

Father Leonardo Gassó
THE MISSION OF SAN JOSE DE NARGANA
AMONG THE CARIBS (REPUBLIC OF PANAMA)

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I TAKE as motive for beginning my narrative or diary a notable favor that I attribute to St. Joseph, patron of my Mission, to which Saint I promised, when I found myself in difficulties a few days ago, that I would publish an account of the most visible favors that he has done in these four years for this Mission of San José de Narganá among the Carib.¹

On March 19, 1907, I was to leave for the first time to go to the Caribs of the Archipiélago de Mulatas ...

We left Colón in the little river steamer La Fayette, which was like a shoe, without any cabin at all, and old ... Twenty minutes out of port we were already on the point of capsizing... All shouted, "To land! We're going to drown"---white as paper, even the blacks---when another wave entered all of a sudden. The captain, affrighted, changed course back into port... The truth is, I was not afraid of perishing, since I trusted in my great cause and in the protection of St. Joseph ... These Indians are so barbaric that they would not admit anyone into their lands. If they do admit me, likely as not they'll only martyr me ...

. . .

March 27, Holy Wednesday. -- At three in the afternoon we reached Narganá. Chief Enrique of the island today called Sagrado Corazón made us wait anchored for a long time. Finally he made an appearance with great gravity and seriousness... In a few dry words he investigated my parentage and origin, answering that he did not want any Spaniards, and even less one who did not have a wife, because... if someone did not have a wife he would take one away from them, which is why they do not admit foreigners, in order not to mix their blood and race.

I said that the Father is a son of God and has to live like Christ, without a wife, and that for the Father to live with a woman would be a great sin that would send him to hell. He was astonished by these first ideas he received, and therefore I tried to clarify them for him.

"And you, what are you attempting by coming here?"

"I come to teach you the way of heaven, so that when you die you will be joyful." So I summarized for him all the doctrine of the Trinity; of Incarnation; Redemption; Vicarate of Christ in Peter, the Pope, the Bishop of Panama; and that if they believed in such a doctrine and acted according to it they would be saved, and otherwise they would be condemned.

¹ The Kuna are not Caribs.

On hearing the part about hell he said, "What? All of us be burned? Hah! That will be you huacas" (or foreigners), "because we're going to see our Father, God." ... [Chief Enrique argues further, then suggests that Father Gassó try on the island next door.] ...over there is another chief who knows how to read. If you want, go to him." ...

The Chief, Carlos, seeing me at his door, stood up behind the counter of his little grocery store. ... I showed the letters to the chief.

Letter from the Bishop of Panama, Don Francisco Xavier Junguito:

Sr. Governor or Chief of the natives of the Coast of San Blas, and those who dwell in Narganá.

Panama, 18-3-1907.

When God, through the Supreme Pontiff, made me Bishop of Panama, He gave me the charge of seeing to the salvation of each and every one of you. Daily I have asked God to provide me means of making you happy and wise in the law of the Lord. I see that God now wishes that I attend to you more closely, and thus it is that today I can send you Fr. Leonardo Gassó: so that he may visit you in my name and show you my good wishes, and that you may communicate to him those which you have of pleasing God and of meriting His favors.

I pray you, then, that you receive him as you would receive me, being assured that the only thing that he proposes in my name is to do you the greatest possible good, and that in no way does he seek his own interest. I continue hoping in God that you will be pleased by this visit, and that you will not lend an ear to the perfidious insinuations by which the enemy of man [i.e. Satan] would like to close off your road to the benefits of heaven. Consider that to oppose oneself to God is to open the way for Satan, who seeks only to pull all men, white, black and Indian, down to hell. I wish nothing but to bring you to heaven.

Your Father and Prelate,
† Javier, Bishop of Panama.

[There follows a brief letter of introduction from the President of Panama, not included here.]

Once Carlos had read the two letters, he said resolutely, "Father, this is your house. For some time I have wanted to be instructed by a Catholic Father, and I'm happy that you've come. You shall live among us teaching us, and you shall be our Father." ...

Carlos is the most intelligent Indian I have met in my twenty years in America. As a very young child he wanted to know: putting on a little shirt, he boarded a sailboat, paid for his passage and meals by his service, and appeared in Providencia [an island off of Central America, owned by Colombia but inhabited mostly by English-speakers] at the home of a teacher. He learned to read and speak in English; and his tutor, a Protestant of good

faith, made him very devoted to the Bible, and did not make of him an enemy of Catholicism, as Spanish-speaking Protestants are in the habit of doing. ...

After all this the old Chief died. They came together even from the neighboring islands to elect a new one. Although they customarily elect old men, keepers of the traditions,.. all now turned their eyes towards young Carlos, because they said, "He's more intelligent than all of us; and in these circumstances, when it seems that the whites of Colombia and Panama and the Yankis want to take control of this territory of ours, he with his knowledge will be able to lead and defend us." ... They pressed him so hard that in the end Carlos said, "I'll only accept if you all promise to let yourselves be ruled by my judgement, even against your prejudices and customs."

