

TRIEST TOUR

In the footsteps of Father Triest



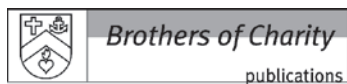
A visit to the places
where Father Triest
was living and working

Bro. René Stockman,
Superior General Brothers of Charity

Triest tour, In the footsteps of Father Triest

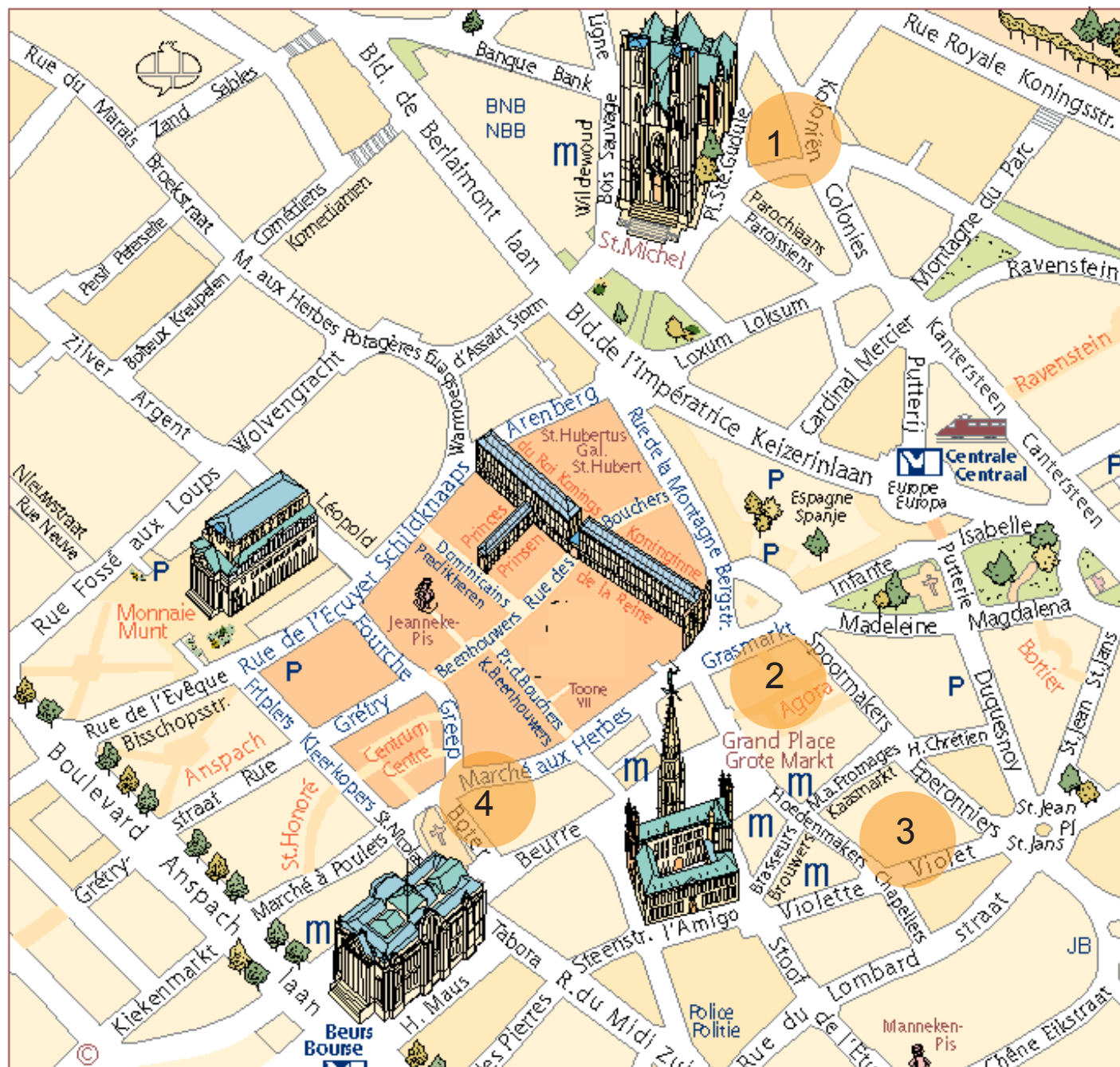
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TRIST TOUR

In the footsteps of Father Triest



1 = St Michael's Cathedral 2 = Grand Place 3 = Cheese Market + Hoedemakersstraat 4 = St Nicolas's Church

BRUSSELS



Peter Joseph Triest was born to Jan Triest and Cecilia Mello as their ninth child in Brussels on 31 August 1760. Triest's parents were well-to-do citizens of Brussels. His father achieved the rank of warden of the guild of the blacksmiths and had acquired several houses and landed property as his business flourished. His mother belonged to a rich family; certain documents suggest that Cecilia Mello sprung directly from the patrician families 't Ser Huyghs and 't Ser Roelofs, two of the seven patrician lineages whose ancestors are considered to be the founders of Brussels in the 10th century. For some time, the Triest family was supposed to be related to the aristocratic Triest family of whom the 17th century bishop Antonius Triest (1567-1657) was the most famous figure. There were many reasons for thinking so, including the fact that Antonius Triest had been bishop of Ghent not so long before Fr Triest's activities.



St Nicolas's Church

Well-to-do, of common descent, thriving by dint of serious work and good management - that is how we can characterise the Triest family among the citizens of 18th century Brussels. That Jan Triest was a competent craftsman appears from the fact that he had an apprentice in his service early on and that he is called a master spur-maker in a 1749 document. In 1745, he married his cousin, German Cecilia Mello; and in 1747 their first child, Jan Jacob Bartholomeus, was born. The second-born, Jacob Jan Joseph, born two years later, died when he was three years old. In 1751, the first daughter, Maria Catharina, was born. Thereafter, another eleven children were born of whom the ninth was Peter Joseph, born on 31 August 1760. The next day the baby was baptised at *St. Nicolas's* with Peter Joseph Tollenaers as godfather and beguine Catharina Vermunt, first cousin of Cecilia Mello, as godmother.

Till 1756, the Triests lived on the corner of *Cheese Market Street and Hat-maker Street*; thereafter, they moved to a bigger residence, "The Mirror", on the opposite side of Cheese Market near St. John's Hospital. This hospital was a refuge for foundlings and the mentally ill; the latter sometimes disturbed the peacefulness of the neighbourhood by their agitated screaming.

The Triests lived in this neighbourhood till 1767, so we may suppose that young Peter Joseph got knowledge of the mentally ill due to their screaming and by observing new arrivals at the hospital. It is a moot question whether



Birthplace of Triest

this contact influenced his later interest in his care for the sick.

