

# What Dreams are Made of

## The Rediscovered Catechism “The Mass and its Ceremonies” of Friar Francisco Pareja

BY DR. TIMOTHY JOHNSON

**THE DASHING IMAGE** of Indiana Jones, a rather shy archaeology professor immortalized by Harrison Ford, will be forever tied to adventure, danger, excitement, and the thrill of discovery of long-lost treasures like the Ark of the Covenant and the Holy Grail. The lives of professors outside of Hollywood rarely offer material for the big screen. Nevertheless, their research holds out the possibility of a singular discovery that will bring a rush of pleasure and the satisfaction of contributing to their field.

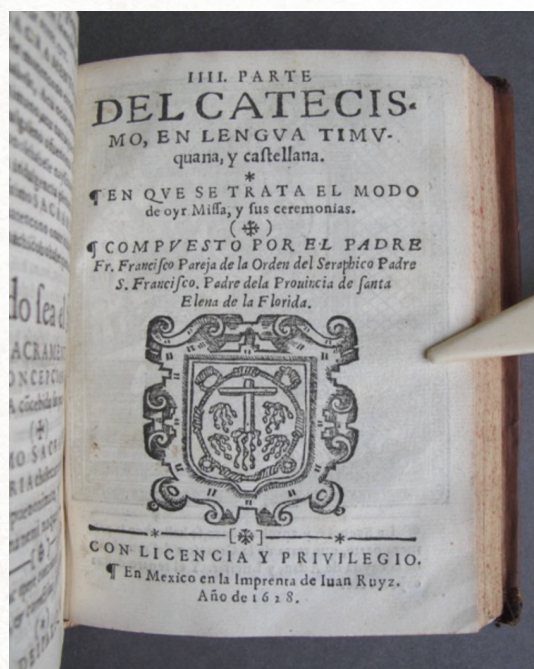


In 2015, a dear friend, the French scholar Jacques Dalarun, discovered an unknown Latin biography of St. Francis of Assisi dating to the 1230s. In 2019 I wrote to him that I had located an unknown Spanish-Timucua liturgical catechism dating to 1628 by Friar Francisco Pareja. In our ensuing correspondence, we agreed that discoveries such as these are what dreams are made of for those whose lives are marked by a passion for the written word.

Francisco Pareja is a name we rarely hear even in Northeastern Florida, where knowledge of Spanish colonial efforts is better known than in other parts of the country. He was a Franciscan missionary from the small town of Auñón in the Diocese of Toledo, Spain. While the date of his birth is uncertain, sources confirm he died in Mexico in 1628, and his last known work, according to scholars, was published in 1627. Instinctually I distrusted an obscure website I came across during my sabbatical from Flagler College that listed a 1628 text attributed to Friar Pareja. After all, the last time scholars found a previously unknown text by this friar was in 1886. The notation on the website suggested that the book might be a “ghost listing” since there was no scholarly confirmation that it existed. Nevertheless, the Library at All Souls College in Oxford was identified as the place to find it, should it exist at all.

I contacted the Library at All Souls College, formerly known as the Codrington Library, and learned that the book in question was there, but it was not available in a digital format. My pulse started to race, I wondered if the Oxford book was simply a misnamed text, and I struggled to reign in my expectations. When the gracious staff sent an image of the title page, I opened it on my computer to look, and my chest tightened when I saw the title, author, and date.

I wanted to laugh, cry, and jump up and down all at the same time. I quickly contacted Professor George Aaron Broadwell at the University of Florida, the preeminent scholar of the Timucua language, and we met in Palatka, Fla. When I opened my computer



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■ “The fourth part of the Catechism in the Timucuan and Castilian Languages...” a section of *The Mass and its Ceremonies*.

screen for him on the restaurant table, he confirmed the work's authenticity, and we celebrated like two children on a bountiful Christmas morning.

So, why the fuss about a book of some 129 folios? The title begins to answer this question: *The Fourth Part of the Catechism in the Timucuan and Castilian languages which treats the manner of listening to the Mass and its Ceremonies*. Published in Mexico, this may be the only extant liturgical catechism produced in Mexico

during the Spanish Colonial Period. Tracing the trajectory of the volumes Friar Pareja published with the assistance of Timucua co-authors, we realize that earlier works treating the foundations of faith, baptism, confession, and Eucharist culminate in the celebration of the sacred mysteries of the Mass found in *The Mass and its Ceremonies*.

Similar to other period catechisms, *The Mass and its Ceremonies* begins with a series of questions and answers regarding why someone should go to church. One reason is to remember the deceased as the section below illustrates.

- Q.** These souls that are in purgatory and on their way to heaven, do they pray to God for us?
- A.** Yes, they pray to God for us, and they are our intercessors.

This introductory section also describes the benefits of holy water and concludes with a prayer to be offered when entering a church:

"I will enter Lord into your house and temple, and confess and adore your holy name, Amen Jesus."

The substance of the following folios is dedicated to commenting, in both Spanish and Timucua, on phrases from the Latin Mass and subsequent prayers. A striking trait of both linguistic versions is the detailed and extended focus on the *Via Crucis* of Good Friday before the consecration and *The Our Father* preceding the sign of peace.

The subtitle of the *Via Crucis* section reads, "Our Lord Jesus departed the house of Pontius Pilate with the Cross on Good



■ Folio 2r., "Purgatory" in "The fourth part of the Catechism in the Timucuan and Castilian Languages..." a section of *The Mass and its Ceremonies*.



