

## **Sanctity; a Way to the Transcendent -*Little Saint* by Hannah Green**

### **Reflection by Rose Klassen**

“There is only one tragedy in the end: Not to have been a saint.” Marcie presented this quote from Charles Peguy in her introduction to the ‘Year of the Pilgrim,’ and it is appropriate for those considering this year’s pilgrimage as well. However, how is sanctity possible? What is it? Sanctity does not have to be some aloof, abstract reality that one can never attain. Neither is it a weary focus on righteous good deeds without miracles. It is, in fact, a tender invitation from Christ to have faith in Heaven and to seek and find signs of its presence every moment of life.

When I first read this book, I was bed bound following a miscarriage, and that painful loss and limited movement made mind and heart ready for entering on a pilgrimage. Hannah, the narrator, shares with the reader her intimate vision of San Foy, and the saint’s role in the life of the Medieval town, Conques, which is not only a place of revered relics but a pre-pilgrimage route to the Camino de Santiago. The footsteps and canes on Conques’ stone streets were in my ears, the faces of its people-warm, devoted, ribald, sad, and full of charm-looked into mine. The cold fog touched my face and the fright of being lost on the mountain was relieved when I tasted the hot coffee with Hannah and Jack, who, when they found their way to safety, heard the story of the monk’s bells that used to guide and save the pilgrims wandering in the fog hundreds of years ago.

Indeed, the word “romieu,” which since the year 1000 in Conques meant all those who were on a pilgrimage to Rome, has over time become slang for “pilgrim.” So from where does our word “roam” come? For Hannah, it is directly linked to the old word for a pilgrim. This relationship strikes my heart, because pilgrimage, though the end is to find Paradise, is fraught with risk, with the tension of falling away from the path, with finding ourselves in the dark wood. Without acknowledgment of our weakness we would not seek so ardently for truth nor value love and the grace it brings to keep our feet directed.

Many of the books this year have explored how friends are God’s messengers; they give us the directions for our journey. I marvel at how the people of Conques venerate their San Foy. They sing about her, they think about her, they talk about her, they breathe her, all year round, year in and year out. However, what a wonder it is to discover that friendship between saints and pilgrims is reciprocal. For not only do we choose particular saints to be our friends, but they choose us as well. San Foy’s soul is marvelous like a “golden spark” Hannah says. My heart expands and almost breaks as I hear about her brave, virgin death, her miracles of tender mercy that are also touched with humor, or with a girlish desire for emeralds and gold to dress our Lord’s altar. Her delicate bones kept in the reliquary and her miracles that happened both in the ancient past but in the immediate present of the book allow me to see and touch the transcendent. Little by little elements of this world become part of Heaven and a saintly intercessor might in any unlooked for moment split the veil of time and space and illumine my mind and eyes with supernatural life. Prayer to the saints in this light takes on new meaning as I see how Christ listens to my needs through the heavenly friends in whom he takes delight. It is a communion of love.

Finally, San Foy has caused me to realize that the saints' role in bringing the supernatural to earthly reality is part of the Incarnational mystery. The tympanum-the stone relief carving that you walk under as you pass into the Basilique of San Foy-depicts the Last Judgement. The faces carved upon it are of Christ, Mary, San Foy, and the devils of Hell, and they bear the faces of those who lived and live in Conques-because these real people served as models for the stone carvers. Dante too met familiar faces all through his pilgrimage of Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory. Be careful about your reading! His was not a judgment on the sins of others, but an odyssey through his soul, a self-examination of conscience. So too does Little Saint call us not to only look upon the faces of others and judge, but to see our faces reflected there, and to thus examine our faults and beauty in regarding theirs. Even the stone angels bear the faces of Hannah's friends within the book. "The faces of angels are everywhere, everywhere," someone from Conques says. Spiritual reality has a human face because Christ became a man and because we are made in His image. It's when we love and when we open our hearts to God's gift of friendship that we encounter the eternal right in front of our noses.

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