[Gassó recounts how Chief Carlos, who called himself Charly Robinson, arranged with the President of Panama, Miguel Amador Guerrero, to have a group of 16 or 17 boys educated by the Christian Brothers in a special boarding school in Panama.]

The Bishop was anxiously trying to find missionaries ... I arrived from Mexico, on the way to my old Mission on the Marañón [in Ecuador], which there were plans of reactivating; and instead of leaving the [train] station to go to the mouth of the canal, I felt compelled to spend the night in Panama...

[Spending the night in the Bishop's Palace, Gasso is urged to take up the mission to the Kuna.]

"But as it happens, I have been posted to Peru or Ecuador."

"We shall arrange it with your superiors, if you have no objection." The next day he spoke with the superior [of the Jesuit Order] here and wrote to the others, who all agreed, and here I have been, once the Bishop presented me to the President, who insisted on my remaining. ...

Returning to Carlos: Once he heard the summary of doctrine that I told him, he showed that he understood very well about the other life and about my mission from Christ and the Pope, and he showed that he believed it all. ... I in due course received lodging from Carlos. He pointed out the best corner of the house. . . .

There was a pilgrimage of children and adults to see me, since I was such a strange thing. Then they began to touch me with a fingertip and flee. ...

[The men of Margana hold a meeting in the village gathering house.]

In the big hut [the village gathering hall] there were about 100 Indians, not counting children or women. They put a log that they use as a kind of seat for me to sit on. I put Carlos on my right and on my left another Indian who seemed to be in authority, and the rest made themselves comfortable in hammocks and benches, both before and behind us, since the speaker, according to their custom, should be surrounded by the audience.

I read the letter from the Bishop, thereby presenting my credentials. ... Once my narration and commentary on the letter were finished, Carlos read the President's letter in English and commented on it. All of them showed their satisfaction. Then I read to them from the catechism what I had written, with the aid of interpreters, in my days of preparation. . . .

Good Friday, the 29th--- . . . Then we ordered that the large cross be made ... it was borne among them all, with the children, who went singing "Holy Mary, Mother of God" (the only thing they had learned) as we formed the first and original procession; many other pagans laughed and made fun of all this, while many others, men and women, poked their heads out between the poles that formed the walls of their houses to see that first manifestation of Christianity. Those who carried the cross with fervor reprimanded those who were mocking. Arriving at the spot where I entered this village, we dug a hole and planted it. ... we believers and the children, one after another, kissed the holy Cross; and we went home, charging them that on entering and leaving the village they should adore the holy Cross in order to expel the demon from these lands.

On arriving home the boys could not tear themselves away from me, and--- Oh comfort and fruit of the Redemption!---among the many who, crowded around my chair, were pressing against me, one threw his little arm around my neck and told me, "Father, I want to go with you, because I want to go to heaven; take me to Panama." First calling. ... So I agreed to take him for a son, and he did not part from me in all the days that I was there, until I took him with me to Panama. ...

After dinner, which was at six, as it is every day, we went to the... praying of the doctrine. Today I explained the Commandments to them. I impressed upon them the great respect they must have for the Father and for the chief, and that they should remove their hats before them. That has pleased Carlos so much that these days he goes around telling everyone to remove their hats.

. . . .

April 5.---How shall I explain what one of these gentile villages is like? By saying that it is like a cageful of madmen... In fact, since I came, I have been teaching the doctrine at all hours; but some follow the prayer, others leave off from that and sing wildly out of tune, others suck pieces of sugar cane while stretched out belly-up, others set off running through the hut and go to get something to fiddle with while they are learning, others laugh, others weep, others pinch each other, others stand up, others stretch themselves;

It is already happening that on entering the hut some come to greet me, kissing my hand and saying, "Blessed be the Most Holy Sacrament" . . . How much it takes to form men! The Eternal Father had to send His Son to change the world. It has already been achieved that twenty-five of them know "By the sign", etc., and the Ave Maria, and as many others know only Holy Mary, etc. . . . "Why begin with the Ave and Holy Mary and with those questions?" Because they are the ideas that most easily enter savage heads...

To show the progress made: This last night, after the prayer and the sermon were concluded, I called on a girl of about 12 years. The most difficult person among gentiles is the woman. In spite of everything, the child with great docility came out in the middle of the great group and prayed alone all that had been taught, to the admiration of those present.

. . .

April 6.---...today [Carlos] told me: "Father, the Indians are very bad. None of the old people want there to be a Father among us.

. . .

"But, my man, didn't Enrique say last night that they'd build the house here within a month?"

"He deceived you: the Indians are very bad."