Friday, at eleven before the middle of the day." This narrative may come from an earlier meditation given the precision and detail regarding the steps taken by Jesus from the time he is brought to Pontius Pilate until his crucifixion on Mount Calvary. This *Via Crucis* portion of *The Mass and its Ceremonies* was probably used outside of Mass in various liturgical settings. Here we recognize the profound devotion to the Crucified Christ that marked Franciscan and Timucua Christian spirituality. Writers of the period echo this claim, and describe the intense liturgical practices during the Triduum, and single out the members of Confraternity of the Holy Cross in Friar Pareja's mission of San Juan del Puerto (Fort George Island, Jacksonville) and elsewhere.

Since the prayer that Christ taught his disciples, *The Our Father*, holds such a prominent place in the celebration of the Eucharist, it is wonderful to find that Friar Pareja and his fellow Timucua author(s) offer a rich commentary on each petition. Evident are

the hardships of daily life in the Spanish and Timucua Christian communities. When elaborating on the seventh petition, "And liberate us from evil," they write in part,

"All powerful and eternal God, liberator of human weakness and sickness, and of the infinite, almost unnumberable evils that surround, enclose, tire, and squeeze us in the course of a miserable life: Consider well that we are not forgetful of you, nor lose sight of you in the necessities of each day, hunger, thirst, heat, cold, plagues, many types of sickness, wars, fires, flooding, heresies, errors, schisms, and affliction. Against so many evils, we are without arms, forces, and capabilities. You are our recourse, a city of refuge and protection."

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This commentary on the perils of life, a meditation on the Lord's passion, prayers, and other reflections shared by those who gathered to celebrate Mass in and around the city of St. Augustine in the 1600s, offers a glimpse into a rich, forgotten era of Christian history. The turn of each folio of *The Mass and its Ceremonies* confirms a unique and now lost expression of multicultural faith in the 1600s and belies the long-standing stereotype of Native American illiteracy.

The rediscovery and study of *The Mass and its Ceremonies* coincides with archaeological work at Mission Nombre de Dios conducted by Professor Kathleen Deagan and her team, which brought to light the foundations of a stone church and Franciscan friary. Now we know not only where a church was located but how those who gathered there were guided into the mysteries of the faith before, during, and after Mass.

Centuries later, the Second Vatican Council proclaimed, "...the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time, it is the font from which all her power flows." Spanish and Timucua Christians affirmed this claim in their own day and prayed for mercy. Even today, their hushed voices are heard across the centuries,

"Most clement God, we ask that by the prayers, intercession, and merits of the Virgin Mary, Our Lady, and all saints in the celestial choir, receive the small service of my weak and timid prayer and negligence, and if something took place listening to the Mass that is worthy of your praise, may you look with favorable and clement eyes, and if something was done with negligence may you pardon it through your clemency. You who live in perfect trinity and being God, reign for ever and ever. Amen."

While the powerful voices of the faithful from the past echo in the reading of *The Mass and its Ceremonies*, questions emerge regarding the present and the future of this text. For those with "eyes to see" and "ears to hear," this recovered text appears on our contemporary scene amid a "renaissance" of studies related to indigenous peoples in Florida and the cultural diversity of the colonial St. Augustine environs. The mere increase in the number and variety of Timucua words in this work enables linguists to further their efforts to understand the language and, thus, the worldview of those peoples who have disappeared from our view into the mists of history. While scholars certainly cannot bring the Timucua peoples back, we can strive to gain deeper insights into their rich culture, cultivate a reverence for what



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■ Reverse Title page, "The fourth part of the Catechism in the Timucuan and Castilian Languages..." a section of *The Mass and its Ceremonies*.

has been lost, and remind ourselves and others that even today, indigenous groups around the world are threatened and face an uncertain future.

The commitment of Timucua Christians together with other Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans in colonial Florida to worship casts light on the past and illuminates a path leading to the future. In 1630, two years after the publication of *The Mass and its Ceremonies*, a Franciscan friar reported there were as many as 20,000 baptized indigenous Christians and 30,000 catechumens in Florida. History will not allow us to forget the relentless tragedy of sickness and war that radically reduced the numbers of these indigenous Christians or the gipping stories of many of these Native Indians who, like Antonio

Cuipa, became martyrs of the faith. Nor should we ignore that Franciscan efforts to evangelize would not have been successful without the Timucuas, Apalachees, and others who played an active role through their preaching and teaching to construct a diverse and dynamic expression of the faith. Their efforts continue to inspire and empower the faithful who now live in this growing and increasingly diverse area of the United States.

I am fortunate to live in an area of this wide world where the past, present, and future come together in a book that speaks, in multiple languages, of human longings for forgiveness and love engendered by the mystery of the divine encountered in prayer. Likewise, I am encouraged to continue my research in the company of others, knowing the excitement of discoveries such as this reach far beyond the parameters of ecclesial life and move many to a heartfelt appreciation of the diversity and richness of St. Augustine history. This is most apparent to me at Flagler College. As I introduce my students to the legacy of Friar Pareja and his Timucua co-authors through on-site visits and translated texts, the response I receive from

many regardless of their faith perspective – and especially those who live in St. Augustine – can be summarized as follows, "Wow! All of this happened here, right where I live – I had no idea!" 🐦

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