

POPE INNOCENT'S DREAM

At last my house stood finished. A consuming project, years in the making, I began it from scratch. I planned it. I designed it. I hired the best architects, artists, draftsmen and engineers in all of Europe.

For years we immersed ourselves in even the smallest of details, for this house of mine was to be perfect, flawless in every way.

And I built it. With my own hands I built it. I supervised the entire operation, making sure that it progressed perfectly according to plan; no longer merely a project, but rather a passion.

And slowly, bit by bit and piece by piece it rose up in flawless beauty. The domes, the towers, the arches, the lines and angles all blending together in perfect symmetry until, a harmonious, balanced whole, it seemed to burst forth from the Earth like the Easter Lily.

And it was perfect, I noted with great delight. It had to be! For my house was to be a home, a haven, a refuge for all the people.

All the people! That was the dream – rich and poor, young and old, wise one and fool, noble and serf, warrior and leper – all could come to my house and call it their home, for in those dark and troubled days the people needed a home.

But nobody came. No one at all. Oh yes, all stood in awe, marveling at such beauty, such perfection. But that, they said, was the problem. My house seemed too perfect, too flawless, and they could not feel at home in my house.

Yes perfect, they insisted, but still a piece is missing – something very subtle but so vital. It seemed as though all the right parts were there, but the one element needed to bring the place alive, to give meaning and purpose to the structure had somehow failed to show itself.

Again I summoned the draftsmen, the artists, the architects, the designers and engineers. Again we poured over every detail in search of the missing piece, but all our efforts seemed wasted.

Finally, lying, they concurred: “Nothing is missing, all is in order! Unblemished it stands and nothing shall bring it down!”

“But my people – “ said I,

“Fear not!” they smiled, “perhaps something so new and different puts them ill at ease. Perhaps they will come in time.”

“Yes, perhaps,” I sighed, waiting for the day I feared would never come.

And then one night it happened. I was standing off in the distance watching my house glitter and sparkle like a jewel in the evening sun, its shadows casting fanciful designs across the troubled earth, while all seemed still and strangely silent, so much like the hushed, tensed up atmosphere that precedes a sudden bold of lightening on a warm summer’s evening.

And then, very quietly, it began. It was very faint at first, almost imperceptible, but oh, I heard it and I moaned.

There came a low rumbling like that of a wild animal, crouched low and poised, ready for the strike. And then louder and louder it grew, becoming more and more

menacing, the sound now seeming to come from all directions; a continual, deafening crescendo which threatened never to end!

The earth began to quiver and shake – and how the panic consumed me! For now I felt it, oh yes, my house was certain to fall! My precious pearl, my haven for the people - what had gone wrong? So many years, so many tears; now all seemed wasted.

It was happening. The foundation, so carefully lain, now began to buckle and slide. The towers, which had soared, it seemed, almost to heaven, now began to totter and convulse. And across the solid, sturdy walls, fissures began rapidly spreading like purple veins across old and sickly skin.

“Save it! Save it!” I heard myself cry, but no one was there to hear me. And my house, ah, that glorious and perfect fortress, now appeared so brittle and fragile.

And then, out of nowhere, there he was. He appeared such a slight and insignificant little man, this beggar. (Where had I seen him before?) Such a ragged and dirty man who seemed so weak and ill, he wore a torn and shredded tunic and his hands (oh, his poor hands!) were so beaten and battered.

But what a smile! How it seemed so in tune with all the joy and all the sadness the world has ever known! And how it seared right through me – bringing order and calm to the chaos within me!

Now I watched him approach my house. I shouted to him, telling him he would be crushed by the now certain collapse. But again he smiled, and now even the walls seemed to respond.

No! Could it be that the rumbling just grew a touch quieter? Could it be that the fissures drew themselves a bit narrower?

I rubbed my eyes and looked again. The beggar now stood flush against the main wall, his feet close together and his arms full extended so vulnerably. It seemed such an odd position (how dangerous and foolish!) from which to give support to a building. How could he expect to push while in such a perilous stance?

But wait –

No, he wasn't pushing it. Indeed, I saw no sign of a struggle. Instead, he exerted no force at all, but seemed to hang there limply.

I looked closer and saw.

He was kissing the building, cradling and caressing it. Yes, ever so tenderly, ever so gently, he was loving my house.

And yes, it was happening! The rumble softened and faded away. The fissures drew closed, the towers straightened up and the foundation solidified.

In a moment it was over. And there came a calm so soothing, and a new gracefulness and peace surging from somewhere deep within the building, making it seem more perfect than before.

He smiled again – and I knew. In an instant I understood that life was pouring out from my house. Finally! My house was now a home.

And they came. Oh, how the people came! Thousands upon thousands upon thousands, a steady, never-ending stream from every direction, they kept coming, pouring into my house and making it their home.

I awoke with a smile and stretched slowly and comfortably, relishing the newfound strength and vitality within me. “How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord God

of Hosts, “ I heard myself say, and with a fervor that seemed so long ago lost, I blessed the new day.