

Chapter Fifteen

June 2015.

Our Lady of Fatima Church (“Cova”) and Grounds, Detroit, Michigan.

Cova Rectory, Friday Afternoon, June 19, 2015.

On Friday afternoon at four o’clock, after Mikhail Romanov had left the Cova to meet the Petersons at Detroit City Airport to fly to New York for the ball, Father Kiril and “Father Jacob” met together in the rectory office. To help preserve his anonymity, the Pope had been saying his daily Mass privately in the rectory chapel, very early in the mornings, with only Father Kiril or Father Belarus in attendance. The Holy Father had spent most of Friday afternoon, after Mikhail’s late morning departure, working on correspondence and administrative matters for the Vatican. On Monday he had sent his most highly trusted personal assistant, Father John Herald, back to Rome to oversee every detail of the preparations for the consecration ceremony. They talked together several times each day by secure telephone, and Nicholas was pleased with Father Herald’s wisdom and fortitude in such a difficult undertaking. He knew that enemies of the consecration lurked everywhere in the halls of the Vatican, and he was glad that Father Herald had a cadre of trustworthy and dedicated Swiss Guards, devout young men selected by Nicholas himself who would stay with Father Herald at all times, guarding him even while he slept.

As “Father Jacob” settled into a comfortable chair in the rectory, he wistfully imagined what it would be like to have the “Thank Goodness It’s Friday” perspective, so possible for the working man in today’s world as the weekend begins. But, for the Holy Father, the work was never done. That did not mean, however, that a bit of Friday afternoon spirits was in any way precluded.

“I have asked the housekeeper to bring us each a ‘Russian Sunrise,’” announced Father Kiril. “It’s mostly orange juice, so it’s quite healthy. But it contains a sufficient quantity of Jagermeister to fortify us for the tasks ahead.”

“Very good, Father. It would hardly do to argue with such a thoughtful host.”

“The news people have not been kind to the Holy Father this week, Father Jacob.” Because the housekeeper was expected any minute, Father Kiril had to use the Pope’s birth name. “On Tuesday morning, after the Proclamation was read in Rome, the press was vicious. Each day since then their attacks have escalated. Some bigoted anti-Catholic writers now publish innuendoes that the Pope’s actual secret location may be a psychiatric hospital, although of course the paparazzi telephoto shots, apparently showing him in the Italian monastery, stave off most such speculation. And there was one attempt to attack your brother – whom

the world supposes is you – in the Italian monastery. An unidentified man dressed all in black, including a black ski-mask, lobbed a grenade over the monastery wall at the time your brother usually exercises in the walled garden. Fortunately, the grenade failed to detonate. The paparazzi published a telephoto image of the man running off into the woods, but so far he has not been apprehended.”

“Here is what I have been thinking,” said Nicholas. “‘Woe unto you when all men speak well of you!’⁷⁰ ‘Blessed are you when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice and be very glad, for great is your reward in Heaven.’⁷¹ ‘If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.’⁷² These words of Our Lord often comfort me when the storms arise. It then seems to me as if, in the midst of the tempest, He is with me in the bow of the Bark of Peter, rebuking the wind and the waves and saying, ‘Peace, be still!’”⁷³

“Your faith is very great.”

“Much grace comes with the office. It is not so much ability but willingness, not so much fortitude but submissiveness, which enables me to carry on.”

“What do you think will happen when you fly to Rome in the morning?”

“The Holy Angels will protect me. Just as they have protected me here in this most unlikely of all places for a papal retreat. Otherwise, there would be no way to guarantee my safety. But you see, Heaven wants this consecration done every bit as much as I do. The Brown Group will fly me, disguised as ‘Father Jacob,’ into a private airport just outside Rome. First they will fly under the radar into a remote northern Italian town, and then take off for Rome as if we are an Italian domestic flight. That way no passport or customs will uncover my identity. Their security men, dressed as civilians, will drive me into the city in an unmarked private car. Father Herald has arranged for me to hide out in the apartment of Father Ignacio Battista, who lives just two blocks from Saint Peter’s Square. His apartment doubles as his office, and there is a sleeper sofa so his pro-life organization can accommodate the occasional priest traveling to Rome on a limited budget.”

“Yes, I know Father Battista. He is the Rome Correspondent for Worldwide Defense of Human Life. A very erudite man, who was a South American attorney before entering the priesthood. He has helped some of my parishioners find their way around Rome when they travel there as pilgrims. They say he is a holy priest and an expert on the art and history of Rome. By choice, he only says the Tridentine Mass.”

“He is a good man. But the press tries to ignore people like him. The best way they can silence them is to pretend they don’t even exist. So if

⁷⁰ Luke 6:26.

