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University of Notre Dame
Religious Bulletin
December 17, 1956

Vacation schedule: Daily
Mass in Dillon chapel at
7:15. Confessions at Mass
only

The First Christmas Crib

As the days grew shorter, and the nights more chilly, Francis set out for Greccio, a small town in the mountains. A friend of his lived there, another who had exchanged his wealth for a Franciscan cowl -- Giovanni da Velitta. Suddenly, in the fields, Francis saw an ox and an ass standing before a pile of hay, and a plan struck him. Thinking that he needed permission of the Holy Father for his plan, he visited Pope Honorius III. With permission granted, he broke the news to Brother Giovanni:

"I want to make a memorial to the Holy Child, that our bodily eyes may see at least part of the hardships of His infancy. Let us look upon Him as He lay in a manger on the hay, with the ox and the ass standing near. Let us celebrate this festival at Greccio, and do you prepare everything as I tell you."

Brother Giovanni did -- he built a stable with a manger inside, and an altar next to it. Meanwhile, Francis summoned his Brothers to Greccio for the Christmas Holiday. And they came -- along with hundreds of villagers, and shepherds. Francis stood beside the stable, welcoming all of them. The stable door was open. And all who saw it fell on their knees at the sight of the man and the woman beside the manger, of the ox and the ass, and of the Christ Child's image lying in the hay, wrapped in swaddling clothes. Then the priest intoned the angelic announcement:

"For to you is born this day a Saviour!"

And all who heard it folded their hands with a new depth of devotion, with Mary and Joseph who knelt by the manger, watched by the ox and the ass. The priest continued with the Christmas message:

"Peace on earth to men of good will!"

There were tears in Francis' eyes. He did not look at the kneeling crowd, but only at the small figure in the crib before him. His voice rang out like a bell: "King of Poverty -- King of Love --"

It was a song, not a sermon, that flowed from his lips -- the great hymn of love. His arms opened wide, as though to embrace the whole world. The youngest shepherd was the first to join in, then other children's voices rang out, and finally those of women and of men: "Gloria in excelsis Deo" -- the first Christmas hymn rose jubilantly to heaven whence it had come!

Overcome by tenderness, Francis bowed down to the manger. Tears of joy streamed down his face as he pressed the small figure to his heart. "The Child of Bethlehem," he cried with shining eyes, lifting it high that all might see it.

With trembling hands, Francis laid the figure back into the hay and knelt down. He had found the answer to the question at Bari: "How can I put the spirit of God's Birthday into the hearts of people?" The Christmas Crib was the way.

The Prefect of Religion, and the Class Chaplains, pray that the same spirit of Christ's Nativity will find a generous lodging in your hearts, too, this Christmas.

PRAYERS REQUESTED - Ill: for Jake Hinson, requested by the Hager family; for Anthony Jennings Doordan; and the grandmother of Bernie Cooper.

During Vacation: All Masses in Sacred Heart Church will be on the parish schedule.