By the end of his wardenship, Jan Triest turned to the farrier's trade. He developed his new business on Grass Market; in a register of 27 June 1767 we read that Jan Triest was "a farrier, elderman of the great guild". The new house was strategically situated near a busy crossroads. Thereafter, Triest bought several houses and landed property with the obvious aim of having valuable property for all their children. Among the houses was the so-called "hotel Triest" in Royal Street, which Peter Joseph inherited. Of the nine surviving children, the eldest, Jacob Jan Bartholomeus, joined the Norbertines of the Drongen Abbey (near Ghent) in 1768. Maria Catharina and Barbara Theresia married in 1776 and 1778 respectively; as did Jan Baptist Karel in 1783 and Emmanuel in 1786, who continued his father's business. Peter Joseph and John Baptist Carolus, on the other hand, took holy orders on 10 June 1786 whereas the youngest son, Jacob Joseph, remained a bachelor and was a hat-maker. It was with Jacob Joseph that Jan Triest and Cecilia Mello went to live in in 1786 to enjoy a pleasant old age. Their plan to go and live at Gooik in the countryside was never realised. Jan died on 4 July 1807 at the ripe age of 82; and Cecilia on 28 April 1797, at the age of 70. This then is our picture of the beautiful 18th century family excelling in diligence, parental care and healthy religion, in whose bosom the child Peter Joseph grew up and was educated. It is this Peter Joseph's life we are going to trace hereafter.

Two other places in Brussels are linked to Father Triest: the Saint Michael's Cathedral and the Basilica of Koekelberg.

Saint Michael's Cathedral



Brussels was the city of the Blessed Sacrament. Every inhabitant knew about the legend of the Miraculous Host and could tell how in 1370 a few Jews defiled and pierced three consecrated hosts – and how the hosts miraculously started to bleed. Historically one cannot prove the part of Jews in this matter and most probably it was non-existent. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was flourishing in Brussels. Each year in July there was a grand procession during the Brussels Fair and a lot of people took part in it – the higher classes just as well as the lower classes. Also the young Peter Joseph Triest took part in the procession on the occasion of the 400th anniversary in 1770.

It is in this church that we find *the monument of Peter Joseph Triest*. In the first chapel in the right hand side aisle a white marble monument was erected in 1846 by Eugène Simonis, a sculptor from Liège and a pupil of



G.-L. Godecharle. This was the result of a bill introduced in the House in December 1836 to erect a monument at the expense of the state to immortalize the memory of the outstanding services rendered to suffering humanity by Peter-Joseph Triest, the Belgian Vincent de Paul.

On the socle we find in Latin: "Erected in honour of Almighty God and to the pious memory of Peter-Joseph Triest, who went about doing good with special concern for the destitute and the poor". At the same time a marble plate against the wall gives an outline in French of the most important dates in the life of this praiseworthy man. At the bi-centennial anniversary of his birth (1960), a bronze commemorative plate with a Dutch text was put on the floor.

The monument is an allegory of charity. The base is a sarcophagus where we find the Latin text and two angels holding a garland. In the middle of the monument is a medallion with the portrait of the benefactor. A woman, symbol of gratitude, reaches towards the Belgian Vincent de Paul with a laurel wreath. An angel with a trumpet – regretfully broken – sings the praises of his charity all over the world and points a finger towards God from whom all good comes. Finally there is the representation of benevolence: a woman with three children.



Basilica of Koekelberg

The idea of building a national shrine in Brussels originally came from King Leopold II. In 1880 – the fiftieth anniversary of Belgium – it was planned to erect a national Pantheon on the plateau of Koekelberg, following the example of Paris and Rome. But the plan fell through due to lack of money. Later on, after work on the Sacré-Cœur in Montmartre had started, the king had another idea. Walking with Henri Carton de Wiart in the neighbourhood of the palace, he explained his point of view: "Il y a là le mont de la Justice, il faut là-bas à Koekelberg le mont du Bon Dieu, et ici le mont des Arts". (« On that hill over there you see the Law Courts, so the hill of Koekelberg should be dedicated to God, and this hill here be the Arts »).

The construction started in 1905 and finished only in 1970.

On the 29th September 1957, *a nice stained-glass window* was inaugurated, on the occasion of the 150 years of existence of the Congregation of the Brothers of Charity. It is the work of Jan Huet.

The left hand panel represents St. Vincent de Paul in the middle of the young people he is instructing. In the background we see a view of a 17th century city with a symbolic representation of the societies of St. Vincent de Paul. Below there is a Brother of Charity with handicapped youth. Right at the bottom we see the coat of arms of the Brothers of Charity.

The lower parts of the middle panels carry the deed of gift: "Congregatio



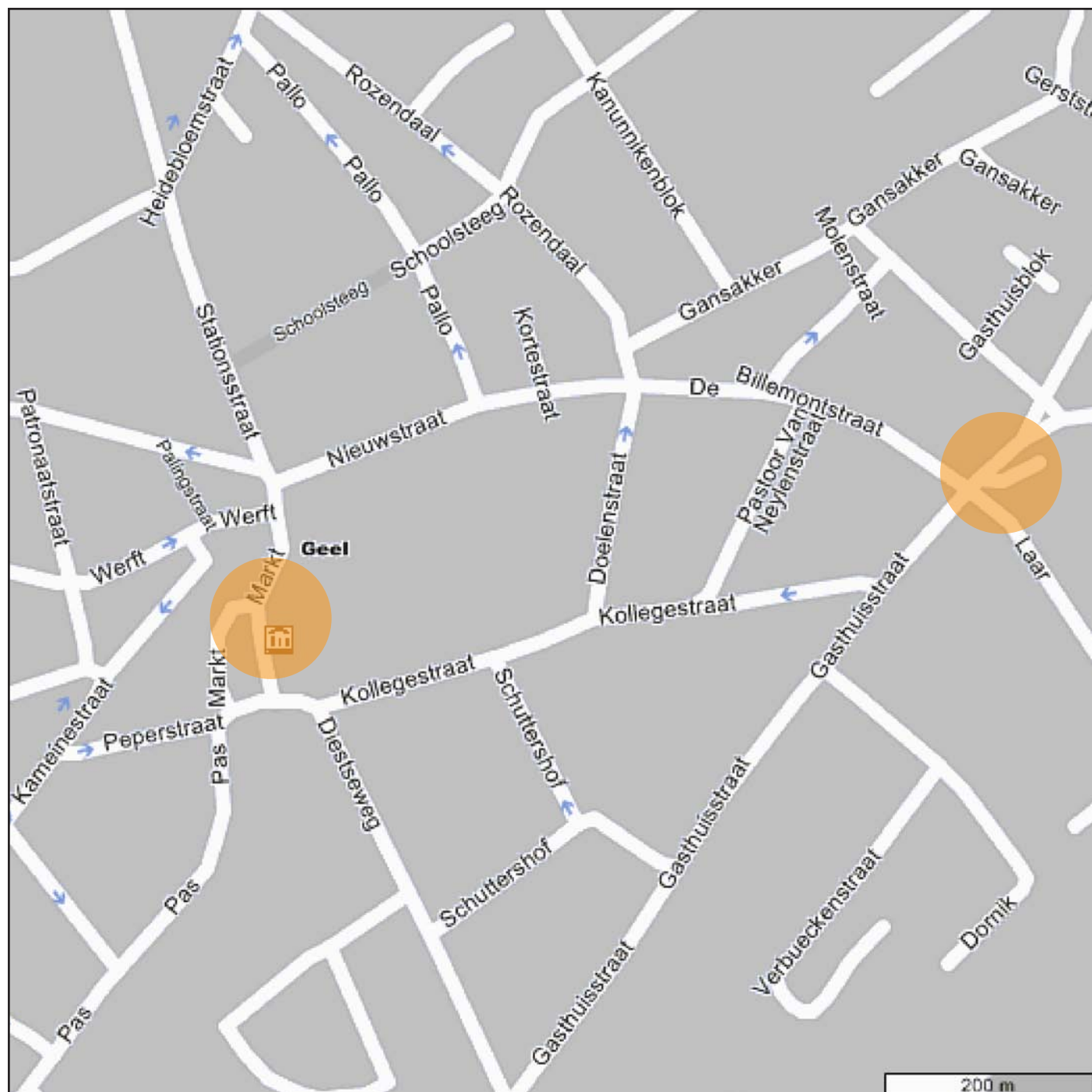
fratrum a caritate et amici": donated by the Congregation of the Brothers of Charity and their friends. Young children surround the foundation date, 1807, while adolescents indicate the jubilee year: 1957.