⁷¹ Matthew 5:11-12.

⁷² John 15:20.

⁷³ Mark 4:39.

he has ‘Father Jacob’ staying in his office for a night, no one will notice. Everyone’s eyes will be on the Apostolic Palace, looking for the Pope’s arrival.”

“When will you arrive?”

“Father Herald has arranged for expedited clearance for ‘Father Jacob’ right into the sacristy of Saint Peter’s Basilica. A few Swiss Guards who will be posted in the right places have photos of me in my disguise, and are instructed to escort ‘Father Jacob’ right in to where Father Herald will be waiting. They will be informed I am an old friend of the Pope from Germany who has been invited to assist with the ceremony.”

“And once you are in the sacristy?”

The housekeeper had now served the drinks and left, and the office door was closed, ensuring privacy.

“There will be twelve Swiss Guards present when I remove my disguise and don the papal robes. They are all trained in military and martial arts and will be armed with modern weapons. It will no longer matter if people figure out how I was disguised, or where I have been on retreat. So you and Don Brown may find the news media hounding you here to some extent, but by then most of the media attention will have been diverted to Rome and Russia.”

“What about security for the bishops coming to Saint Peter’s? Won’t they also be in great danger?”

“Only standard Vatican security will be needed for them. Most of them will be housed inside the Vatican in the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*, the dormitory built to house Cardinals during future papal conclaves. Our enemies will understand that killing a few bishops, or even a Cardinal or two, would make no difference, because the remaining ones would still constitute ‘all the Catholic bishops in the world.’ So if any of them were attacked, it would be for spite, not because it would stop the consecration. Actually, any such violence would probably do more damage to our opponents’ agenda than to our own. So if there is any violence, it will be staged as the work of a ‘radical individual acting alone.’ The only bishop who is absolutely essential to the process is the Bishop of Rome.”

“It sounds as if Father Herald has all the bases covered.”

“Yes. He is even adding the ‘Detroit special’ security device that you insisted I wear here.”

“You mean the Kevlar flak jacket? In Saint Peter’s?”

“Yes. Only until the consecration is completed. We just cannot risk a lone gunman putting a stop to the coming Russian sunrise.”

“You are wearing it here, then?”

“Oh, yes. It’s heavy and uncomfortable, but it is my duty to take reasonable precautions since my life is not my own, and the salvation of countless souls depends upon the completion of the consecration. There is a very great danger that the current College of Cardinals would not elect a successor who would do the consecration. We only have this one opportunity left. If the consecration is delayed any longer, I fear, the vision

of the bishop dressed in white may be fulfilled literally.”

“So you don’t really think the attempted assassination of Leo Alexander II by a lone gunman in Saint Peter’s Square was the fulfillment of the vision?”

“Not anymore, no. I allowed the Vatican Secretary of State to hoodwink me some years ago, when I signed onto the Vatican document released in 2000 that purported to declare an end to the relevance of Fatima as prophecy. But then there was that former close friend of the Secretary, an Italian journalist and television personality,⁷⁴ who researched the whole matter, starting with the assumption that the 2000 document was correct. In the process of his excellent and very thorough research, he came to realize that part of the Third Secret was held back – that is, the actual words of Our Lady of Fatima – and that the consecration has never been done in the exact manner requested by Heaven.”

“Well, then what do you think the vision is all about?”

“I carry a copy in my pocket at all times. These are the words written down by Sister Lucy, the only Fatima seer who lived into adulthood, describing her vision. Here, you take it and read it out loud to me.”

Nicholas handed Kiril a folded and yellow sheet of paper that appeared to have been well-traveled and unfolded many times. It was slightly torn across some of the creases. At some time in the past the text had been printed out on a computer. It read as follows:

J.M.J.

The third part of the secret revealed at the Cova da Iria-Fatima, on 13 July 1917.

I write in obedience to you, my God, who command me to do so through his Excellency the Bishop of Leiria and through your Most Holy Mother and mine.