"Don't they believe in God?"

"Yes, they believe in what you tell them."

"And do they believe they're going to burn, if they don't have a Father?"

"Yes, they believe it, but they don't want Fathers or foreigners... to enter."

"Well, how will we fix that, Carlos?"

"Father,.. they're like animals, who only think of eating, drinking, and living the life of a beast. . . .

"It also occurs to me, Father, that with one soldier sent by the President, they'd all be afraid, and therefore they'd listen to reason."

"You have hit on the quid [matter], my son, because Initium sapientiae timor Domini [Fear of the lord is the beginning of wisdom], and these aren't men but beasts---and this is what is said by the histories of our old-time missions." ... Poor Carlos does not know that I am afraid of having soldiers,...

. . .

Saturday, the 6th. -- The life of the missionary to the gentiles is like going out on the high seas in a little boat. At every step tasting death, or fear and shipwreck, and at every step laughing and rejoicing to see how God sets one free: until one gets so used to trusting in God that he walks in the middle of every kind of danger with great peace and assurance that he is doing the will of God, good and advantageous for body and soul---and he is no longer afraid.

. . .

Today they were made to kneel rather than squat, as they are used to doing, to sing the "Blessed and Praised", etc. Only Christian people know how to kneel, the Bishop made me realize some time ago, and that is why for these Indians, it is almost as difficult to do so as it is for us to lie on the ground on our elbows.

. . .

Since the third day of my stay I have noticed about Chief Carlos that he has an uproar of ideas in his head.... Because I could not explain to him, for lack of words, as many considerations as are necessary, and so as not to harm him with my inadequacy in the Carib language, I proposed that he should come to Panama City, where the Bishop would tell him in English what I wished... "And can't my wife come with me?"

"Very well," I said; "and then we'll baptize your little son in Panama."

"And will the Señor President be his godfather?" ...It took a lot of work to convince her to leave her homeland...

...the advances of these eight days. Some 70 boys, 12 girls, and 21 men know By the Sign, Ave and Holy Mary in their language, besides singing the "Blessed and Holy Mary". Twelve boys copy the alphabet on the little blackboard. All now salute with "Praised be the Most Holy Sacrament", kiss my hand, and remove their hats before the Father and the Chief; and some kiss his hand. These signs of deference have made the Chief greatly respect me, because I make him respected. This; chasteness of behavior, which they admire; speaking only of God or His law; and disdain for money---these are what have given me this moral influence in the human sphere. ...

So today we left San José de Merganá---the Chief, his wife and son, and my two little future sacristans, the innocent Estanislao and the gifted Leonardo--- and we ended up sleeping on the shore of an islet, passing a bad night. ...

The 11th.---We reached Colón. Since the Indian woman goes about in that costume---even though her husband has stretched the covering that he has put over her of the long cloth... nearly to her ankles---one still sees when she walks the beadwork designs encircling her calves and ankle; she cannot hide the gold ring hanging from her nose, nor remove any of that nor any part of her multicolored blouse and assorted necklaces, on pain of being killed upon her return for having abandoned her customs. So I left them in the little steamer and went to find a coach, in order to get them from the boat to the coach and thence to the house of the Sisters of Charity such that the fewest possible people would see them, and they would not be embarrassed by laughter and astonishment. ...

The 12th. -- The start which every jolt of the coach produced in the Indian woman, grew when she was seated in the train and it began to move. She was looking in every direction while holding on... ...

I brought my Indians by coach -- once we had arrived in Panama---to the palace of the Bishop, where he gave me lodging. ...

The 13th. I went with the Chief to the President of the Republic, Dr. Amador Guerrero, who showed himself very satisfied with the journey and the fruit obtained. He promised us all his aid ... We told how Carlos was bringing a child in order to baptize it, and then he offered himself as godfather and added that his wife would be godmother. ...

At noon Carlos, my two little sacristans and I were invited to the Normal School -- which was managed by the Brothers of Christian Doctrine -- where the seventeen little Indians of whom I spoke were being educated. ... When the meal was finished, the Chief -- as he is a great preacher -- preached at length to those being educated, that they should behave well, learn, respect their teachers, and forget the teachings of their pagan parents. ...

. . .

[An] old Indian... [said] "What do you think? God created the dog, and to this day it's a dog; God created the jaguar, and to this day it's a jaguar; God created the hen, and to this day it's a hen; God created the Indian, and now they don't want to let us be Indians. That's intolerable. They should let us be Indians!"

The thing is that some outsiders have given them the idea that the Indians are to enter the modern system or social circle, which they very justly detest . . . The poor Indian believes that the Father is going to bring them that egotistical, irreligious, proud, and dishonest spirit... These Carib Indians have very good things. . . . Because of this they do not oppose the teachings of the Catechism, but instead the fashion of being modern -- although there is a small group, educated among Yankees or Yankeeized, who have a great confusion of ideas: detesting some things from the elders, they detest all of them, ... and conversely they admit everything modern, good and bad, but especially the bad,.. The missionary needs great discretion in order to do good for the many and not disgust those of this little group, who for the time being will be those who will help him most.