The bottom scene of the right hand side panel represents the practice of the corporal works of mercy by a nursing brother. Here too we find the name of the artist, Jan Huet, and on top of it the motto of the Brothers of Charity: "Deus caritas est", God is love.

The right hand side panel of the window is dominated by the noble figure of Canon Triest surrounded by the aged, the sick and the afflicted.

At the top one finds a symbolic representation of the missionary activity of the Congregation. The central part represents the parable of the Good Samaritan.





GEEL



When the Jesuits were abolished in 1773 Peter-Joseph was no longer allowed to continue his studies at the new institution that replaced the abolished college of St. Michael in Brussels. His parents chose the famous Latin School in Geel for him. They considered a good education as the best inheritance for their children. His eldest brother had studied there as well. The college had about 300 pupils, none of them boarders. The pupils were boarded with relatives, acquaintances, or in a house recommended by the headmaster.

The Latin School was situated in this building at the northern side of the Church of St. Amandus. The nearby Havermarkt served as playground. It was strictly forbidden for the students to visit the inns, and even the innkeeper risked being punished.



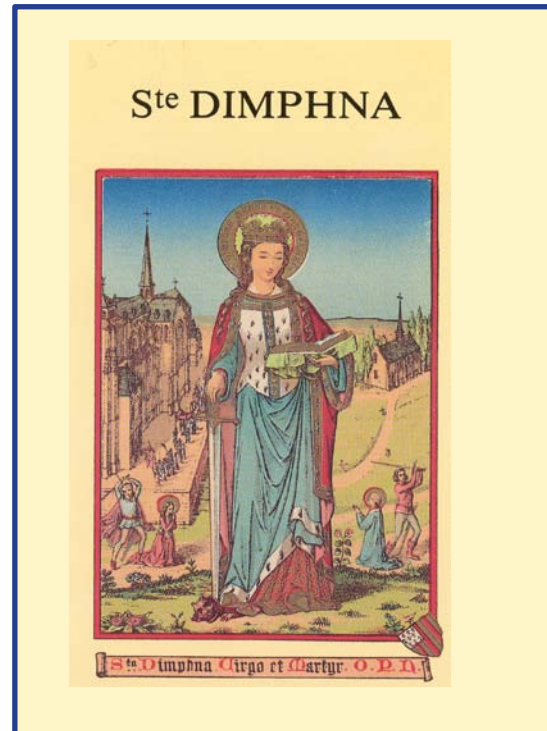
The College of St. Aloysius in the College Street continues the tradition of more than 500 years of Latin School. It keeps a list of prize-winners where we find the name of Peter-Joseph Triest as one of the successful candidates of the Syntaxis, the fourth year of Grammar school that he doubled in 1777.

Hospitality was a characteristic of the people of Geel as it had been a refuge for the mentally ill since the Middle Ages when the sick were taken care of by local families.

Geel had become a centre of mental healthcare after the devotion to *St. Dymphna*, an Irish princess murdered by her father. During his stay in Geel, Peter Joseph got first-hand experience of the mentally ill. De Stassart's biography mentions that the young Peter Joseph went to see the sick and gave them sweets which he had bought out of his own pocket money. This contact will have influenced young Triest very much in the light of his great sensitivity to the poor and the sick in later stages of his life. The Latin School, sometimes called the "farmer's grammar school" was renowned and had very good results. Peter Joseph studied there from his 16th till his 20th year.



St Dymphna's Church with Shrine





Church of St Dymphna

The domiciliary care of the mentally ill, started thanks to the devotion of St.Dymphna, made Geel famous all over the world. It was named: 'the merciful city'. Next to the church they built a sick room because the mentally ill had to stay in the neighbourhood of the saint for 9 days. Daily they had to crawl round the altar and through the gate of relics. Due to an increase of pilgrims the sick-room soon became too small. The patients were lodged first with the Canons, later on with the neighbours of the Canons and in the end with the neighbours of the neighbours of the Canons.

The town of Geel also boasts a central **psychiatric hospital** from which home care is organized. This building resembles the Dr. Guislain Hospital in Ghent, since the same architect, A. Pauli, was responsible for drawing its plans. As with the Dr. Guislain Hospital, those plans were also based on the views of Dr. Guislain regarding the accommodation for psychiatric patients.