After the two parts which I have already explained, at the left of Our Lady and a little above, we saw an Angel with a flaming sword in his left hand; flashing, it gave out flames that looked as though they would set the world on fire; but they died out in contact with the splendor that Our Lady radiated towards him from her right hand: pointing to the earth with his right hand, the Angel cried out in a loud voice: ‘Penance, Penance, Penance!’. And we saw in an immense light that is God: ‘something similar to how people appear in a mirror when they pass in front of it’ a Bishop dressed in White ‘we had the impression that it was the Holy Father’. Other Bishops, Priests, men and women Religious going up a steep mountain, at the top of which there was a big Cross of rough-hewn trunks as of a cork-tree with the bark; before reaching there the Holy Father passed through a big city half in

⁷⁴ Socci, Antonio, *The Fourth Secret of Fatima*. See Bibliography.

ruins and half trembling with halting step, afflicted with pain and sorrow, he prayed for the souls of the corpses he met on his way; having reached the top of the mountain, on his knees at the foot of the big Cross he was killed by a group of soldiers who fired bullets and arrows at him, and in the same way there died one after another the other Bishops, Priests, men and women Religious, and various lay people of different ranks and positions. Beneath the two arms of the Cross there were two Angels each with a crystal aspersorium in his hand, in which they gathered up the blood of the Martyrs and with it sprinkled the souls that were making their way to God.⁷⁵

Kiril finished reading, and laid the paper on the end table. He savored another sip of his Russian Sunrise, and both men sat silent for a moment, pondering what had just been read. Then Kiril spoke.

“Do you think any of this has happened yet?”

“No, not anymore. I think it may be a warning to the Popes of what will eventually happen if they delay too long in obeying the request of Heaven to do the consecration. And I am hopeful that, because of the obedience we will finally demonstrate Sunday evening, it may never come to pass.”

“Some say Our Lady’s words explaining the vision were written down by Sister Lucy, but on a separate paper – what one prominent Italian journalist has called ‘The Fourth Secret of Fatima.’”⁷⁶

“They are correct, of course,” said the Pope. “Actually, I sent that courageous journalist a personal note, thanking him for the sentiments in his book,⁷⁷ because he is telling the truth. A number of Popes and high ranking priests have read that carefully guarded page containing Our Lady’s actual words. Pope John XXIII had Malachi Martin read it.⁷⁸ I read it back when I was a Cardinal. But I cannot possibly disclose to you right now the contents of that page, which contains the actual words of Our Lady of Fatima. In 2000 the Vatican Secretary of State tried desperately to bury the very fact of its existence. All I can tell you is this: if the consecration is not done, if Popes continue to refuse obedience to the simple mandate of Heaven, the future of mankind looks very bleak indeed.”

“How can I assist you in your final evening here, Father Jacob?”

“I need to spend the evening hours in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. I want to have the church locked after nine o’clock tonight, with Father Belarus posted in the back to assist me if needed, and the Swiss Guards and Brown Group security men posted all around the exterior. I must not be disturbed short of a world crisis. Tonight Our Lord

⁷⁵ Downloaded from Vatican website on August 30, 2010 at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000626_message-fatima_en.html

⁷⁶ Socci, Antonio, *The Fourth Secret of Fatima*. See Bibliography.

⁷⁷ Ferrara, Christopher, *The Secret Still Hidden*, Appendix II, No. 99. See Bibliography.

⁷⁸ <http://www.fatima.org/crusader/cr77/cr77pg04.asp>, downloaded on November 22, 2010.

will help me to obtain the grace I must have in order to go on tomorrow to the Calvary which awaits me in Rome. At this point, the consecration ceremony is the easy part. But the rage of the prince of this world, which will follow in its aftermath, may result in my destruction. Yet if it does, it will not matter, for the good deed will be done and Heaven's promise of unimaginable blessings for Russia and eventually the whole world will unfold in such a time and manner as Heaven sees fit. As for me, I think of Our Lord's parable: 'I am only going to do those things which are commanded; I am an unprofitable servant: I have done that which it was my duty to do.'⁷⁹

With that, the Holy Father took his leave from the rectory office, and went upstairs to his room to rest in preparation for his late-night prayer vigil that was to begin at nine o'clock.

Cova Church and Cemetery, Friday Evening, June 19, 2015.

At nine o'clock Friday evening Pope Nicholas descended from his rectory bedroom, and informed Father Kiril that he was ready to begin his prayer vigil in the church. The Pope was dressed in a Benedictine monk's hooded white robe, with a white rope belt about his waist. When Father Kiril looked surprised, Nicholas explained that the Swiss Guards liked him to change his appearance from time to time for increased security, especially at night, and so they had suggested that a white monk's robe would make it easier for them to see and protect him in the dark church and on the late-night walk back to the rectory. Father Belarus was waiting in the kitchen, and was again assigned to sit in the back of the church and watch, in case the Holy Father should need any assistance. The guards were already at their posts, and the church had been "swept" by Brown Group security men to ensure there were no other persons lingering within.