Until I made the second entry among the Indians I entertained myself in arranging my notes and preparing my two sacristans -- who also learned to assist in the Mass -- for baptism. ...

The Day of the Most Holy Trinity, May 26, 1907, I set sail from Colón; and on the fifth day, in a miserable little sloop... piloted by the Indian Sho, I arrived at his islet, Nusatupu. I went in this very miserable little boat,.. because no other boat... belonging to the merchants who go to the... Carib Coast, wished to carry me...

[Gassó returns to the Indians, but he finds that Charly Robinson has gone off fishing, and he is held captive for a few days on Nusatupu (later renamed Corazón de Jesús) across from Nargana.]

I was detained about five days, ... without the Indians' letting me teach publicly, while they quarrelsomely deliberated over my entry. ... [Gassó insists on being taken to a village meeting.] They put into the great hut of

the chief three hammocks for the three principals, an armchair for me, and several benches; and when all were gathered, with their hats on -- derby hats on the heads of savages!..

When I had taken my seat, Chief Enrique said to me, "Tell us clearly what you're trying to do."

"I've come to live here to teach you the way of heaven."

"Well, so that no one should come here, we've sent boys to learn in Panama City, and the rest are occupied and aren't here to learn."

I answered that my presence was not just to teach the youths, but to attend to the souls of everyone. . . . one old demon-possessed man, Manuel Portete, broke the silence, asking why they needed any priest at all.

"So that he'll baptize you, he'll teach you, and you won't go to hell."

He and his son laughed. "We're not going to hell," they said. "Has God told you that if we don't get baptized we're going to hell?" . . . Furious, they said that they did not want a Father. . . .

Tomorrow at these hours I shall return, and if the assembly... tells me to go, then I'll take off my shoes, shake them so as not to carry away with me even a grain of sand from your beach, and then the curse of God will fall on you; there will come upon you illnesses and misfortunes, you'll die in your infidelity and will go down to be burned." After this brusque answer I left without saying goodbye. ...

[The Indians of Nusatupu give in, allowing Gassó to stay if he will baptize their children to protect them against demons.]

The next day, the feast of the Sacred Heart, I began to baptize infants, and each day I baptized ten or twelve or more, converting another more suitable hut into a chapel. Because the conversion of this islet took place on the day of the Heart of Jesus and during its novena, I, in agreement with the principal Indians, named it Isla del Sagrado Corazón or Jesús Kuake tupu. ...

Meanwhile God worked some notable occurrences in this island. . . . Also in front of this image of the Sacred Heart, the Indian Nieves Obkangipilele recovered his health... He was at death's door, in our opinion. His mother was furiously against our advice of making him a Christian, and especially against me. The sick man truly wanted me to baptize him. I put the aforesaid image in his sight. The mother, in my presence, furiously removed the image. I replaced it in the sick man's hammock. When Nieves had been baptized, his relatives, incited by the old lady, became as if demon-possessed against me, saying that my medicines, that is, the holy oils, had killed him -- because after the baptism he remained as if lifeless. But God was pleased to return because of the honor of the Holy Baptism, healing him very quickly. . . .

preserved in many parishes and haciendas... this serves to correct weakness and indolence.... It is told of Hernán Cortés... that in spite of his very great authority, he secretly agreed with the Franciscan missionary that he would arrive late at daily prayers; and on calling the roll the missionary would give him a mark and would reprove him like anyone else, and then would quicken his sought after negligence with a punishment, just as for the others who were lacking. Thus it was done. . . . men of this class are those who have civilized the world. . . .

I wish to deliver these facts for the glory of the Christian civilization in Spanish America, and so that they will serve as an example and a norm for those who go astray in the education of the Indians.

. . . .

Portete, seated at his door today with four or six elders, mocked my honorable lay assistant Primero Baligiginia... as he passed by there, because he was bringing some plates of food for my sacristans and me, as he does every day... "Baligiginia, I am a servant of no one!"

. . . .

The 30th. -- The coolness of the Indians who remain in the village is increasing. . . . some Protestant petty traders are coming around here telling them to pay no attention to the Father, because what he wants is to exploit them. It is true that the pagans who hear the voice of Christ pay no attention to that, and tell those ambassadors of hell to their faces that the Father is good and that they love the Father and the holy Religion which the Father teaches, and that those defamers are evil. . . . The old-timers correctly said that a village of Indians could not function unless there were an authority who was at least one-fifth Spanish, in order to conquer the indigenous laziness. This is why what Liberalism first tries to do is to remove the honest authority and his military discipline, so that confusion may enter. To manage a village, small or large, the fear of God is necessary -- under the form of authority, or of the whip or the stocks, or whatever thing may be equivalent and may make itself perceptible. . . .