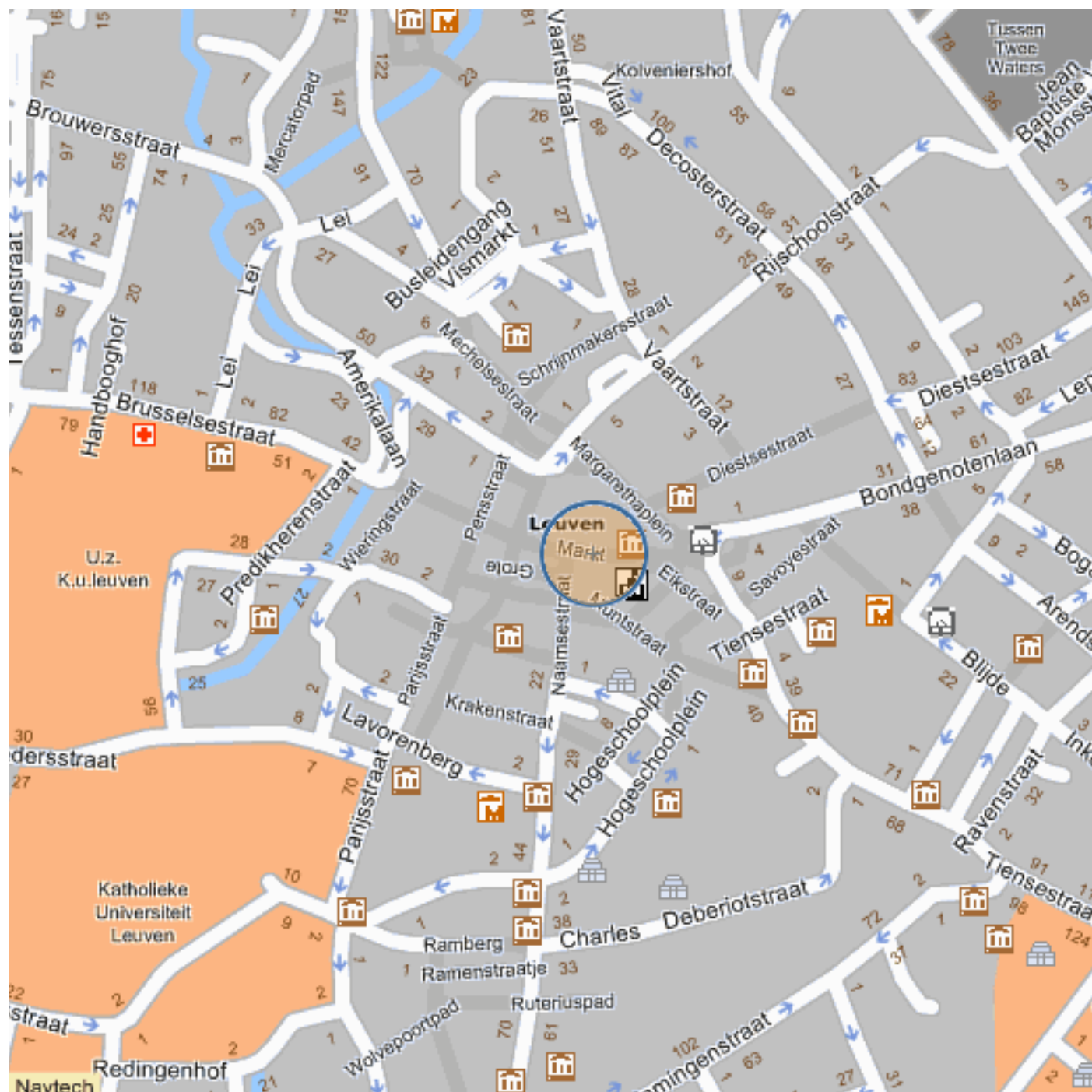
Prayer:

*Oh Father,
 Lover of purity,
 You, who stood by
 your blessed martyr Dymphna
 When she decided
 to stay virtuous,
 Please make her,
 whom we are celebrating
 respectfully today,
 Assist us with her merits
 and her prayers.
 Through Jesus Christ,
 our Lord.
 Amen.*

St *Dymphna* was born of royal blood in Ireland at the end of the sixth century. Her father was a pagan but her mother was a Christian. That devout lady devoted a lot of attention to educating her beloved child in a Christian way.

Dymphna grew up as a virtuous young girl, but the Devil tried to pervert her. In order to safeguard her innocence and her purity, *Dymphna* left the house of her father and fled in the company of Father Gerebernus her counsellor and protector. A while later, they arrived in Antwerp. Having stayed there for a couple of days, the refugees decided to settle in Gheel in order to escape the search parties.

The King of Ireland started pursuing her as soon as he had learned that she had fled across the Channel. He arrived in the Kemps, a heath area in the north of Flanders, and discovered Irish money spent by his daughter, which caused him to conclude that his daughter was hiding out there. Father Gerebernus reprimanded the bad king for his undignified behaviour and encouraged *Dymphna* to remain firm. However, he was the first to die by the brutal king's own hands. And *Dymphna* did not escape him either. She was beheaded by her own father. Ever since then, she has held the palm of the martyrs. Those events took place around the year 600 A.D. St *Dymphna*'s relics are kept in the St *Dymphna* Church in Gheel currently.



LOUVAIN

After the summer holidays of 1780, Peter Joseph Triest, joined by his younger brother John Baptist Charles, enrolled at the [*University of Leuven*](#). Peter Joseph intended to read pedagogy as a member of The Castle and John as a member of The Lily. Both The Castle and The Lily were colleges that housed students who took courses at the then Artes department.

In order to obtain their degree, the Arts students had to sit a double written exam that covered all the courses of the past two years: logic, metaphysics and physics. Peter Joseph obtained the 55th place out of the 111 students who passed, whereas his younger brother had already left for the Major Seminary of Mechelen on 8 February 1782. All things considered, that was not a bad result, since out of a total of 351 students only 111 were successful.

Little is known about his college days in Louvain, and we can only assume that he was impressed with the developments in the field of poor relief and healthcare in Louvain. The Alexians in Louvain took care of mental patients, so he must have known their work. Near St. Jacob's was an asylum for the terminally ill, homeless and beggars. It was managed by a parish priest, John Baptist Van Cauwenberghe, who had been inspired by St. Francis of Sales's doctrine and St. Vincent de Paul's work. In 1794, Fr. Van Cauwenberghe founded the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent. In the course of that process, he was assisted and advised by two priests from West Flanders, Fr Valcke of Rumbeke and Canon Van Roo of Ypres. Both of them have played a significant role in the promotion and popularization of the devotion to St. Vincent de Paul in Flanders. Thus P.J. Triest got acquainted with the innovative spirits of St. Francis of Sales and of St. Vincent de Paul. It was going to be affirmed in a further stage of his education.



Central Library of the University

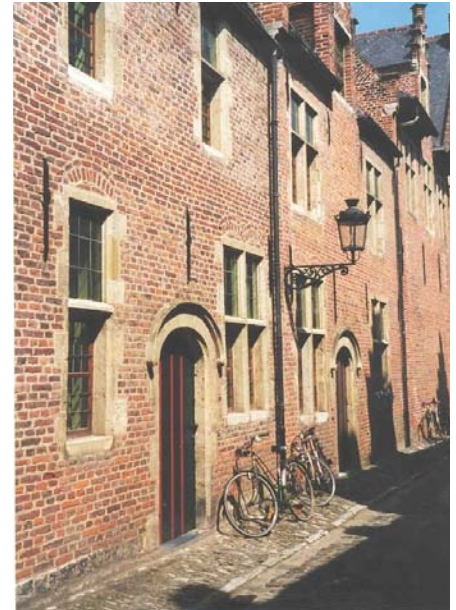
The college where Peter-Joseph Triest stayed for two years in Louvain (1780-1782) was situated on the right-hand side of the road to Malines, close to the Dyle, at Oratoriën Bridge. The building was demolished during the French Revolution.