As Nicholas walked with Father Belarus across the rectory lawn to the side door of the church, the brilliant light of a full moon in the cloudless June night sky bathed everything in a silvery glow. It was actually somewhat cool this evening even for Michigan, about sixty-five degrees Fahrenheit, making the monk's robe welcome for its warmth. Michel, a Swiss Guard in plain clothes, unlocked the church door as the two priests arrived, and assured them that absolute security was being maintained on the outside perimeter of the church. As Nicholas heard Michel lock the door behind him, he breathed a sigh of relief. Here in this vast neo-gothic stone room was immense peace. The church was dark except for the flickering red candle of the sanctuary lamp suspended high above the center of the marble-floored sanctuary, and two small spotlights illuminating the tabernacle on the altar. A faint glow of moonlight shone through the large stained-glass windows.

As before, Pope Nicholas prostrated himself before the high altar, and once again sought the advice and consolation of Jesus in this hour of anticipation for the coming tempest. He remembered the rage and ridicule that had come at him all week long from the mainstream press,

⁷⁹ Luke 17:10.

following the announcement of the consecration. Once again he begged Christ for forgiveness for himself and all his predecessors since 1929, who had delayed, out of human respect, from fulfilling the simple request made by His Blessed Mother. Minutes passed, perhaps hours, while the Pope remained deep in prayer.

After some time Nicholas moved from the main altar to a kneeler in the corner of the south transept. Here were two statues, traditional in style and yet obviously the recent work of a skilled artisan, inspired by the vision reported in the 2000 document on Fatima issued by the Vatican. Our Lady of Fatima stood, looking down at a globe representing the world, with a gaze of immense love and patience. Golden rays extended from Her outstretched right hand, toward the figure beside Her. *At the left of Our Lady and a little above stood an angel with a flaming sword in his left hand. It gave out flames that looked as though they would set the world on fire; but they died out in contact with the splendor that Our Lady radiated towards him from Her right hand. Pointing to the earth with his right hand, the angel cried out, and his words were inscribed on the base of the statue: "Penance! Penance! Penance!"*

Nicholas prayed here for a few minutes, pondering the urgent need of repentance for all the nations of the modern world. His heart was pierced with sorrow as he realized that the delay of the Popes for the past ninety-eight years in performing the consecration had undoubtedly forestalled the urgently needed restoration of Christian civilization for nearly as many years. How many souls had failed to work out their own salvation in fear and trembling because the world and the Church had been focused on politics and ecumenism instead of earnestly preaching the Gospel in season and out of season? How many young Catholics had never even heard sound preaching about the last four things: death, judgment, Heaven, and hell? How many souls had needlessly been lost even during the years of Nicholas' own pontificate? Nicholas prostrated himself before Our Lady of Fatima, and wept bitterly in sorrow for his own sins, not only for what he had done, but especially for what he had failed to do. After a prolonged period of waiting in silence, Nicholas perceived that Our Lady, as the Mother of Sorrows, was calling him to visit Her at the Calvary on the hill in the back of the Cova cemetery, which would be ever so brightly lit in the moonlight. For She understood his sorrow, and wanted to console him there.

So Nicholas arose, and called out.

"Father Belarus, are you there?"

"Yes, Your Holiness." The tight security made it safe to use the proper form of address for the Pope.

"I feel the need to make a little pilgrimage this evening, through the cemetery behind this church and up the hill at the back to the Calvary. The moon is so bright that there should be no difficulty. Will you inform the guards, and ask them to notify us when they are ready to secure the cemetery?"

"Of course, Your Holiness."

The Swiss Guards were skeptical, but the can-do local men working for the Brown Group security service took the position that this was the Holy Father's secret retreat, and that, within reason, he should be allowed to go wherever he felt led by his prayers. Who were they to second-guess the propriety of a conversation between Heaven and the Pope? Their job was to make sure he stayed safe. It was now almost one o'clock in the morning, and the moon was directly overhead, bathing the entire cemetery in silver light. The city was mostly asleep, and no one was likely to notice a few men walking through the cemetery. Four Swiss Guards and four Brown Group security officers positioned themselves around the perimeter of the cemetery, and then they radioed to Father Belarus the "all clear" to bring the Pope out of the church.

As they walked across the parking lot and entered the cemetery gate between high stone pillars, Nicholas read the sign: "Saint Mary's Roman Catholic Cemetery, 1852." He stopped to read the inscription on one of the pillars, explaining that the replica of the little chapel at the Cova da Iria in Fatima, Portugal, had been erected in the cemetery in 1932, when the parish was renamed in honor of Our Lady of Fatima. It was styled to resemble the little white building with a tile roof that had been erected in 1919 in front of the little tree upon which Our Lady of Fatima appeared to the three shepherd children. However, unlike the original little chapel that had just one door, the chapel in the Cova cemetery had multiple folding glass doors that could open it up to serve as a sheltered high altar for the celebration of outdoor Masses. Large crowds of pilgrims would come on the thirteenth day of each summer and autumn month to commemorate the 1917 apparitions. The parish's regular Masses for First Fridays and First Saturdays were also held outdoors at the little Cova chapel whenever the weather permitted.

