

## **The Religious Life in Glogowatz** by Sofia Gruber née Merle

When the farmer prepared wheat for sowing, he then sprinkles the pile with holy water and says a short prayer. Before he strewed the first handful over the field, he took off his hat and prayed for blessings in favor of good growth, timely rain, sufficient sunshine and that the harvest would not be destroyed by hail. At the start of the harvest, the farmer said, "So jetzt fangen wir in Gottesname an."<sup>1</sup>

If there was a big thunderstorm, one sprayed holy water in the yard to be spared from any lightning strike.

If a member of the family, or even one of the domestic animals, is ill, one promises alms or gives a donation of money in the collection box for the needy, which is mounted in the St. Anthony chamber.<sup>2</sup>

Life in Glogowatz is connected in almost every respect with religion and piety. The year is begun and ended, too, with pleas and praying.

On New Year's Eve, one goes first to church to the thanksgiving service, afterwards to the New Year's Ball. It is surely not a Holy Mass to which one feels obliged to go; nevertheless, so many people were present that some believers had to stand outside the church. After the thanksgiving, the musicians played the New Year's song from the church steeple. On New Year's Day, the men, youth and children went well-wishing. Everyone says the beautiful saying, "Ich (wir) wünsche(n) Euch allen, ein glückseliges neues Jahr, langes Leben, Gesundheit, Friede und Einigkeit, nach dem Tod das Himmelreich."<sup>3</sup> The answer goes, "Wir wünschen Dir (Euch) auch soviel."<sup>4</sup>

The carnival period<sup>5</sup> began the time when all weddings were celebrated (no doubt because there was no work in the field at this time). All marriages took place in the church. The three days before Ash Wednesday were spent with dance and amusement. On Tuesday evening at 11:00 o'clock, Lent was rung in<sup>6</sup> and consequently the entertainment of dancing brought to an end. That lasted until Easter Monday. Easter Sunday or other high holiday was never profaned by entertainment of dancing.

One also gave expression of joy and contemplativeness through clothing. In Advent and Lent, the women and girls wore dark clothes. At joyful occasions and summertime, clothes were light and colorful. It is like in daily life, one shows somebody honor not only with words but also good clothing. We also held this with regard to God and the church. During Lent, there was vespers with way-of-the cross devotion every Sunday. The church was always chock-full; at the end, the particle<sup>7</sup> was kissed. Most of the faithful made their Easter confession in

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<sup>1</sup> "So now we begin in God's name."

<sup>2</sup> Near the exit of the church

<sup>3</sup> "I (we) wish each of you a blissful New Year, long life, health, peace and harmony, the kingdom of heaven after death."

<sup>4</sup> "We wish you (you plural) as much, too."

<sup>5</sup> After New Year's

<sup>6</sup> Most events in the village were announced by ringing the church bells

<sup>7</sup> Blessed relic housed between glass

Lent. Men, women, guys and girls as well, had an opportunity for confession on a fixed Saturday afternoon and evening, which often lasted until late into the evening.

On Palm Sunday, the women and girls carried palms to the church. Good Friday, everyone went to the burial,<sup>8</sup> later to the holy graves.<sup>9</sup> There were three of them: in the big church, in the Holy Trinity Church and in the chapel at the Five Hills. (They say anyone who goes dancing on three days at Shrovetide has to call on all three holy graves.) On this day, nobody touched the soil in the field or garden. Without the church ever forbidding this, everyone behaved accordingly.

Easter Saturday, old and young went in procession to the resurrection ceremony. The brass band played "Der Heiland ist erstanden."<sup>10</sup> The church choir and the faithful sang along. One man carried a statue of the arisen Savior. The procession was brought to an end with "Großer Gott, wir loben dich."<sup>11</sup> When the faithful came from the church, the musicians played a Ländler,<sup>12</sup> as proof that the days of contemplation are over.

Easter Sunday, the children were surprised with a filled nest.<sup>13</sup>

On Easter Monday morning, the guys, little boys as well, went to spray the girls and women with rose water. One says that could stem from the time when the women fainted because they could not find the corpse of Jesus in his grave.

White Sunday,<sup>14</sup> the children receive their first communion. That is a family celebration.

On April 25, St. Mark's day, the procession went into the field for the crop dedication.