. . . .

The truth is that the battle lines are being drawn. The bad ones are manifesting themselves more, but on the other hand, what attendance among the good ones! . . .

Most recently, the news has been brought that the savages from above us want to come and burn down my house. . . . To all the brute savagery one must add the savagery of the Protestant gringos, imported in the form of rum, the phonograph, and mone[y]... [Gassó uses a misspelled version of the English word.]

. . . .

[July] 3rd. -- The great harm, more than in the incitements of the

highlanders, is in rum, which the petty traders bring, because it is by means of drink that the Indian loses his liberty. The nights are horrible, with as much shouting, running, and games in the village, as if it were day. . . . When I returned from the catechism on the island of Sagrado Corazón, they told me that the highlander was going about drunk with a knife, looking for me, and when he did not find me he unleashed his anger against the post which serves as a bell tower, cutting it. Then Carlos had the highlander seized in order to eject him from the island, but in short order he was incapacitated by the liquor; they resolved that early tomorrow they would make him leave. Oh, what a blooming, buzzing confusion! The violent storm and the gale continue.

. . .

The order has been given that the lay assistants are to escort out of the church by the arm anyone who makes a noise or talks or does not know how to kneel at the ringing of the little bell.

The 8th. -- The banners or camps are already delineated in this village of San José. Some 30 men, forty-five years old or under, are very decidedly for the Father. Also some 50 men over forty-five: that is, a total of 80 families. Opposed are some 25 families, few out of simple evilness: most out of prejudice.

. . .

Yesterday, Sunday, an old man went to work, warned by the others that God was going to punish him because he did not listen to the Father, who teaches that feast days are to be kept holy. He returned from work half dead, spitting blood out of his mouth because of a blow given him by a log which he himself was cutting.

. . .

Tonight, after the Corona, I explained to those in Narganá how we come from Adam and from Noah -- showing them the pictures of those patriarchs -- and the most probable opinion of the origin of the blacks and of the Indians in the curse of Noah, to show them how we come from the same trunk; because the visible diversity of types is one of their most serious difficulties to admitting our doctrine, since it always is alleged that ours is for us, and their beliefs for them. . . .

The elders, who are almost as much children in many ways as these children are, are very delighted and admiring that the children are attached to me. Not in vain did Carlos say the other day, "Father, now everyone looks on you as one of the family. Do you remember how in the first days, everyone fled on seeing you?"

"It's because then, my son, almost all of you were little more than beasts, and now you're beginning to be sons of God." . . .

the village of San José de Narganá is already in via [underway].

. . .

The 13th. -- My chief has come, at the silent hour of noon, and tells me that all the pagans are stirred up, and that they want to kill not me, but him because he admitted me. A sign that he has done more in admitting me than I in entering. That the Chachardies [men from the village of Sasartii, to the east], and I don't know what others, are going to come to set fire to this island.

Back to the past fears, then! The guns and the stocks are urgent. Carlos says, then, that he and the majority were planning a prudent withdrawal. . . . I encouraged him by saying that the enemies would not even come, with me in the village, because I represent the Government, and if they touch me the Government will punish them; nor will they touch him either, because I shall put myself between the barbarians and him.

. . .

The 17th. -- Seeing that I have the field well enough explored, and that it is in the greatest peace that this can have for now -- since they tell me that even the highlanders have calmed down -- I plan to return to Panama City, with Carlos remaining in charge of preserving the spiritual fruit, and the church building and its furnishings.

The 18th. -- We left today, then, in a little seven-ton sloop belonging to two Protestant peddlers.

. . .

The 24th. -- I arrived with my three little Indians in Panama City free of charge, because the Government has arranged free passage for us from the railway company since the Mission began.

The 27th. -- In spite of the glowing recommendation of the Bishop for my reception before the Interim President, the employees did not show much courtesy. Of course, I already had learned what was to be feared, because not all Governments were to have such excellent intentions as to the civilization of the Indians, as those Dr. Amador had shown.

[Gassó finds more allies in the government and arranges to have Chief Carlos named as Governor of the San Blas Coast and Enrique made an honorary General. On September 4, 1907, he set out for the mission for the third visit. After more than a week, he reaches Nargana.]

The 16th. -- The falling off which I note in the attendance at catechism is great; I have just learned the cause of it. Some eight days ago, ten highlanders came on a mission of diabolical savagery. Their whole intent was to throw me out and put an end to my hut and my poor household goods. While they could not achieve that, because of fear perhaps, at least they achieved that no woman or girl, few boys, and fewer men, are coming to pray.

