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Feb. 15, St. Claude la ColombiËre, S. J.

Gerelyn Hollingsworth | Feb. 15, 2010 NCR Today

Accomplish your will within me--
even in spite of me.

--from *Hearts on Fire: Praying with Jesuits, [1]* by Michael G. Harter, S.J., Loyola Press, 2005, a collection of prayers written by St. Claude la Colombière, Daniel Berrigan, Pedro Arrupe, Bl. Peter Faber, Joseph Tetlow, St. Robert Southwell, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Karl Rahner, St. Peter Canisius, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Daniel A. Lord, et al.

St. Claude la Colombière [2] was born in 1641 and entered the Society of Jesus at the age of 17. "In 1666 he went to the College of Clermont in Paris for his studies in theology. Already noted for his tact, poise and dedication to the humanities, Claude was assigned by superiors in Paris the additional responsibility of tutoring the children of Louis XIV's Minister of Finance, Jean-Baptiste Colbert."

Click here [3] for more about Colbert and his children.

In 1675, Fr. Columbière pronounced his solemn profession and was named rector of the College at Paray-le-Monial. He became the confessor for the Visitation Convent and spiritual director to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque. [4]

"She opened her soul to him and told of the supernatural events taking place in her life. He had the insight to recognize this prayer as a real gift from God and a true revelation. In his own prayer, Colombière [5]came to learn the Lord's wishes more clearly. In June 1675 the Lord made an explicit request regarding the devotion to his Sacred Heart, asking her to establish the Friday following the octave of Corpus Christi as a special feast and to tell Colombière to do all he could to spread this devotion."

In 1676, Claude was sent to St. James's Palace [6] to be the preacher to the Duchess of York, [7] wife of James, Duke of York, younger brother of King Charles II.

"In addition to sermons in the palace chapel and unremitting spiritual direction both oral and written, Claude dedicated his time to giving thorough instruction to the many who sought reconciliation with the Church they had abandoned. And even if there were great dangers, he had the consolation of seeing many reconciled to it, so that after a year he said: 'I could write a book about the mercy of God I've seen Him exercise since I arrived here!'"

In 1678, the perjurer Titus Oates [8]set off a frenzy of anti-Catholic hysteria by accusing Jesuits and other Catholics of a "Popish Plot" [9] to assassinate King Charles II.

"Those executed for the Plot were: in 1678 Edward Coleman (Dec. 3); in 1679, John Grove, William Ireland, S.J. (Jan. 24), Robert Green, Lawrence Hill (Feb. 21), Henry Berry (Feb. 28), Thomas Pickering, O.S.B. (May

14), Richard Langhorn (June 14), John Gavan, S.J., William Harcourt, S.J., Anthony Turner, S.J., Thomas Whitebread, S.J., John Fenwick, S.J. (June 20); in 1680, Thomas Thwing (Oct. 23), William Howard, Viscount Stafford (Dec. 29); in 1681, Oliver Plunkett, Archbishop of Armagh (July 1).

"Those executed as priests were: in 1679, William Plessington (July 19), Philip Evans, John Lloyd (July 22), Nicholas Postgate (Aug. 7), Charles Mahony (Aug. 12), John Wall (Francis Johnson), O.S.F., John Kemble (Aug. 22), Charles Baker (David Lewis) S.J. (Aug. 27)."

--from "Oates's Plot" [10] in The Catholic Encyclopedia

Claude la Colombière was arrested in 1678 and confined in the "King's Bench Prison where he remained for three weeks in extremely poor conditions until his expulsion from England by royal decree. This suffering further weakened Claude's health which, with ups and downs, deteriorated rapidly on his return to France."

St. Claude la Colombière died at Paray on Feb. 15, 1682.

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