The fourth of May, Floriani,<sup>15</sup> is celebrated; it is the day of the fire brigade and the patron saint against fire.

The Kirchweihfest<sup>16</sup> was always celebrated solemnly in the church but was also the biggest public festival of the village. St. John of Nepomuk,<sup>17</sup> the patron saint of our church, is highly venerated. Our forefathers probably chose him because he met his death in the Moldau River<sup>18</sup> and our community lies on the edge of the Marosch River. The Kirchweihpaare<sup>19</sup> went to Holy Mass in the morning, accompanied by the band. The public festival, in which old and young participate, is in the afternoon. May devotion is daily; most of the children and older people go during the week. On Sundays and feast days, the church is

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<sup>8</sup> The Blessed Sacrament was taken to the holy grave

<sup>9</sup> A diorama of the sepulcher with a supine statue of Christ

<sup>10</sup> "The Savior has arisen."

<sup>11</sup> "Great God, we praise you."

<sup>12</sup> A country waltz

<sup>13</sup> A child built a nest for the Easter Bunny, which then was filled with Easter eggs and candy. Unlike a chicken, the Easter Bunny demanded a nest made from soft grass and decorated with spring flowers.

<sup>14</sup> Whitsunday

<sup>15</sup> Feast of St. Florian

<sup>16</sup> Feast of the consecration of the parish church

<sup>17</sup> Also patron saint of the Banat

<sup>18</sup> Vltava River in Prague. He was drowned there on orders of King Wenceslaus IV

<sup>19</sup> Couples dressed in the traditional holiday costume of the village

packed. The Mother of God is venerated a lot; the most beautiful songs about Mary are also sung among us.

On the three prayer days,<sup>20</sup> the procession went to the Five Hills, the Holy Trinity church and the Jergerischen<sup>21</sup> cross.

Ascension and Pentecost were solemnly celebrated in the church, like all high feast days. Early in the morning on Whit Monday, the guys rode horses adorned with flowers and ribbons through the village to the girls. The musicians rode along in a few wagons. Those guys, who did not participate in the Pentecost riding, had floral wreaths woven by their sisters or younger aunts and threw them onto the roofs of their girls' houses.

Trinity Sunday is the day of our community's pilgrimage to Maria Radna.<sup>22</sup> Pastor, Marienmädchen<sup>23</sup> and the brass band, as well as many believers, participate. Most go by foot, others by wagon or the electric train. There was a Holy Mass at the crack of dawn on Saturday; afterwards, the procession was accompanied by the pastor, musicians and believers who stayed home. From here on, the prayer leaders and usually some men took the responsibility on themselves. They actually set off on the main highway up to Radna, where there is other traffic, too.

Arrived at the church of grace, it is up the mountain with the song, "Großer Gott, wir loben dich." After the prayer of thanks and a short rest, one went to seek lodging for the night. The way-of-the-cross was prayed on the mountain in the afternoon. Some also went to the cemetery. Presents and keepsakes were purchased, candy and gingerbread as well; body and soul is always looked after.

On Trinity Sunday after the solemn High Mass, the procession left the place of grace. At the Five Hills, it was greeted by the priest and the faithful who stayed home. One thing has always moved me: When the pilgrim said at the greeting, "A beautiful greeting from the Mother of God." Throughout the summer, smaller processions go to Maria Radna on Mary's feast days.

Corpus Christi was beautifully celebrated. Everyone helped with the beautification in his way. In the streets through which the procession ran, the path was made smooth; sometimes, a farmer even drove over the bumpy path with his land roller. The grass was hacked off and on Corpus Christi day green twigs were brought here from the woods; they were stuck into the earth on the right and left of the wayside. Fresh meadow grass was spread on the path. The women and girls brought floral wreaths and bouquets to the four chapels. Flowers and other greenery, which were left over at the wreath-making, were spread on the footpath in front of every house. During the procession, the Marienmädchen carried little baskets with rose petals, which they scattered in front of the monstrance which the priest carried under the baldachin.