"Father, do you have a flashlight?" asked Nicholas.

"Of course, Your Holiness."

Nicholas began to shine the bright light on tombstones as he worked his way into the cemetery. Down the center, leading back to the little Cova chapel, was a long brick sidewalk. But Nicholas preferred to wander in and out among the graves, taking note of the history and evidence of Faith that could thereby be gleaned. Most family plots had a tall monument, such as a stone crucifix towering eight or ten feet, or a life-size statue of an angel or a saint. Nicholas knew that the dark-clad security guards were patrolling at the perimeter. Once or twice he thought he saw some of them move about behind the larger monuments, as if they were young children playing hide and seek in a moonlit forest.

"Here we are," commented Father Belarus, "surrounded by the half-ruined neighborhoods of inner city Detroit, neighborhoods which in 1929 were filled with elegant new homes, built of solid timbers and fine woodwork, homes filled with throngs of happy children growing up in large Catholic families. In those days a Catholic man working in a manufacturing plant could easily earn enough to raise such a family, and his wife could stay home and manage the household. People lived within

one to four blocks of their parish church, and they could easily walk to Mass or confession any day of the week. The life of their neighborhoods revolved around the liturgical calendar of feast days and seasons, and they could send their children out into the neighborhood knowing that they would be protected and corrected as needed by every adult, and even by most older children, whom they were likely to encounter. It was a Catholic world in these close-knit neighborhoods.”

“Sometimes I think these faithful souls, whose Faith is proclaimed so boldly on their gravestones and monuments, could hardly have imagined that in a mere hundred years many of their homes would be burned out shells, and almost no one in the neighborhood would even try to keep the Faith.”

“In Europe there is no urban decay like this, is there?” asked Father Belarus.

“No, but the spiritual decimation is every bit as complete. Architecturally intact neighborhoods filled with healthy bodies whose souls are mostly dead in mortal sin is hardly any better than this.”

The Holy Father noted that the sidewalk down the center was lined with posts supporting plaques depicting the fourteen Stations of the Cross. It reminded Nicholas that perfect obedience to Heaven always meant, one way or another, the way of the cross.

“Here is a monument to the millions of unborn infants sacrificed in the abortion holocaust,” said Father Belarus. “Some parishioners were able to retrieve the mutilated bodies of many babies from dumpsters behind abortuaries, and they were brought here and buried after a requiem Mass offered by the Archbishop in the Cova church.”

The Pope knelt down on the kneeler in front of the grave, and wept.

“Father Herald told me the story of how Father Kiril was arrested and put on trial, as a young seminarian, for “disturbing the peace” by daring to picket outside an abortion clinic. In those early days the diocese was more worried about the bad publicity of a troublemaker priest than it was about decrying the legalized slaughter of innocent souls. But Father Kiril’s courage of conviction changed things. The new Archbishop himself offered the requiem Mass and assisted at the proper burial for these innocent little ones.”

“But can they make it to Heaven without having been baptized?” asked Father Belarus.

“I always think about what Our Lord Jesus said: ‘See that you despise not one of these little ones: for I say to you that their angels in Heaven always see the face of My Father who is in Heaven.’⁸⁰ God is perfect in justice, but also in mercy.”

Soon Nicholas had reached the paved plaza in front of the Cova chapel. In the moonlight, the glass doors spread across the front of the chapel emitted a mysterious silvery glow. As Nicholas walked past them, he saw his reflection in the doors, as if in a series of mirrors. But through

⁸⁰ Matthew 18:10, DRV.

his white-robed reflection in the glass doors he could see the exceptionally bright light of the red sanctuary lamp, burning to attest to the very presence of God in the Blessed Sacrament, which was reserved in the tabernacle on the altar of the locked chapel. Superimposed on his small reflection, the light inside appeared to be enormous. For a moment, he had a powerful sense of unexplained *déjà vu*. Then he realized that this present scene was eerily similar to a certain passage in the Third Secret of Fatima, which Father Kiril had read to him that very morning: *An immense light that is God ... something similar to how people appear in a mirror ... a Bishop dressed in White ... we had the impression that it was the Holy Father ...*

“Strangest coincidence,” said Nicholas.

“What’s that, Your Holiness?”

“Oh, nothing, really ... I think it is getting late, Father Belarus, and I am so tired that I am beginning to imagine things. Can you help me now to find my way up to the Calvary?”

