

The Land of the Holy Cross

Quite likely all of you have heard of Christopher Columbus, the discoverer of a "New World". I dare say many of you know the lines,

"In fourteen hundred ninety-two,
Columbus crossed the ocean blue!"

I am sure you would like to learn something more of the first voyage to this goodly land. It was a wonderful voyage, in light vessels, across a waste of waters where no sail had ever before been spread.

Columbus was a very learned and a very holy man, and his studies led him to believe that the world is round, and that by sailing away from Europe, where he lived, straight across the ocean towards the West, he would find other countries and other peoples.

Then, because his heart was full of the love of God, and his faith in his holy religion was strong and active, he determined that he would undertake this voyage, and get missionaries afterward to go to those heathen nations, and teach them the Holy Faith our dear Lord gave us, so that the whole world might become Christian.

After a great many difficulties, so many that most men would have given up trying to overcome them, he at last set up sail with three small vessels from the little port of Palos, in Spain, Friday, August 11th, 1492. He was the admiral of this little fleet.

His own vessel was named for our blessed Mother, Santa Maria, and he chose for his banner a flag bearing the image of Christ Crucified. A favorable breeze wafted them out of port on Friday, and this also pleased Columbus, because of his devotion to the Passion of our Lord.

Every morning the sweet accents of some vesper hymn, the "Hail, Holy Queen", and the favorite chant of the sailors, "Ave maris Stella" (Gentle Star of the ocean) were heard from the deck of the Santa Maria, and then the crews of the Pinta and Nina joined in; their united voices floating over the vast wastes of the unknown Atlantic.



At last, one evening, at the close of this devotion, Columbus declared to his crew that they were nearing land, although their eyes could not see it. All hearts throbbed with hope. No one doubted, no eye closed in sleep.

The clock of the Santa Maria showed the time to be two in the morning, when the report of a canon, the signal for "Land!" was heard. Columbus cast himself on his knees, and, while tears of gratitude flowed over his cheeks, intoned the "Te Deum", and all the crews, transported with joy, responded to the voice of their chief.

On Friday again, as if Friday, the day of the cross, was to crown his triumph, on Friday, the 12th of October, 1492, at dawn, they beheld a flowery land, whose groves, lighted by the first rays of the sun, gave forth a strange, sweet fragrance, and charmed every eye by its smiling beauty.

Beaming with gladness, the freshness and joy of youth seemed to return to him as he stepped upon the shore. Three times he bowed his head and kissed the goodly land, while all shared in his emotions.

Then, raising in silence the Standard of the Cross, he planted it with his own hands in the soil, and, prostrating himself before it, consecrated this new world by name to the service of God.



There is still in a library in Venice, an old book, printed there in the year 1511. In it is a map of this continent, bearing the name first given it by Columbus, printed in red capitals, "The Land of the Holy Cross".

Now let me give you the meaning of the name, Christopher Columbus. It seems to be the very name that such a hero ought to have. Christopher means "One who carries Christ", and Columbus signifies "a dove", so his name may be read, "The Christ-carrying Dove".

He did indeed bring Christianity to countless thousands, through the missionaries who followed his path, many of whom won the glory of the martyrs by sufferings, tortures, and death. True, evil and covetous men did what they could do to destroy God's work, but still, in all places and times,

"The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth."

Source: Sadlier's Excelsior Third Reader, 1876



Do you know?

Under what title is Our Lady the Patroness of the United States?

Who is the Patroness of the Americas?

Under what title is Our Lady invoked by sailors?

The Immaculate Conception; Our Lady of Guadalupe; Star of the Sea