

3 Hail Mary's and the monkey under the bed.

In the city of Naples in the early fifteenth century, a certain distinguished gentleman began to entertain the modern notions of the day critical of the Catholic Church. Soon he had abandoned the practice of the Faith and was causing great scandal among the faithful for his open ridicule of those who frequented the Sacraments and practiced popular pious devotions.

Nonetheless, his affairs prospered, as so often happens among the men of this world. He became famous for the marvelous feasts and parties that he frequently hosted in his palatial residence. Of particular interest to all was an unusual little steward who would serve the astonished guests. Dressed in a charming red velvet and gold braid vest and hat, serving plates with perfect propriety, and then offering charming displays of acrobatics, was none other than a grinning little monkey!

It was the talk of the city, and many of the ladies who pleaded with their husbands to accept the invitations to a feast put on by the avowed agnostic so that they might witness the marvelous sight! Before too long, the gossip about the strange steward reached the ears of a parish priest renowned for his holiness and virtue. But instead of dismissing the talk or issuing warning about attending the parties of one so opposed to the Holy Church, the priest asked to receive an invitation to the next gala event to see for himself the truth of this talk.

The host at first desisted – none of those foolish, sour-faced clerics would set foot on his premises! But in the end, his spirit of pride conquered: he wanted to flaunt the feats and antics of his devoted little four-footed servant to the credulous priest. The invitation was issued. The evening arrived, and the priest rang at the bronze gates of the palace some time after the festivities had begun.

“A priest begging leave to enter my hall,” his jovial host remarked at his entrance. “Will wonders never cease! But, indeed, this is a house of wonders.”

“Yes, so I have heard,” the priest calmly replied. “And truly I must say I am interested to see this amazing sight of a monkey who serves a man.”

The host immediately rang his special silver bell that called his peculiar steward to his presence. But the monkey, who only moments before had been charming a group of ladies with his antics, did not appear. The baffled host shook his head in amazement. This was the first time it had failed to respond to his call. The priest insisted: he had come expressly to see this strange sight and would not be deprived of the pleasure. The host called again. No reply. The monkey seemed to have disappeared. A search of the house was made, and finally the creature was discovered, shaking in his velvet suit under the bed of the host. It was dragged out from under the bed, the little creature trembling and struggling to escape the presence of the priest.

“Now,” the priest demanded, “I command you in the name of the Almighty God, Three in One, to tell your master who you are and what is your purpose in this house.” Forced to obey, the furious, still trembling monkey spat out these words to his shocked master: “I am

no ordinary beast. I am a demon from hell who has taken on the form of a monkey who attends to your every bid and call. And so I do, but I await under your bed every night for the first night that you might leave off that abominable custom taught to you by your mother of saying three Hail Marys before you retire. For then, and only then, do I have permission to strangle you in your sleep and drag your soul to the eternal fires.”

With these words spoken, the writhing monkey disappeared. The arrogance and mocking manner of the host faded with the wretched creature. Ashen faced and shaken, he turned to the priest. “Ah, my fortunate man,” the holy man said. “For fortunate indeed you have been to have retained this small devotion to the Mother of Mercies, who never abandons even the most wretched who have recourse to her.” He heard the confession of the man, who became a model of faith in the city and was especially renowned for his tender devotion to the Virgin Mary.

How many of us in our journey through life have felt the presence of a monkey under our beds? And how many of us have experienced the goodness and mercy of Mary, who until the end of the world will never cease relieving the miseries of man and flying to their aid to return them to the path of truth, the Holy Catholic Church? The Mother of Mercy, she stays the hand of justice of her divine Son for all who invoke her, even for three Hail Marys.

This story is proof of the words of St. Bernardine de Bustis: “This great Lady is more desirous to grant us graces than we are desirous to receive them.”

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