And the reason for the absence of the women in this? That if the Father comes to know the evils they officially perform in the shearing [i.e. ritual hair cutting in puberty ceremonies] of which I have spoken he will prohibit the women from letting themselves be given those baths, etc., which they are obligatorily given on beginning puberty---those things and others which constitute, with their marriages, the diabolical, dirty, superstitious feasts which are crowned with a classic drinking bout. In fact, it is now not the naive Indians who have prohibited their girls and women from coming to learn; but even a lay assistant, one of those fondest of the catechism, has told his already-married daughter that if she comes he will kill her. . . .

The 17th. -- Last night after the aforesaid, a great drinking bout, such that I was not allowed to sleep. It is not strange that I did not sleep: because even a neighboring Indian woman, in the middle of the night, went out into the street, furious, saying that she already had a headache from so much noise. And so the drunks with their shouts, the phonograph belonging to some Indians, and a hurdy-gurdy belonging to some black peddlers, did not rest until dawn: savages with a phonograph in their hands!

. . .

It may be seen how easily the panorama changes among Indians: Carlos came by, and after I pondered for him his appointment as Governor, he told me that as an Authority he wanted to become a Christian promptly, and planned for all the other Indians to be baptized also; that the highlanders had developed a fear of the Narganás . . . He added that he would help the Father, and in proof of that he was going to prohibit the selling of liquors, and would impose silence at eight o'clock at night, as the Father was indicating to him. . . .

The 19th. -- The diabolical mission of the [highlanders] has undone for us almost all our advances in punctuality and affection for the catechism. So, seeing this destruction, Carlos and his assistant, the energetic José, said to me after the sermon, "Father, every time you go to Panama the advance deteriorates. Stay here now forever...." Added Carlos, commenting on the sermon, "Here there are many of those Jews who killed Our Lord, and they're the stumbling block of the village; but I hope that little by little we're to win them over."

. . .

Motivated, then, by what was said last night, we have set up this arrangement: Each day, after the Mass, the catechism is sung; and after that, the people go to their employments. At two o'clock, when they return from fishing or hunting, they come to learn the catechism in groups, and it ends on the hour with the sung prayer of the Catechism. At nightfall they return to the church, and one day the Corona is sung, another day the catechism is prayed with some songs -- concluding with the doctrinal explanation. When the village has been baptized, the morning prayer for the children and the evening one for everyone will be sufficient.

In the midafternoon I go out to visit the sick and conquer the stubborn.

I expected...

[When the Black man persists, Gassó formally curses him.]

. . .

When the Mass was finished, the brother of the cursed black man presented himself, saying, "Father, I'm a Christian, and I don't want my brother to be here and to be disagreeable. He shall come, and on his knees he'll beg your forgiveness." . . . "If he does that and preaches to them against his bad influence, then he shall be pardoned." Thus it was done.

It is also notable that on three days Francisco Xavier has gone at dawn, without hearing Mass, to a site where there is much fishing, and returns late with no fish. When I told him that was God's punishment, and that he should see how the other boys, leaving later, after the Mass, returned promptly and with a great amount of fish, he decided today to stay for Mass. He went fishing, and although he was not gone two hours, he returned joyful because of his great fishing; and brought me a great plate of good fish, celebrating the blessing of God.

Summary of the three Entries: Seeing that I now have the Carib language made familiar, the will of these Indians probed, and the common difficulties which can occur in the evangelization of these people noted, I have planned to return to Panama . . .

October 4. -- With the village in profound silence, Estanislao and I, when the early morning Mass had been said, left with four rowers...

. . .

Seeing that this Mission has many difficulties,.. therefore the Bishop and Fr. Arjona, Superior of Panama City, were of the opinion that I should go to Spain to expound it all, and to try to make missionaries if this evangelical labor was accepted.

. . .

The 13th. -- I left Colón for Spain at two o'clock in the afternoon on the Montevideo, belonging to the Catholic "Spanish Transatlantic Company", bringing my faithful sacristan Estanislao with me.

. . .

November 15. -- After receiving many demonstrations of charity from natives and foreigners in Cádiz, Puerto de Santa María, Madrid, Burgos -- to whom Estanislao and I were extremely grateful in our hearts -- we reached Loyola today. Here, besides a great deal of edification, we received from Fr. Cesáreo Ibero the great gift of the baptismal font,

. . .

December 11, 1907. -- The Provincial of Aragon, Fr. Antonio Iñesta, has given the authorization for the printing of the Catechism in Spanish and Carib. We made many efforts to have the printing done in script letters, either English or Spanish, with the purpose of doing good rather than ill to the Indians: making easy for them the benefits which reading and writing bring, but impeding them from being able to learn to read bad things in ordinary printed letters. But we could not find a printing press with enough type to second our wish.

. . . .

