

In August, 1878, Yellow Fever invaded the city of Memphis for the third time in ten years. By the month's end the disease had become epidemic and a quarantine was ordered. While 30,000 citizens had fled in terror, 20,000 more remained to face the pestilence. As cases multiplied, death tolls averaged 200 daily. When the worst was over ninety percent of the population had contracted the Fever; more than 5,000 people had died.

In that time of panic and flight, many brave men and women, both lay and cleric, remained at their posts of duty or came as volunteers to assist despite the terrible risk. Notable among these heroes were Constance, Superior of the work of the Sisters of St. Mary in Memphis, and her Companions. The Sisters had come to Memphis in 1873, at Bishop Quintard's request, to found a Girls School adjacent to St. Mary's Cathedral. When the 1878 epidemic began, George C. Harris, the Cathedral Dean, and Sister Constance immediately organized relief work among the stricken. Helping were six of Constance's fellow Sisters of St. Mary; Sister Clare from St. Margaret's House, Boston; the Reverend Charles C. Parsons, Rector of Grace and St. Lazarus Church, Memphis; and the Reverend Louis S. Schuyler, assistant at Holy Innocents, Hoboken. The Cathedral group also included three physicians, two of whom were ordained Episcopal priests, the Sisters' two matrons, and several volunteer nurses from New York. They have ever since been known as "The Martyrs of Memphis," as have those of other Communion who ministered in Christ's name during this time of desolation.

The Cathedral buildings were located in the most infected region of Memphis. Here, amid sweltering heat and scenes of indescribable horror, these men and women of God gave relief to the sick, comfort to the dying, and homes to the many orphaned children. Only two of the workers escaped the Fever. Among those who died were Constance, Thecla, Ruth and Frances, the Reverend Charles Parsons and the Reverend Louis Schuyler. The six martyred Sisters and priests are buried at Elmwood Cemetery. The monument marking the joint grave of Fathers Parsons and Schuyler bears the inscription: "Greater Love Hath No Man." The beautiful High Altar in St. Mary's Cathedral, Memphis, is a memorial to the four Sisters.

# Constance, Nun, and her Companions

*Commonly called "The Martyrs of Memphis," 1878*

- I We give thee thanks and praise, O God of compassion, for the heroic witness of Constance and her companions, who, in a time of plague and pestilence, were steadfast in their care for the sick and dying, and loved not their own lives, even unto death: Inspire in us a like love and commitment to those in need, following the example of our Savior Jesus Christ; who with thee and the Holy Spirit liveth and reigneth, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*
- II We give you thanks and praise, O God of compassion, for the heroic witness of Constance and her companions, who, in a time of plague and pestilence, were steadfast in their care for the sick and dying, and loved not their own lives, even unto death: Inspire in us a like love and commitment to those in need, following the example of our Savior Jesus Christ; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

## Psalm

116:1-8

or 116:10-17

## Lessons

2 Corinthians 1:3-5

John 12:24-28

*Preface of a Saint (1)*