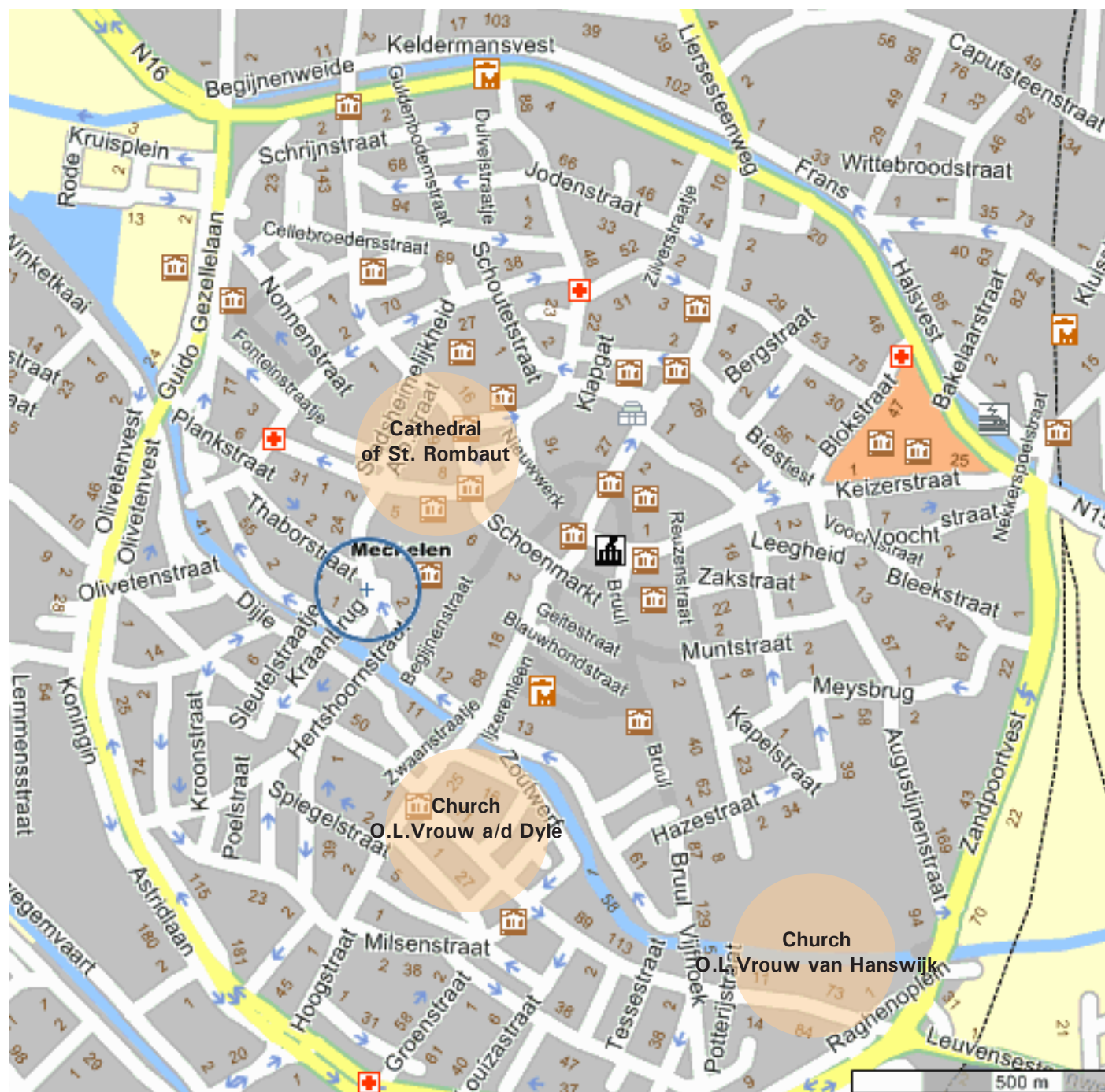
The University of Louvain was founded in the **Lakenhalle** (Clothmakers' Hall) in 1425, but later spread over the whole of Louvain and its surrounding district. But the Clothmakers' Hall was to remain the centre of the university until the 18th century and it still plays an important role in the administration these days.

At the time when Peter-Joseph Triest was studying at Louvain and had paid the tuition fee to be allowed into the Halls, a struggle was going on between the university and the Austrian authorities who had turned out to be quite meddlesome. Having only just succeeded his mother Maria-Theresia, Emperor Joseph II visited the university on 21 July 1781. He found everything much too Roman and the scientific standards too low. In that same year, he issued an Edict of Tolerance permitting non-catholic students to enrol at the university and non-catholic professors to be appointed by the State. Louvain resisted violently because it held on to its former rights. Obviously, this caused tension as well as doubts about the orthodoxy of the teaching.

Peter-Joseph Triest wanted to continue for the priesthood after his two years of higher education. He could have chosen any one of the twenty or more colleges in Louvain, but eventually chose the Major Seminary in Mechlin, probably because he and his parents no longer believed in the orthodoxy of the lessons taught at Louvain, and also because he would have the advantage of a scholarship at Mechlin.







MECHLIN



Having obtained his degree in philosophy at Louvain, Peter Joseph Triest opted for the priesthood and started his training at *the Seminary of Mechlin* at the beginning of October 1782. His brother Jan-Baptist had arrived earlier, in February of the same year, without having sat his Artes exams at Louvain. Both of them obtained a scholarship. Each had the following books for spiritual reading: "The Imitation of Christ", "The Spiritual Battle" and "The introduction to the Devout Life" by St. Francis de Sales.

Jan-Ghislenus Huleu, who had been president of the seminary since 1775, was a zealous advocate of devotion to the Sacred Heart. Close to the 18th century chapel is a painting by C.J.Herreyens of Malines, which was bought in 1782 and which still proves this. It depicts God the Father in human form and a human heart representing the Son surrounded by the heads of ten angels. This representation of the Sacred Heart was prohibited later on. In the parlours, the many painted portraits of bishops and presidents of the seminary testify to its glorious past.

Cathedral of St.Rombaut

Peter-Joseph Triest was ordained priest, together with his brother and many other young men, by *Cardinal John Henry van Frankenberg* (picture) in the cathedral on 10 June 1786. His dream had come true.



But it was not sentimental devotion. Difficult times for the Church were at hand. Emperor Joseph II had already abolished the contemplative orders. The Episcopal seminaries and religious scholasticates were replaced by a General Imperial Seminary at Louvain. The Cardinal showed himself to be a true defender of the orthodoxy and freedom of the Church and stood up to the arrogant attitude of the Austrian government. Resistance arose on all sides. To priests and faithful alike, the Cardinal was a shining example of faith and he undoubtedly made a deep impression on the newly ordained priests.

