

ROSE PRINCE

of the

CARRIER NATION



Most of the greatest Saints are not known to us. Their holiness was hidden from our eyes and known only to Heaven. They drew no attention to themselves, but lived quiet and gentle lives of prayer and service to others.

Yet sometimes God in his mercy reveals to us a glimpse of the greatness that has been in our midst unrecognised. Such is the humble life of Rose Prince of the Carrier Nation in British Columbia.

AN ASTONISHING DISCOVERY

In 1951 it was decided to relocate a few graves that were west of the Lejac Indian Residential School. They would be moved to another larger cemetery nearby. During the transfer, the casket of a young woman named Rose Prince broke open. She had been buried two years earlier.

The workers were amazed to find both Rose's body and clothing perfectly preserved. Other bodies were examined. All of them, some buried after Rose, were found to be decaying. Witnesses were called, including some Sisters. They found her body in perfect condition. She seemed transparent and looked as if she were sleeping. There was "just a tiny little smile on her face." A bouquet of withered flowers was on her chest.

THE SIGN OF INCORRUPTION

Among Catholics such bodily incorruption has a very special meaning. The Church accepts this as a sign from God which witnesses to a life of great holiness. It is a miracle that reflects the victory of Christ over death and is echoed in the words of scripture, "*You will not allow your holy one to experience decay.*" Acts 13:35

Over the centuries, the bodies of some holy people have remained intact long after their death. Over 140 years after the death of St. Francis Xavier, examiners found that his body had remained fresh and unchanged. He seemed to be only sleeping. In our own time, the bodies of St. Bernadette of Lourdes and St. Charbel of Lebanon have been discovered in this state. They have no odour except for a fragrance like that of flowers.

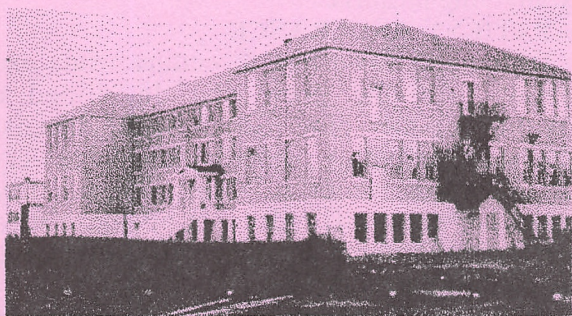
About two hundred such cases have been known. Unlike a mummy, these bodies remain intact, fresh and pliable. This state lasts sometimes only a few years and other times much longer.

This brief account of a young First Nations woman, reveals a quiet and humble life that is a sign of the hidden grace and mercy of God.

"Then I finally asked, "Who are they?" She answered, "Our Blessed Mother and her Son Jesus, they are my parents. I feel so close to them here, I just don't want to go out and I have no intention of going anywhere." That is what she told me."

HER ADULT LIFE

After graduation, Rose asked to stay on at the school. Because she was loved and respected, she was accepted as part of the staff. To a friend she confided that it was the best choice for her. Here she could be herself, enjoy quiet and privacy and practice her faith.



Lejac Residential School

Her spiritual life continued to bloom. She had a special devotion to the Eucharist. In spite of the difficulty that her deformity caused her when kneeling, she spent hours at prayer in the chapel. As an adult, religious practices were optional, yet Rose faithfully received Jesus at daily Mass.

She did many jobs at the school. Rose took on secretarial work, mending, cleaning, embroidering and sewing. Books were a favorite pastime and she often helped the younger children in learning to read. No one ever heard a cross word from her and she did her tasks with great cheerfulness.

Rose loved to sing and always sang or hummed, while she was doing her chores. Her fingers were always busy with bead work or crocheting. She was a talented artist and often

a brilliant student, kind, lovely, gentle and compassionate.” Some of her fellow students remember her as a happy child with a natural sense of dignity. Her goodness and understanding attitude drew other children to her.

One childhood friend says, *“Sometimes I would feel resentment towards the Sister or the other girls, or someone who said something to me, and then she would talk to me about it and say to pray for the person instead of feeling resentment. She was full of advice like that.”* To the students and Sisters she was a friendly but quiet girl. She was not one to complain or to say anything negative.