“This way, Your Holiness. Behind the little chapel, the hill suddenly becomes quite steep. In time past the hill was considered to be a place of honor, where the graves of many *Bishops, Priests, and men and women Religious* were placed, as if *going up a steep mountain* to Calvary. At one time there was a stone stairway, but long ago it fell into disrepair, and so we have to make our way somewhat carefully up the hill over the graves.”

Father Belarus used his flashlight to help Nicholas find his footing. In the process, the names and offices of many of the departed were illuminated. Here were two Archbishops, several auxiliary bishops, and many holy priests and nuns, as well as religious brothers who had taught in Detroit’s once-thriving Catholic schools.

“These precious servants of Jesus and Mary could never have imagined this *big city half in ruins*, surrounding the hallowed ground in which they now rest awaiting the resurrection,” mused Nicholas. “My soul is heavy with sadness when I think what has become of the once-vibrant Catholic culture which they bequeathed to those of us who would come after. Did they ever imagine that one day a Pope would stand upon their graves, at two o’clock in the morning in the moonlight, and think of their dedication and sacrifice? We have permitted most of former Christendom to self-destruct, because we have been too busy trying to make friends with the enemies of Christ, not by seeking to convert them, but by ‘dialog.’”

The Pope *half-trembled*, as his *halting steps* became uncertain on the steep hillside. His heart was *afflicted with pain and sorrow*, and he knelt down for a few moments to rest, and to *pray for the souls of the corpses he met on his way* up the hillside. After several minutes, Nicholas stood up, and asked Father Belarus to guide him up the rest of the way.

At the top of the hill stood a *big Cross*, at least fifteen feet high, fashioned *of rough-hewn trunks as of a cork-tree with the bark*. The carved-stone Corpus on the cross was life-sized, as were the statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of Saint John, which flanked it. Despite being in excellent condition, nevertheless Nicholas was an octogenarian and

was physically tired from the climb up the hill. But more importantly, he began to feel the weight of the world and its spiritual conflicts descending upon him. *Having reached the top of the mountain, he fell on his knees at the feet of the big Cross.* In his exhaustion he had no choice but to throw his arms about the shaft of the cross, as he began to weep and pray. Father Belarus thought someone was approaching up the hill from behind him, so he turned and began to descend the hill part-way, to see who it might be.

All at once, without warning, two groups of men in military camouflage uniforms stepped out from behind nearby monuments and pointed their weapons in the direction of the big Cross. One group, in United States army uniforms, had guns, and the other group, in United States Marine uniforms, had modern hunting cross-bows designed to shoot arrows. To his horror, as Father Belarus turned and watched the Holy Father from a distance, he saw that *he was killed by a group of soldiers who fired bullets and arrows at him.* Angry shouts rang out from the men, in a barrage of profanity and accusations of betrayal. The Swiss Guards and Brown Group security men quickly closed in, wrestling one Marine and one Army soldier to the ground and disarming them, while the other assailants escaped over the cemetery fences and into the adjacent labyrinth of abandoned houses. It was apparent from the attackers' exchange of words and accusations that they had a huge cache of illegal drugs hidden beneath the big Cross, a stash which had recently been flown in from Afghanistan on a United States military plane. The Army men and the Marines had each assumed that the others had sent the white-robed monk to steal the stash for their own profit, rather than splitting the drugs fifty-fifty as agreed. The four Brown Security men carried the two captive attackers off to a safe distance so that they would not overhear any discussion revealing the identity of their white-robed victim.

Jacques, one of the Swiss Guards, was trained as an emergency medical technician, and said he needed to determine the condition of the "monk." While he quickly ran the thirty yards to retrieve his medical kit, Father Belarus knelt beside the motionless white-robed figure and began to offer last rites. In the background, some of the Brown Group security men were advising the other Swiss Guards that it was impossible to call the Detroit police, lest the identity of the victim become known before there would be any time to plan for contingencies. They worried that the world would think the Holy Father had been killed in order to stop the consecration of Russia, when in fact he had been innocently caught in the middle of a midnight drug swap between corrupted members of two different branches of the United States military. The sound of gunfire was a nightly occurrence in inner city Detroit neighborhoods, and by itself would not arouse any suspicion.

In those intense moments of distress, the fact that these amoral drug dealers could well be unwitting accomplices of hell, assassinating the Holy Father on the eve of the consecration without even realizing what they were doing, did not yet occur to any of them.

Back in the rectory, Father Kiril's unlisted cell phone jangled on his nightstand. Only a few trusted parishioners, fellow religious, diocesan officials, and hospitals knew this number, so he always answered it, even in the middle of the night. Probably he would have to go for last rites at a hospital, he thought.

"Father Kiril speaking."