Sermon Blaasveld, 1787, Asse 1790-1802 – On the occasion of All Souls

To attract the attention and compassion of someone to a poor unfortunate there is nothing more powerful than love which is at the origin of everything. Love, I say, has a particular capacity to drive someone and to control the mind; love speaks so eloquently that it penetrates the most secret recesses of the heart. And, in fact, the request of the two sisters based only on love was so compelling that, when he saw the plight of his friend Lazarus, Jesus wept. What tender love! Here, we see, dear listeners, the power of love and in answer to a simple plea for this love, the Lord Jesus not only wept for Lazarus' plight but also raised him from the dead.

Sermon, 1789 – Feast of the Holy Rosary

Mary has for us a mother's heart, a heart full of love, a heart full of tenderness, always ready to help us. Therefore, I do not doubt but that you have all a great devotion to the Queen of Heaven and Earth and that, as a result, you pray each day in her honour and to her memory. But among all the prayers the rosary is the prayer she loves best.

While you are working like slaves or resting or sleeping there are thousands of holy and just souls who, at the same time, are fervently saying the holy rosary for you and for themselves. Ceaselessly, they pray God to give you grace and mercy.

She is indeed a Mother of Mercy especially at the hour of death.

The one who prays the rosary with devotion is like a spiritual bee alighting on the most beautiful flowers, in others words, on the principal mysteries of the life of Jesus in order to draw from them the honey of piety.

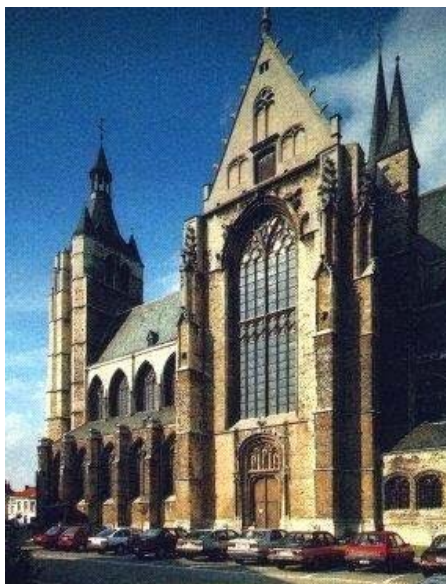
Sermon Hanswijk, 1797

I will express my thoughts in three points:

1 – Time is precious; so we must consider it as important; 2 – time is short and passes quickly; we must use it well; 3 – time does not return, the damage done is irreparable; we cannot, therefore, waste our time.

These three reasons are sufficient to prove to some reason that we must spend the time still remaining to us well and pass the year in a Christian fruitful way.

Think each day, at dawn, that this may be the last day of your life. Make the resolution to devote the day entirely to God and to your salvation.



Our-Lady-across-the-Dyle

The first appointment for Peter Joseph Triest came from the seminary and was a temporary appointment as curate in the parish of Our-Lady-across-the-Dyle in O.-L.-Vrouw street. Here he proved himself to be the ultimate example of a devoted and caring curate from 6 December 1788 till mid-June 1789.

In the baptismal register, we see that he baptized forty-three children five of which had been rejected by their unmarried mother. For three of these children, he found a foster mother, according to a manuscript of a later date.

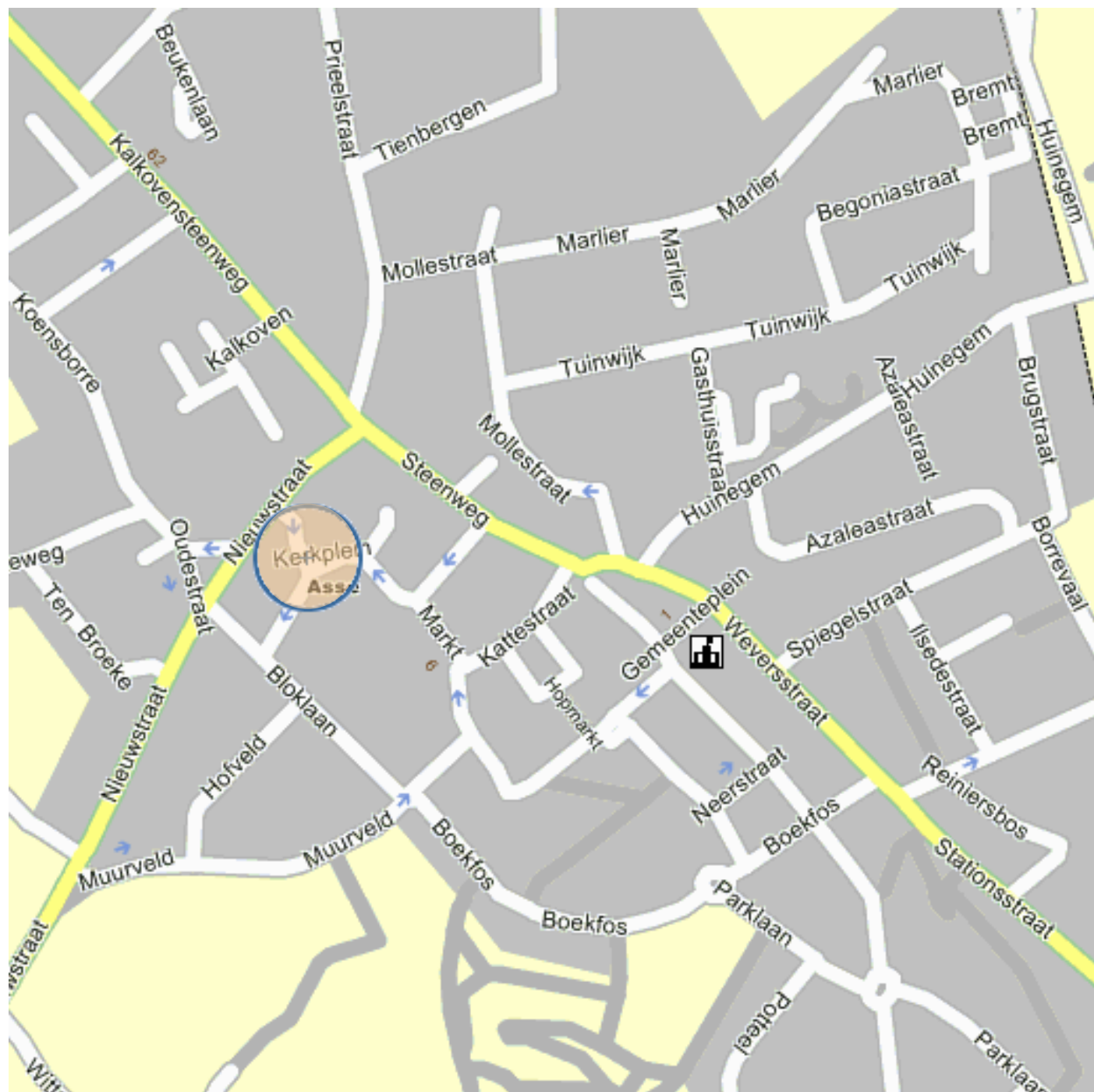
A sermon written in his own hand proves that he dedicated himself to preparing the children's First Holy Communion. In a reaction to the growing hatred for the Church and because Joseph II wanted to gain control of the Church, he incited his listeners in another sermon to persevere steadily and convert themselves. That second sermon was for Trinity Sunday. Joseph II had already abolished the Fraternities and Confraternities and he distrusted the instruction given to the faithful. That is why "eavesdroppers" were sent to churches. They were people who had to pass on what was said in sermons. So obviously Father Triest talked in his sermons chiefly about the great evil of mortal sin and was very cautious about including any references to topics of the day.