IN PATIENT ENDURANCE

In her life Rose had to endure trials and sorrows. As she grew she developed a curvature of the spine. Sister Bridie recalls, “She had a deformity on her back and was very self conscious about it.” This abnormality caused her great difficulty, yet all those who gave testimony about her, agree that never once was she heard to complain.

At the age of seventeen, she lost her mother whom she loved dearly, to influenza. Soon after she also lost her two younger sisters. This must have been very hard for her. After that she never wanted to go back home in the summer holidays. Her brothers and her sisters went home each summer but she chose to stay at the convent.

A FLOWER BLOSSOMS

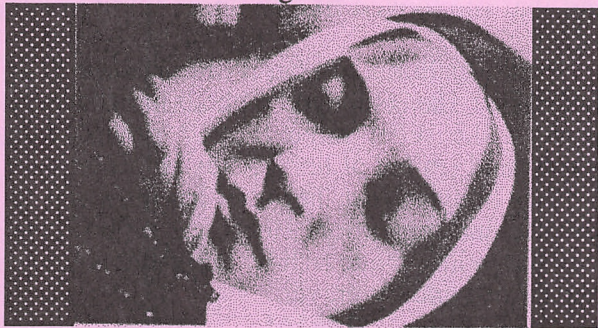
Rose also began to develop a deep life of prayer and seemed to have an abiding sense of the love and presence of Jesus. An indication of this comes from her cousin Celena John, who relates, *“Rose lived only for the Glory of God. She didn’t live for anything else. One time I was curious, so I asked her why it is that she never goes home with her brothers and sisters? She kept silently going on with her work, then finally she looked up, she smiled and said, ‘I’ve got my parents in here.’ I didn’t understand what she meant. I thought she meant the sisters.*

THE ROSE OF THE CARRIER

Rose Prince was born in 1915, at Fort St James. She was the third of nine children born to Jean-Marie and Agathe Prince. Both her parents were devout Catholics.

Rose's father, Jean-Marie, was descended from a long line of chiefs and leading men among the Carrier Nation in northern British Columbia. At times he led the prayers and singing in church and also helped to look after the building. People liked to call him "the Church Chief".

Agathe, her mother, was raised by the Sisters of the Child Jesus in Williams Lake. Her own mother had died when she was very young. Agathe was known to be kindly, gentle and a woman of strong faith.



Inncorrupt body of St. Bernadette

Jean-Marie and Agathe went to school together in Williams Lake. They fell in love, were married and returned to live in Fort St. James. Their children first attended the little school in Stuart Lake. Then in 1922 the government built a large new school at Lejac and Rose was sent there.

IN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

It is hard to say what may have been in Rose's mind as she gazed upon this building for the first time. Did she guess that it would be her home for the rest of her life? Perhaps, for she applied herself to learning and became an outstanding student.

Sister Bridie Dollard who taught Rose for three years described her as, "a hard worker and

gave away small paintings as gifts. Few of her pieces of religious art or paintings have survived.

A FLIGHT OF ANGELS

Rose contracted tuberculosis and by 1949, grew so weak that she was eventually confined to bed. In August of that year, she told Sr. Francis who was going off on holiday, that she would never see her again. Admitted to the hospital on August 19th, she quietly passed away that evening while Mass was being offered for her.

The Sisters prepared her body for burial. In death as in life, her body lay awkward because of it's deformity. They put a pillow under her head and put her body in the right position because she was so crippled up. Sr. Rose later said that she looked like an angel lying in her coffin.

Rose was buried on her 34th birthday. This special day, she celebrated with all her heavenly family. She must have looked down from heaven and smiled at her friends below as they laid her body to rest, her soul having risen to new life and perfection. Her's was an ordinary and hidden life made rich by faithfulness to the sacraments, and by prayer .

On the first weekend of July each year, a three day pilgrimage is held at Lejac near Burns Lake B.C. and Mass is celebrated at the site of her grave. There are already testimonies of healings and answered prayer through the intercession of this holy woman.

The present state of her body is unknown. The parish is poor and cannot afford to build a chapel as a suitable resting place for the body if it is exhumed. Anyone wishing to donate to this project or obtain holy cards or information may write to: St. Andrews Church, Box 580,
Fraser Lake, B.C., VOJ 1S0

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