"Good evening Father," said the familiar voice of Jim Johnson. "I hate to wake you up, Father, but I'm worried. I heard gunshots across the street, and it sounded like it could have been right in the cemetery."

Jim and his wife were African-American parishioners who lived in the neighborhood, and were mainstays of the parish. Jim was always fixing something around the parish grounds on his days off, and the younger five of their seven children all currently participated in the Cova's homeschool support program. The older two children were in college on merit scholarships. The oldest son, now a college senior about to graduate with honors – who had served at the altar under Father Kiril since he was seven – had recently been seeking spiritual direction from Father Kiril about entering the seminary to discern if he might have a vocation to the priesthood. Kiril was always available to people like this, because they gave much more than they ever received from him. Such lives of heroic quiet virtue made him feel that all the relentless sacrifice involved in being a holy priest and dedicated pastor was, all told, a very good bargain.

"Jim, we hear gunfire in the neighborhood every night. There are extra security people on duty this week, and they are out patrolling the grounds even now."

"Okay, Father, I just wanted to be certain you were safe over there."

"God bless you for your concern, Jim. I'll keep an extra eye out for any trouble."

"Okay, then, Father. Just be careful. Good night."

At the Calvary atop the hill in the cemetery, as Father Belarus began to trace the sign of the cross on the forehead of the motionless Pope and to pray the prescribed prayers for a departed Christian soul, he was suddenly interrupted by an unexpected but familiar voice.

"Not so fast, Father! Not so fast! I know you mean well. But I am not dead yet!"

"Your Holiness!" laughed Father Belarus.

"I thought I should play dead for awhile, at least until I was certain they were done shooting."

"Are you badly hurt, Your Holiness?"

"You know, Father, I really don't believe I'm seriously wounded at all. Dear Father Kiril insisted on my wearing this flak jacket at all times while I am here in Detroit. And to think I tried to give him a hard time about it!"

Jacques, the Swiss Guard medic, now approached Nicholas.

"Holy Father, you are alive! Praise God! Uh, but you have a bit of blood on one sleeve, I see ... and also on the edge of your hood. I will

need to inspect your wounds immediately.”

“Jacques, you are the one who sided with Father Kiril against me, and forced me to wear this heavy bulletproof vest, against my own will. I had to rest halfway up this hill because of all the extra weight.”

“But I just wanted you to be safe.”

“Yes, and so now I have to thank you for being so obstinate. Your stubbornness has saved my life.”

“I will always remember this night when the Holy Father thanked me for having ignored His wishes,” laughed Jacques. “But I won’t tell it to my sons until they are too old to get into much trouble.”

“You won’t live until they are *that* old,” retorted Nicholas. “I am eighty-five and I still seem to get into trouble every day.”

Jacques was proceeding with his examination of the Pope’s wounds.

“Your wounds are superficial, Holy Father. It looks like a bullet just barely grazed the skin on your right cheek, and another bullet grazed your left forearm. That’s why there is only a little blood. Of course the white robe makes it look a lot worse than it really is.”

“I think we can thank the Holy Angels for guiding those bullets with such precision,” said Nicholas.

“Yes. And none of the arrows hit you at all.”

“It is as the psalmist says,” said Nicholas, a man of prayer who knew most of the psalms by heart: “ ‘His truth shall compass thee with a shield: thou shalt not be afraid of the terror of the night. Of the arrow that flies in the day, of the business that walketh about in the dark: of invasion, or of the noonday devil.’ ”⁸¹

“What are we going to do about the two men we captured?” asked Jacques.

“I will take full responsibility for this decision, my sons,” said Nicholas. “As a sovereign head of state I have diplomatic immunity, even if I am here illegally. It is my judgment that there is no reason to inform the local authorities, and there is every reason not to. I was smuggled into the United States in a private jet ‘under the radar.’ Tomorrow I have to be smuggled back into Rome the same way. So I can hardly afford to get caught up in a formal crime investigation involving corrupt United States military personnel,” said Nicholas. “Those two men over there have no idea they just shot at the Pope. We must let it stay that way.”

“So what do we do with them, Holy Father?”

“Let the Brown Group security men take them for a little ride out into the countryside, rough them up just a bit so they know who’s boss, and then let them go. Tell them that if they are ever caught stashing drugs on Catholic Church property again, the Brown Group boss, who knows many people in high places, will see to it that they are court-martialed.”

While the Brown Group security men herded the two military captives into one of their huge black SUV’s and sped off into the night, the four Swiss Guards and Father Belarus surrounded the Pope and escorted him back to the rectory. Father Kiril was sitting in the kitchen, in his robe and

⁸¹ Psalm 90:5-6, DRV.

pajamas.

