jeanne Plante, Elisabeth Reid, Anne Hope, Barbara Wald, Florence Henderson, Anne Mulkeen and all the others who, in their different fields, contribute to create that "integrating" atmosphere, that so strongly impressed her for her life.

She is a student preparing to take her degree and National Vice-president of the Student Catholic Action Movement.

Tomázia, her sister, works at a kindergarten and having only one month holiday in the year spends it on mission with a group of Noelistes in a Portuguese dechristianized village. And she always finds these are the best holidays she could ever have...

Being the only one of us who is not a student she feels the "non intellectual" member of our "intellectual" group... and very sincerely says : "I am poor of everything.." In our opinion, however, she is a "Master" in Holy Scripture, Catechetical Pedagogy, Missionary affairs and many other subjects... This year she will ask for her holidays in April and will not go to the Mission! (She will be at the Tiltenberg, and not only for the holidays...)

Then comes Fernanda who was one of the first "outsiders" to notice that something had changed in Teresa, when she came back from U.S.A... She had already known the Grail in Scotland (will Anne Mathews, Pat Quinn, Nan Johns remember her?) but apart from some exchange of letters she had not again thought seriously about it...

It was on All Saints' Day that the question burst out: "Teresa, you are going to join the Grail, aren't you?... (Fernanda always asks such queer questions...) This time, however, answers seemed too clear, the way too straight to linger on

on explanations. Was it not just the thing for which she had been looking and was it not lying before her? She was the teenager of the group (at present she is 20!...), and studies her last year at the University. She is also a leader of Student's Catholic Action and very deeply feels that the apostolic formation that was there given to her, was a wonderful step to bring her to her decision of total dedication!

Number five is Francisca. She came one night for dinner with Maria and Teresa, heard some separated "stories" from an Apostolic Movement called the Grail, listened to Grailville sings, read the cover of the record, wanted to know further and... Maria and Teresa dazzled before the work of the Holy Spirit at once so strongly felt in her soul... (Such a miracle was not ever seen! - they state). She is studying to take her degree, and still teaches Morals to Highschool girls.

What is really amazing is that each one of us was specially attracted by a different aspect in the Grail :

Teresa by the absolute integration of every moment of the day in the Liturgy and the first place given to prayer and the deep sense of the cross in life;

Tomázia by the actual living with the Church in a worldwide dimension, and the missionary spirit;

Fernanda by the understanding of the specific role of Woman in God's plan and of her contribution to the extension of the Kingdom;

vivifying force.

Francisca by the discovery of Liturgy as a

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As you will imagine, we are all longing to start, longing for the "opleiding", but in the mean time we are not just waiting. We meet every Sunday afternoon (remember to be with us!) and are trying to live consciously the Grail in its values and build a community of service and love, the bud of a future Grail in Portugal!

At present we are in touch with about 40 young women, student leaders of the Catholic Action mostly. They come for courses on woman's role, for dinner and a little talk, or just "to breathe a little peace", as one of them said. The courses are held by Maria, of course. There is one for beginners, and another for those who had already discussed the subject with her last year.

The feast of the Immaculate Conception was our climax! We interested in the preparation the "second" group (the one better acquainted with the house) and they took things so seriously that those who came for the first time were puzzled by seeing so many house-wives... But what puzzled them most and made them thank us as if we had given them something very special and personal was the atmosphere of quietness and true joy that radiated from the very walls... We sang and read poems on Our Lady and shared a feast meal and ended with Vespers (people are marvelling at our habit of saying Vespers. For the first time they see that the Office is not only to be prayed in Convents!)

The house was decorated with beautiful coloured drawings made by one of them and near an African wall-picture of Our Lady that was given to Maria at the Tiltenberg we lighted for the first time the Grailville candle that Jeanne gave

to Teresa as a "memento of our American Grail Family" (You were all there... we assure you!)

At present, for the second term our prospects have developed. The course on woman for beginners raised such an interest that we shall continue with two or three weekends, in the country, near Lisbon (a beautiful house in a beautiful place! Will it ever be ours?..)

The second group will go on meeting every week because it is charged with the formation of girl students in Pax Romana and now must contact the Federations in view of the Easter meeting at the Tiltenberg for the Europeans and another perhaps at Grailville, for the North Americans.

At the same time we will start with a group that will prepare the field for Lay Missions in our Overseas provinces. Also this was started as a JUCF (Student Catholic Action) initiative, but will be supported by Teresa and Fernanda. There is such an interest in Missions among our youth!

We are still thinking of another group for Liturgy, which possibly could extend to another on the Bible (little known among us!). These will be the special charge of Francisca and Tomasia.

What seems to us very important is that people are coming not only for the courses, but always stay very long with us, dining and saying Vespers or Compline (we always arrange things in such a way as to make this possible...)

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As you see, in two months we have been drawn into all these fields of apostolic action, and if we look back and examine how we got round to this, we see that circumstances (or the Holy Spirit?) just disposed of us.

We have walked so fast that now we must ask if we had better stop and confine ourselves to smaller fields or ask Rachel for an international team...But if we do not spread the most we can, we may fail to be an answer to some young women whom we know to be "wide open" for a total dedication to the Lord. (We leave this to Rachel...)

But this is not all yet. Besides these particular initiatives, each one of us through her special field has still to deal with different apostolic services: writing, lecturing, holding meetings, and so on.

This presence of us in Catholic Action and other lay apostolic movements is not accidental. It is so far one of the aspects we estimate fundamental for the Grail here: to be an inspiration and a service. We find, for instance, that the task of forming Catholic Action leaders cannot be done by the leaders themselves, all too young and always changing. The Grail here may be a unique means of giving to girl movements an adequate and consistent formation, and so working in ever widening circles.

Will not this be too many plans for such a small and tender bud as we are? Of course, it is; with our own means we can do very little, but we have seen things growing so quickly and beyond our expectations (not beyond our hopes!) that, supported by your prayer, we hope to be worthy instruments in the hand of the Father for the coming of the Kingdom!

Deeply feeling one in Him,

The "Grail team" in Lisbon