The volunteer fire brigade, Marienmädchen and musicians were a ornament of the procession. Songs were played to the sacrament and sung by

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<sup>20</sup> Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday before Ascension

<sup>21</sup> Cross on Arader Street in front of the Jerger family's inn

<sup>22</sup> 15 miles ESE of Glogowatz, a church noted for miraculous cures

<sup>23</sup> Mary's girls, an organization for young girls

the faithful. Near every chapel, one kneeled down reverently in the dust when the priest gave the blessing

The volunteer fire brigade consisted of the skilled workers of the village. They were the first to the place when a fire just broke out. After all, the farmers were in the field throughout the year. During religious feasts, they turned out in dress uniform. On Good Friday, two of them always stood by the holy grave as guardsmen. They wore a helmet and carried a halberd; it almost looked as if they were mercenaries from the time when the grave of Jesus Christ was guarded.

We call Mariä Himmelfahrt,<sup>24</sup> “Mariä Würzweih.” The Gwürzbüschele<sup>25</sup> is made, in which seven different wild flowers are supposed to be included, garden flowers which still look good in dried condition, as well. A Gwürzbüschele, decorated with a blue silk ribbon, is taken from every house to the church for consecration. All the consecrated flowers or palms are kept in the attic. Except for incinerating them, one would never dispose of consecrated objects.

Early in the morning, noon and in the evening, bells ring for the angel of the Lord. If one does not have time to say the whole prayer, one says just, “Help us, Almighty God.”

On the day before All Saints’ Day, the graves are decorated with flowers and candles. Then, on the feast day, the procession goes to the cemetery. All the inhabitants participate. Everyone has dear relatives in this peaceful place, where everybody is allowed to rest. In the evening, we went again since women ruled as prayer leaders. The countless candles, which with calm (no wind) burned until late in the night, were so beautiful! On All Souls’ Day, one goes individually to the church or cemetery.

In Advent, one went at the crack of dawn to the Rorate.<sup>26</sup> Candles or tapers burned, which gave the interior of the church a special something. At this time, some children have learned a Christkindspiel<sup>27</sup> by heart. They went from house to house on Christmas Eve and delight the children with their songs and gifts, which they bring for them as if they were from the Christkindl himself. (The mother puts them in a little basket outside in the gangway and an angel brings them in.) In the course of this, beautiful memories also awoke among the grownups. The mother had decorated the Christmas tree with apples, nuts, candy and gingerbread beforehand. How the children have awaited the feast of the Dreikönige;<sup>28</sup> then the Christmas tree was shaken and every child again received his share. Christmas and the time after that, the children liked so much to tell about their presents, which were simple to be sure yet were received with joy and thanks.

Charity and acts of compassion are performed from time immemorial. One never lets a needy person go away without a gift, even if it is only small, probably out of gratitude that one is able to be the giver. As thanks, he says,

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<sup>24</sup> Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary

<sup>25</sup> Bunch of flowers

<sup>26</sup> “Rorate coeli...”; “O heavens, drop dew...”; Isaiah 45:8

<sup>27</sup> Little Christ Child play

<sup>28</sup> Epiphany

“Vergelt’s Gott”<sup>29</sup>; the answer to that, “Bezahl’s Gott.”<sup>30</sup> With the return of an object, one always says, “Vergelt’s Gott,” too. If someone is gravely ill and the relatives hope too much for recovery or how things look for her cannot be explained to her loved ones, then someone is always there who strives in some way or another that the sick person receives extreme unction. If someone has died, then it is announced by bell-ringing<sup>31</sup> during the Angelus (prayer ringing).<sup>32</sup> Relatives, neighbors and friends come to the wake. One pays the final honor by attendance at the burial. The sorrowful rosary is said from the house of the deceased up to the cemetery.

This report about the religious life in Glogowatz is written in past tense fashion in many places because, following the Second World War, many customs and usages can no longer be observed like earlier. Some feasts are moved to the following Sunday, others are still allowed to take place only in the house of God.

As every person regards an area or thing differently, so it can also be in religious life. Therefore, I want to report how I experienced it in my family and know from the telling. It is supposed to serve only as comparison and supplement to facilitate a successful outcome of the Heimatbuch Glogowatz.<sup>33</sup>

Your compatriot  
Sofia Gruber  
4330 N. Albany Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60618  
U.S.A.

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<sup>29</sup> “God bless you.”

<sup>30</sup> “God will repay it.”

<sup>31</sup> The pattern of the ringing even indicates the gender of the deceased and whether an adult or child.

<sup>32</sup> Calling for prayers for the soul of the deceased

<sup>33</sup> Hometown book, Glogowatz