“Holy Father, are you alright?” he asked anxiously, noting the blood on his hood and sleeve. “I am told there were gunshots out in the cemetery.” Then, in his most stern voice, he added, “In this neighborhood, that’s absolutely no place for you to be prowling around dressed like a monk in the middle of the night.”

“We are sorry, dear son. We have been properly chastened.”

For an ever-so-brief moment, Father Kiril felt a pang of guilt for having treated the Holy Father like an errant altar boy. But then he thought about how he was sitting up in the middle of the night because of this Pope’s moonlight madness, and he decided he was justified at being just a bit irritated. Father Kiril ran a tight ship in his parish, and this sort of thing was just too excessive. He certainly wouldn’t want to catch a group of his altar boys sneaking around in the cemetery late at night, like this impulsive Pope.

“Father Kiril, I do apologize for all the commotion. I know you probably have to say the early Mass in the morning. But something quite extraordinary has happened to me tonight.”

“You’ve been wounded.”

“Oh, just some scratches. Grazed by a couple of bullets. That’s nothing. Here’s the thing, Father: I have just lived through the vision of the Third Secret of Fatima.”

“What?”

“Here, let me read it out loud to you, and tell you how each and every line literally happened to me in the course of this evening of prayer. Right up until I was killed.”

Nicholas then explained to Father Kiril how it had begun with his prayer in front of the statues of Our Lady of Fatima and the angel with the flaming sword, and had progressed through seeing his reflection in the Cova chapel glass doors, his climb up the steep mountain over the graves, and then his being shot while kneeling at the foot of the big Cross.

“But then it stopped. *Other Bishops, Priests, men and women Religious, and various lay people of different ranks and positions*, were not shot along with me. So I knew this could not be the real fulfillment of the vision, but only a divine warning of how very, very close we have come to the complete fulfillment of this terrible vision.”

“That is remarkable,” said Kiril. “The attempt back in 2000 to make that vision fit the attempted assassination of Leo Alexander II by a lone gunman seemed awfully far-fetched. What actually happened didn’t seem to coincide at all with the words of the vision. But what you have reported tonight is precisely in tune with the vision. That does cause one to think Heaven is sending a message.”

“Yes, and the message is that the old Nicholas is finally dead: the young Father Jacob Ritter, gung-ho liberal *peritus* at Vatican II who figured he knew how to remake the Church to make it relevant to the new generation; the Cardinal who believed in ecumenism and Ostpolitik as the only realistic road to Christian unity; the Pope who went along with his

Secretary of State, issuing one part of the Third Secret of Fatima while trying to keep the other part – the actual words of Our Lady – forever buried and forgotten, because they condemned the major thrust of my liberal, modernist career.

“That Father Jacob, that Cardinal Ritter, even that previous Pope Nicholas, finally died tonight. The man who got up after the gunfire stopped is a new Pope Nicholas. Now I know for certain that only a miracle can save the world, and turn back the tide of destruction that has spiritually annihilated most of former Christendom.

“Only the consecration of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, publicly performed by the Pope in union with all the Catholic bishops in the world, can now move Heaven to shower upon our poor world the singular grace of a new, powerful Catholic Confessional State, which by its spreading influence will bring a new period of peace to the world.

“I see now that Jesus means it exactly as He said: He wants all the world to know that this great blessing, the miraculous sudden conversion of Russia, will have come about through the intercession of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, so that devotion to Her Immaculate Heart will be placed alongside devotion to His Sacred Heart, throughout the whole world.”

“You sound like you are ready to go to Rome, Holy Father. Like no one can stop you now.”

“Yes, I am ready. By God’s grace and mercy, the stubborn Pope who came here a week ago, who wasted his life trying to follow contemporary human wisdom, has finally died. It is a new man who will be returning to Rome, a Pope who can say, simply, ‘Let it be done to me according to Thy word,’⁸² and who can sincerely pray ‘Not my will, but Thine be done.’”⁸³

“As Our Lord observed, it does seem that ‘The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light,’”⁸⁴ said Father Kiril. “When we achieve true wisdom, then the world thinks we have become fools.”

“Of course. It is just as the Blessed Apostle Paul noted: ‘The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.’”⁸⁵

And with that, the two men headed up the rectory stairs to their respective rooms, to sleep the two or three hours remaining until the dawning of the new day would call them to their duties.

But Nicholas was not concerned about himself. In his heart he now could see, from afar off, that Heaven would soon be moved to deliver on its ninety-eight-year-old promise of a new Russian sunrise.

⁸² Luke 1:38.

⁸³ Luke 22:42.

⁸⁴ Luke 16:8.

⁸⁵ I Corinthians 1:25, DRV.