[Gassó and his young sacristan, Estanislao, made two tours of Spain. They collected donations, especially of sacred paintings, statues, and a baptismal font, but Gassó was sick some of the time, and Estanislao became increasingly restive. After a return trip by steamship, they reached Colón again on May 7th of 1908. On a long trip down the coast, stopping at Black villages along the way, Gassó contracts a skin condition from insect bites, and Estanislao grows even more rebellious. Gasso hears that on Nargana his old enemy, Portete, has been lynched as a sorcerer, and that the mission has largely fallen apart in his long absence.]

. . . .

[When they arrive at Nargana, past supporters seem like] cooled-off friends -- because few came to kiss my hand. Chief Carlos was not in the village. . . . [Estanislao immediately abandons Gassó. When the boy discovers that his father has died while he was gone, Gassó tells him it is God's punishment.]

. . . .

Still more, the Indians have come together today for the first time since the blacks reembarked for their land following Mass; and they have come together to kill me, according to what my heart tells me. After a time of their being gathered, I heard them yelling bloody murder in the neighboring house, which is the house of their services. . . . So with my soul in grief, as they say, I heard that Portete's son, he who on my second entry declaimed so bitterly against me, was saying, "Then go and grab him; tie him up." [But they do not succeed.]

. . . .

In the five months of my absence they say that there have been great drinking bouts, motivated by the feasts which they give upon declaring girls to be of marriageable age

[Gassó, however, produces a new weapon, letters from the government:]

Office of the Secretary of Government and Justice
Fourth Section -- Number 418

Mr. General Don Enrique Clay

Island of Corazón de Jesús

I have been informed by the Rev. Fr. Gassó that you still have not complied with the order to build the Mission house, nor have you appointed the four policemen who are needed for the order of that village. In view of this, I believe it suitable to forewarn you that if you do not comply, making your authority valid, I shall have to send some police in order that they may help you.

I hope that it will not be necessary to carry out this measure and that you will always succeed in making your authority respected for the good of that village.

Your attentive and sure servant,
Manuel Quintero

Last night the hoped-for Chief Carlos finally arrived on this island -- the only one, for now, who can impose some kind of order. . . .

The 20th. -- Oh, what terrible solitude was that of yesterday! Not even Carlos has come to return the visit, alleging that he has a headache, although he went to preside over the service. . . .

The 21st. -- Yesterday at noon Carlos finally came to visit. He filled me with consolation, because although I know that the words of Indians are like those of children, nevertheless they indicate the good courage of this Chief. I began by reminding him of the benefits and punishments which God has shown these people since the Mission began. "Remember how . . . the unfortunate Portete and his son did what was possible to throw out Christ, and I told them that as punishment for their obstinacy they would die badly. Was it like that?"

"Yes, Father, Portete died by being burned up."

"Remember how on Sacred Heart Day you made that profession of faith, and I, weeping with consolation, promised you in the name of God--if you continued thus--eternal salvation, and material goods in this life, and that you would be head of the Indians. Is it happening that way?"

"Yes, Father, because God has given me plenty of seaturtles, and even the fierce Kardíes come to beg my assistance. . . .

"Remember that during the epidemic of fevers, the pagans who baptized their little children didn't die, and the little Christians who drank St. Ignatius' Water were cured?"

"Thus it happened."

"But I told Estanislao that if he stayed good, he'd be the father of the village when he grew up: but if he became bad, God would punish him. Isn't it true that when he became bad, God took his pagan father away from him during the voyage, and while continuing in his apostasy he's lying sick in bed?"

"Thus it is."

"You have it proved that the Religion I preach to you is the truth; why don't you all truly convert?"

"Father, everyone knows that; but what do you want -- they're Indians."

. . .

The 22nd. -- The Corona of last night was better attended: two women, three girls (among pagans, fewer women than men attend), eight men, forty boys. The chief came neither to Mass nor to the Corona. This will be because he must be waiting for me to order him to call: but I am going to see if he gets accustomed to coming of his own accord, conquered by the human respect which these Indians have, in a consummate degree, for good works, The light wash of modernism which some have imported from the civilized Yankees has brought them so much evil.

. . .

If the big news is accentuated which was just whispered to me by an elder who for the first time has gotten furious with me, it will end in martyrdom. [Estanislao], with the idea that the barbarians should come against me, is telling his superstitious grandfather that I am going to bring white people to these lands, etc.; "and therefore," he adds furiously, "if this boy dies of the fevers he has, we'll rise up together and burn you alive like Portete." Nevertheless I do not desire the boy to live, except for the glory of God, but to be converted and die, so that the discord which he has sown may end. So much solicitude for my Estanislao -- where has it led?

