

Munich, December 20, 1944

J.M.

My dearly loved Sisters,

Today I must impart to you my most distressing sorrow. We Sisters have a Motherhouse home no longer. – On the day before the Feast of Our Lady's Expectation, December 17, a priest from the Holy Ghost Parish celebrated in St. James church at 6:30 p.m. in rose colored vestments the Holy Mass of Gaudete Sunday, since the last of the morning Masses had to be omitted because of a danger signal from the skies. After Holy Mass the Community went to the Candidature for the customary act of seeking shelter. In childlike, pious manner our young folks took leave of the Holy Pilgrims, Mary and Joseph, who were conducted to the community room of the young Sisters. I went to the chancery to write a letter of thanks to His Eminence Cardinal von Faulhaber for the great privilege of introducing Perpetual Adoration into the Anger Church. Again an alarm frightened us; still after half an hour's quiet waiting a safety signal followed. After night-prayer I finished the letter promising His Eminence we would do all in our power to conduct the Perpetual Adoration faithfully and becomingly so that great blessing should go forth from the Anger to Holy Church, to the people, and to our fatherland.

When I was about to retire, the siren roared for the third time that day. The last Sisters had hardly reached the air-raid shelter when bombs struck in their immediate vicinity. After a few moments, a deafening detonation. In the food cellar the entrance door from the court was splintered, the gas doors flew open, the heavy iron latches were torn away. Dust and smoke filled the entire shelter. These were moments of terrible agony. Into the awful stillness suddenly loud knocking and a voice came from the wall between the old and new building, - a call from our Local Air Warden: "Hello! Make your way through!" For in the new building where the majority of the Sisters were sheltered, the violent air pressure had caused terrors. All the doors of the basement, the iron gas-doors included, were hurled out; like a storm the air in violent motion swept over the Sisters crouching on the floor while in the Anger region minute after minute bombs struck, filling the cellar with dust and powder gases. The breach in the wall was opened and about twenty Sisters crawled from the new building into the food cellar, the remaining dispersed into the parts of the new building cellar which still seemed to afford some protection.

When about thirty minutes later the most terrific rain of bombs had subsided, our air protection corps began its round of control. A few minutes later our Air-Warden returned and announced to me in trembling voice: "Reverend Mother, now we may in company with Mary and Joseph go shelter-seeking. Our Motherhouse is demolished." An aerial mine had been sent into the vault

wing. It demolished the chapel, the prayer and relic-room, and my private cell. The air pressure did the greatest damage to the church and all the convent buildings. Instantaneously immense conflagrations arose in the church and in almost every wing which rapidly spread over the entire group of buildings. For the Sisters' fire equipment to attempt conquering the flames was out of question. In groups the Sisters made their way to all the wings, in order to save what had not been destroyed by fire or demolished by the air pressure. The Sisters' fire equipment held the doors between the old and new buildings under constant streams of water, as the fire threatened the Sisters' refectory, the music-rooms and the suite above. After midnight the Munich Fire Department also lent help in this section. With the best of will, help from there could not be given earlier, since the engines and corps were taxed to capacity by the raging fires in the entire city.

Meanwhile the Sisters who were unable to assist in fire fighting and in conveying furniture etc., to safety, crept from the food cellar to the new building; for in the kitchen right above the shelter, the fire had spread in such wise that the caving-in of the cellar vault was not unlikely. An exit from the food cellar to the main staircase was impossible because of the falling debris and the impenetrable smoke. Our Reverend Preacher, Anton Pfaeffl, who at every alarm had removed the Blessed Sacrament into the air raid shelter, our food cellar, crawled three different times amid great exertion through the breach in the wall in order to convey the two larger Ciboria, the Lunala, and the Monstrance to the safest part of the cellar in the new building. There he placed the Most Holy in a wash basket in order to bring it in safety in case of extreme need. The first Adorers in this wretched Tabernacle were Reverend Father, who despite the imminent danger had hastened hither, then Sister M. Telesphora, and myself. During the night, the Sisters transformed the scullery of the school kitchen into an improvised chapel, so poor, that we were reminded of the Stable of Bethlehem. Here our Perpetual Adoration is being continued. The Holy Mass in the early hour of the morning reminded us of Mass in the Catacombs. That the Sisters in full number could appear at the Banquet of Love was like a miracle. The catastrophe had claimed no victim; not even one Sister suffered an injury. Certainly only some of the Sisters appeared in full convent clothing, Some met the Lord in firemen's costume, some had lost even their religious veil; not one wore a face-veil. We offered Holy Communion in thanksgiving for this great Visitation from God and for the grace to bear it worthily.

Early dawn showed us the indescribable destruction of our convent home, the church, the chapel, the convent square, - all one field of ruins still lighted by countless tongues of fire. Dawning day also showed us what the nocturnal labors of the Sisters had rescued. The large

school court of the new building was crowded with furniture. In the basement hall of the new building beds and clothing were stacked high, but all saturated by the water from a burst fire-hose. In the basement passages, kitchen utensils and provisions were stored. Despite the efforts of the Sisters, the greater part of the Motherhouse furniture was lost, the beds, the linens, the clothing of the Sisters. Important documents of the Generalate were saved from the flames.

The heavy damage caused by the immense air pressure in the new building which leaves the whole house without doors and windows, and with the inner walls caved in, this condition together with the want of a large room for church purposes and a large kitchen, make the removal of the Motherhouse to the new building an utter impossibility. Besides, the building on Blumenstrasse was let to the city. Therefore with heavy heart I must reduce the convent personnel and divide our Sisters among the missions. Only such Sisters as are needed for parish helpers and those appointed by the Ordinary and those necessary for our daily work will remain here.

The Generalate too must be transferred and it will be to Birkenstein, the mission consecrated to Mother Mary. All mail henceforth must be directed there. The convents at Giesing and the Au were bombed terrifically in the night from December 17-18. The house at Giesing, because of the bombs having come down in its immediate vicinity, has become so rickety that it can no longer harbor many Sisters. Some of them are being sent to other missions. In the Au Convent a bomb destroyed the entire school building. The Institute building and the new building were harmed seriously. – Several convents of the Little Sisters of the Poor shared the same lot as ours did.

The Powers of Darkness in the hours before midnight of Gaudete extinguished the Perpetual Light in the venerable Adoration Chapel and in St. James Church appointed for Perpetual Adoration. But they will not succeed in extinguishing it in our hearts where the light of Perpetual Adoration is nourished by our want of the very necessities of life. Neither will they stem the blessings given us on Gaudete Sunday for our sacrifices. Daily we shall pray:

O my God, Holy Trinity, Thee I adore, help me to forget myself, to be centered in Thee, unmoved in sweet peace as though my soul were even now in eternity.

That we all may be confirmed in this faith, may Our Lady bless with Her holy Child all our Sisters.

Your sorrowing,
Mother M. Almeda

Another Job's message must be added. In the second week of Advent two fugitive Sisters reached Parrenkirchen from Debrecen in Hungary. They knew

nothing special about the fate of their Sisters but they were certain that the larger houses in Hungary, Szeged, Debrecen, Battonia, and Kolosvar had fallen victims to the war. They said it was not improbable that we even now have martyrs in Hungary who had shed their blood at the hands of the Bolsheviks.