

Eucharistic Miracle—Alberta, Canada—1946

Father Gino Violini stood before St. Joseph's Church in Cowley, a nearly-abandoned little mission church. A small group gathered around and said they didn't need a priest.

He celebrated his first Mass at St. Joseph's the following Sunday. There were nine people in the pews. He delivered the best sermon ever, in his opinion, to those nine people. The following Sunday, there were only four.

The next two years were difficult. The collection was enough to buy a loaf of bread which had to last all week. Winter was especially cruel. He'd find his blankets snow covered when he awoke in the morning, as the rectory walls were split open. His first Christmas collection was a dollar and thirteen cents. Water froze in the cruets.

Father had had it. One day he sat down and wrote a sixteen-page letter, addressed to Bishop Francis P. Carroll, the gist of which was — this town is a write-off, and I want to stamp the dust of it off my feet. The Bishop rejected each and all of his requests for a transfer, and told him to stay put. He had full confidence in Fr. Violini, and he expected him to bring about a full Catholic revival in this parish, which had been so long neglected. After the latest of these rebuffs, Father was ready to pray for a noble death.

On the feast of Corpus Christi, as he walked to the church, he noticed the front door hanging off its hinges. He hurried in and gazed at a scene of great destruction. The walls were in shambles, the statues destroyed and then he noticed the tabernacle had been split open and the consecrated Hosts were scattered down the main aisle. One by one, he gathered them up, counting each one. They were all there except the large Benediction Host which he could find nowhere.

A search party of 2,000 people, many from afar (but no locals), searched for the missing host. Two suspects had stolen and abandoned a pickup truck. Father Violini recognized them as transients. Father explained the meaning of the Blessed Sacrament to them, and how precious it is to Catholics. He then offered to drop all the charges if they would tell him where they had discarded the Host. Touched by his explanation, they offered to help find it. One admitted discarding it through the truck window just before the police took them into custody. They all piled into the police cruiser, the two suspects still handcuffed.

As they rounded a corner, they all saw the Host suspended in midair beside the highway. Beautiful rays of coloured light shone from it. Even before the car had stopped, Father leaped from the car and ran towards this astonishing sight. Father fell to his knees in adoration, overcome with joy and wonder. Sergeant Parsons did likewise, and landed in a pool of mud.

Father stood up and reached for the Host. It looked as white and fresh as the day he had consecrated it. As he touched it, they heard: "Father Gino, please take me back to Cowley."

Here was Christ, asking to be returned to a desecrated church; to a parish that Father had long wanted to leave. The Bishop arrived the next day and prayed with him in the devastated sanctuary. As he finished, he turned to Father Gino to say: "Great changes will soon take place in this parish."

Sergeant Parsons came to ask for instruction a few days later. His wife and children soon joined him, and later two of his constables from Pincher Creek. As time went on, more and more Catholics began to return to their church. The parish mission was so popular that the beer hall shut down when it was in progress. The patrons, many of whom were not Catholic, would carry the bar stools to the church to listen to Father's sermons. They even had to take out the pot-bellied stove to make room for everyone.

The little church, so long abandoned, was now full to overflowing every Sunday.