The 27th. -- A great triumph of the Heart of Jesus was that of yesterday afternoon. The new catechumens came to the Corona, a large number, all from 38 to 48 years of age -- that is, the flower of the village. With all human respect deposed, and Carlos at their head, they sang at the top of their lungs and prayed with the enthusiasm of children. . . . The most beautiful was how Carlos ridiculed, in the explanation or repetition of the sermon, the absurdities of the pagan services, with all the others laughing at the lies which the [Indian ritualists] spin in order to sustain their religious services. Some pagans tried to enter the house-church on hearing how well the catechumens were singing, but the doorman -- since for that purpose there is one in the church -- did not let them in, because, as he said, "Those don't believe." Oh, how beautiful! The pagans had to go to the shameful neighboring service, where the intruding chief, Portete's son, was directing the function.

. . .

The 29th. -- My many pains because of the pearls [his skin condition] have impeded me from going to the Corona. The catechumens alone have arranged it and carried it out. This is a true triumph!

The 30th. -- I cannot even walk, except by being bent over at an obtuse angle. Oh, what a manner God has of tormenting me with these pains! . . .

Oh, what days and what nights of pains, which even give me a burning fever -- without being able to be either standing, seated, lying for much time on my side, or kneeling! This little cot does not serve, because one cannot move.

. . .

If God allows His friends here to suffer this way, what will become of His enemies in hell? I said the whole Mass while leaning on the altar, because my feet are not sufficient to support me. In the midst of such suffering it is a pleasure that two catechumens' wives have presented themselves, bringing their little children for baptism.

. . .

July 2. -- I have called Carlos to see if he will prepare the trip to Panama for me: because a little later it may be entirely impossible for me to go, since I may faint en route.

[Playing on their sympathy for his condition, Gassó persuades some of his supporters on Nargana to deed a large piece of land on the island over to the mission. Then, in great pain, he makes a difficult canoe trip out of San Blas. After some weeks in the Black villages and then in the city, he returns to Nargana with a Jesuit Brother recruited for the mission, arriving on October 26.]

So we reached San José de Narganá. A great crowd came out to the shore. I was coming in fear that they would say something because of the Brother and because of the goats. Finally Chief Carlos and some of the most adept decided to admit my proposal, and they gave me the land which I have mentioned for the goats.

So I came ashore. In the following days we recruited catechumens so as to finish dividing this village, and I was moved by the flattering news which the Chief gave me on the day of coming here: "Father, several of us now don't go to the services of the pagans." Then to signify the two bands, and so that we would understand one another, I baptized that house with the nickname House of errors, because of the many that they teach there; and ours, House of God. This was well received, and so when they want to say that one is a rebel, they say, "He's from the house of errors."

Each day, when someone comes to register himself for the catechism, he is given this interrogation:

"Will you come each day to the house of God to learn the catechism?"

"Yes."

"You will not return to the house of errors?"

"No."

"You'll obey all the things the Father orders in order to go to heaven,

and you'll come to Mass every Sunday?"

"Yes."

"What do you think, Carlos and you other leaders, will he be faithful and constant?" They give their observations, preach him their sermon, and he is registered, if everything is satisfactory: if not, he is only permitted to attend.

The punctuality of the aforesaid catechumens and the fervor with which they learn, at the top of their lungs -- men and women -- is admirable.

. . .

Oh secrets of the human heart! Pablo's brother, about 80 years of age, told me that he was going to be baptized after he saw the pictures of hell, etc. He was ill for two days and I could not visit him, until, learning that he was sicker, I visited him. "Get out of here," he said. "I don't want to see you, I don't want to be baptized, I don't believe in anything about that Jesus Christ; you're a liar." I tried to pacify him. He said, "What did you think -- that I 'm going to become a Christian? You don't know what deep beliefs I have." Seeing that I did not go away -- instead I was attempting to tame him with sweetness -he said, "I already told you to go away, and if I don't get up it's because I can't move; if you don't go, I'll have you taken out!"

Seeing him so ill, I did not want to lose this chance. He then yelled to his sons to finish me off if I didn't go away. Promptly I saw one of them come out of the adjoining kitchen-hut with a shotgun in his hand, and he positioned himself behind me to load it. Then I said to the sick man, "Since you're now so excited, we shall leave the conversation for another time: I'll come back."

"You don't have to come back for anything, because Christ and you are liars: I do not believe." So I left cautiously. He who will not believe is already condemned.

. . .

The fourth death threat... came from the perfidious Smit's having lured away some of my unmarried catechumens... I asked him how he dared to teach errors... He said that he alone taught morality. "Then walk with care," I said, "because up to now all those who have helped me have been blessed by God, and all those who have hindered me have been punished by God. Remember your father, Portete... to whom I said that because of his evilness God would give him a disagreeable death -- how in fact the Indians themselves burned him alive." My saying this and his jumping up full of anger, shouting and going out from my presence, were all one movement. Indians, his partisans, began flowing out of the house of errors.

...One came with a knife, one whom, in the hubbub, I did not notice... It seems that [he] was in wait behind me... by chance, I turned my head and