Our-Lady-of-Hanswijk

At the shrine of Our-Lady-Of-Hanswijk, in which church the people of Mechlin had shown great devotion ever since the middle ages, Peter-Joseph Triest was able to serve both the Church and the people. It was a period of war. Austrian and French soldiers were coming and going, and it was not always permitted to expose the miraculous statue.

The French army followed the example of the Austrians and started a military hospital in the former convent school next to the beautiful baroque church. An epidemic of typhus had broken out in 1795. Because great numbers of people got infected and many of them died eventually, doctors and nurses quit their work. Consequently, curate Triest was left all alone to look after the spiritual and physical needs of the sick. He was taken ill himself and was bed-ridden from March till December. On a number of occasions, it was thought that he would die as well. People thought it a miracle that he recovered after all.



ASSE

House of Gilles Triest

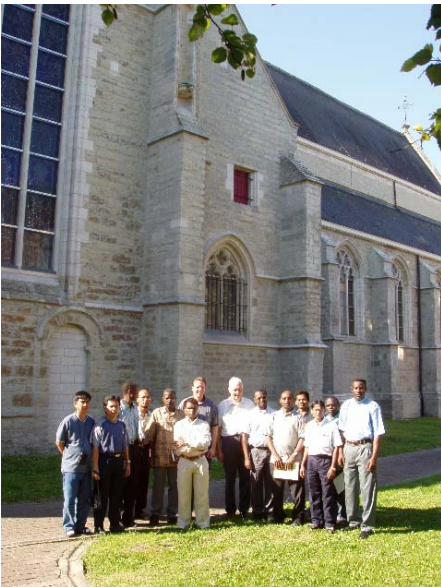
When curate Antoon Van Craen was appointed parish priest in Kapelle-op-den-Bos in 1789, Peter-Joseph Triest, who was still at the seminary at Mechlin, applied for his job as curate and got it for a period of two years.

Asse was not unknown to him. There were at least two families with the name of Triest living there. His father had spent part of his youth there and his grandfather Gilles Triest (28 January 1674 – 9 January 1734) had come to live there with his family in 1726. Everybody held him in high esteem. He was a customs officer in charge of collecting transit duty. He was allowed to impound a wagon if its owner refused to pay or if its load looked suspicious. He was also a member of the poor relief commission and it is probably because of this title that he was buried under the tower of St Martin's church. There are still several memorial plaques from the 18th century church in its floor, but it is not known exactly where Gilles Triest is buried.

His death caused a state of uproar in Asse. It even came to a court case. The evening before his death, Gilles had argued with his neighbour's wife about clearing away the snow on the doorsteps of their houses. Her son had thought he could back up his mother's arguments by using a stick. Gilles' death the following night was blamed on this event. The house of grandfather Gilles Triest stood on the same site as his office in the centre of town on the road to Aalst.

Church of St. Martin

Judging by the records of the town of Asse, curate Triest was a dedicated and fervent priest. During his two-year stay there (24 June 1789 till the end of October 1791), he baptized 143 children, several of whom were illegitimate. But it is a sign of his conscientiousness and his sense of responsibility that he added later on and in his own handwriting that the child was made legitimate by the marriage of its parents. On 19 October 1791 a child was found along the road to Aalst, in the Kalkoven neighbourhood. The baptismal register mentions very accurately that the child was found at 6 a.m. and that the baby was thought to be one day old. Curate Triest baptized it and persuaded his brother Jaak-Jozef, who was visiting him from Brussels, to accept becoming its godparent. The boy became known as Jaak-Jozef Den Kalckhoven.



Sermon 1791 – Exaltation of the Cross

They adore you on the cross but hardly anybody has the courage to take up your cross or his own.

One must carry it and love it, one must carry it and not drag it, love it and not complain or grumble. There is no condition in life without crosses: there are crosses in marriage, in celibate life, in the world, in convents, even in the most remote desert. There are so many illnesses, so many difficulties, so many disappointments, so many bodily ailments, so many sad events! The poor feel keenly the misery caused by their poverty. The rich suffer agonising worry, and the ceaseless anxiety which always accompanies wealth and abundance. And this includes kings themselves who are crushed under the burden of their high dignity; and the crown which sparkles on their head often overcomes them with its weight. “But since suffering is inevitable, the manner in which you bear suffering is important,” says St Augustine. And, as each one has his cross, the best thing one can do is to embrace the cross and love it.

Whether you are a celibate, a magistrate, a lord, a father, a householder or nothing, you are all required to walk in the footsteps of Christ. You can do this only if you follow him by doing what he has done. You can only do this if you carry your cross in the same spirit as Jesus!

I do ask you to carry it with a little love and abandonment to God’s will.



A few sermons surviving from his time in Asse show us that, from the pulpit, which was made in 1732, Triest exhorted his faithful to devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. This happened especially on the day of the First Holy Communion and on the occasion of the annual mass of the confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament (founded in 1731) with about 40 members including the dignitaries of the town. We also have his notes of a sermon on the Rosary. In that sermon he compares a fervent prayer of the Rosary to one who sits next to the most beautiful flowers and he explains that he is referring to the most important mysteries in the life of Christ – his Saviour – in order to extract the honey of devotion.

Two crosses are venerated in the chapel of the Holy Cross. The miraculous cross of Kruisborre is above the tabernacle.



In the beginning of 1791 – at the time when Triest was his coadjutor – the parish priest of Asse, Father Ringler, was taken ill and his illness clearly affected both his mental and his physical capacities. He would display infantile and peculiar behaviour, and suffer from violent fits. The parish priest was 67 years old. He still lived at the presbytery, but was no longer capable of doing any work. The servants looked after him and guarded him because he had become difficult to master. On March 20th 1791, the Cardinal extended Triest's set of tasks and made him a fully authorized coadjutor for all priestly tasks: this was a sure sign of confidence from the highest church authority. Not everybody was pleased with this, certainly not the family of R.F. Ringler and least of all the latter's brother-in-law, Dr. Joseph Dillens, who was a physician in Brussels. He was especially interested in a possible inheritance and the financial consequences of Triest's nomination. He would have liked to take over the financial management of the parish and tried to obtain it several times. Incited by his superiors Triest did not accept this and tried very hard to get Fr. Ringler into an old people's home. There were more difficulties. Triest was appointed as "desservitor" i.e. as "acting parish priest" in order to give him more authority. Then Dr. Dillens got himself appointed as agent for the person and the goods of the patient, and obviously that did not improve the communication between the two parties. Triest took on the manservant and the maid. But because he found that Fr. Ringler did not get enough attention, Dr. Dillens took Ringler with him to Brussels and tried to take the notebook with all the possessions and earnings of the parish written in it as well. Father Triest refused. Lawyers were brought in and the case risked ending up before the courts. The death of Father Ringler on 12 August 1791 put an end to this human, but not very elevating story.

Sermon Blaasveld 1787, Asse 1791, Hanswijk 1792 – Day of the Sacrament

Many spiritual writers have the impression that the fire of divine love in the Church lessens in proportion to the weakening of the burning zeal of the first Christians for the regular reception of the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. St Thomas Aquinas, too, expressed the same idea when he said that the first Christians maintained the ardour of their faith for as long as they received holy communion regularly and worthily. But in so far as this zeal diminished, so too did the spiritual hunger for this divine food and, with it, all the ardour in the practice of faith.

Many believing Catholics reveal only a veneer of religiosity. Nowadays, one rarely finds absolute fidelity in married people, modesty in virgins, reverence in the young, respect in children, wisdom and prudence in the elderly, compassion in the rich, justice in the poor. When we realise this we can conclude that many Christians are giving free rein to immoderate passions because they fail to receive the Blessed Sacrament. "When your soul is wounded, you must use the right remedy. The wound is sin, the remedy is the adorable Sacrament of the Altar," says St Ambrose. He [St Bernard] assures all souls that, through the strength of the precious Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, they will gain victory over the evil tendencies of the senses. [...] Who is powerful enough to break the violence of passion? [...] Entrust yourselves to the help of God who will never let you down and, to ensure you of this, he has left you as guarantee of his love his Body and his Blood. It clearly follows that whoever approaches the Blessed Sacrament respectfully will experience a beneficial change in himself. Yes, dear listeners, you must admit that the divine nourishment was often your strength and your victory in the struggle but that as soon as you dropped the regular reception of holy communion the enemy assumed power over you and you were overcome by your passions.

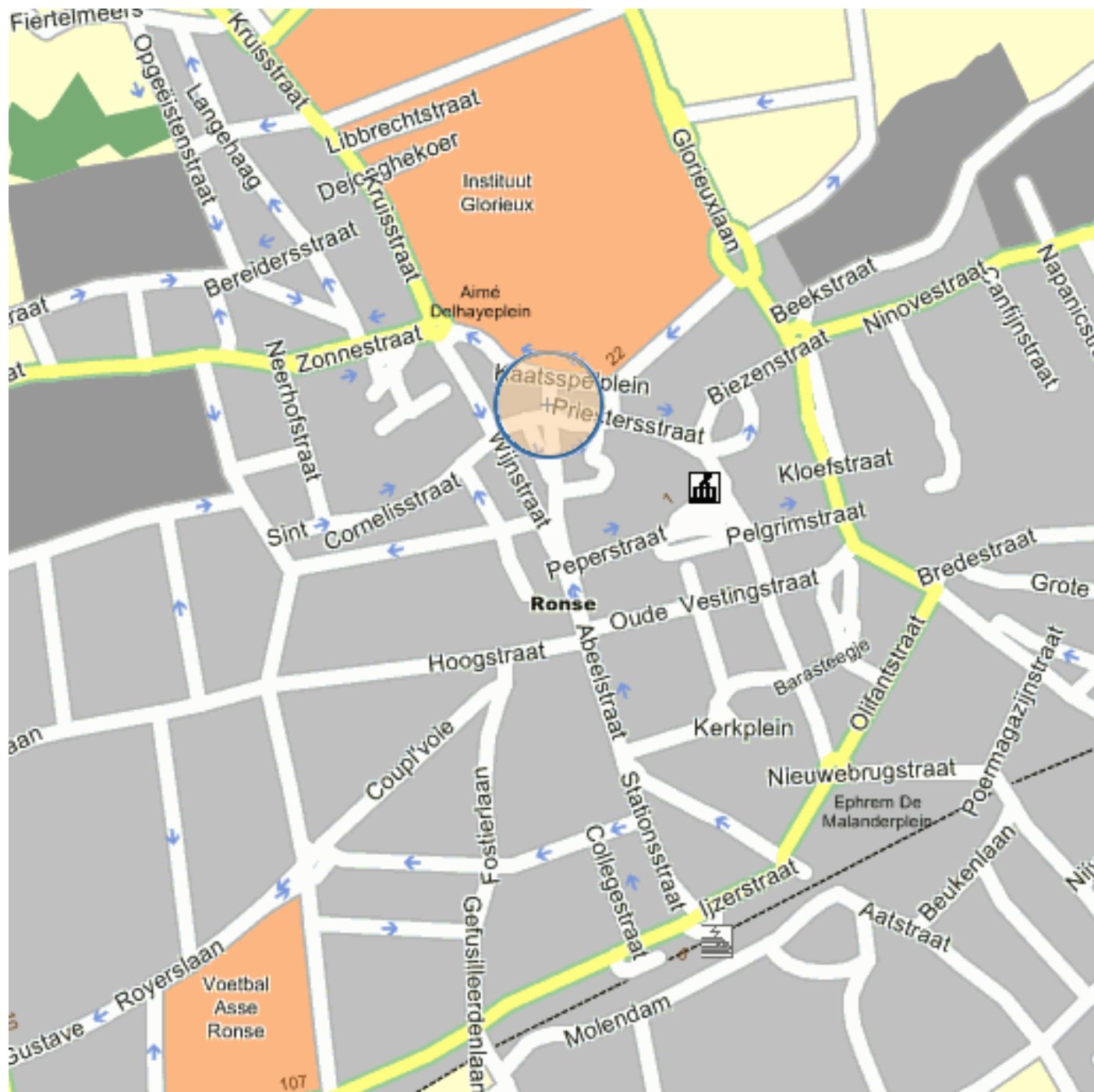
I wish God would give me the grace to enkindle in all believers this fervour and love for the Blessed Sacrament.

Prayer

O Lord, I acknowledge my unworthiness and I now see that the more I distanced myself from the holy altar the more deeply I fell into the abyss of sin which makes me feel ashamed. But now I wish to purify my heart by confession so as to receive you worthily. I desire to be one of your regular guests. Because I am weak I want to strengthen myself continually. As I am miserable I wish continually to seek your consolation. Give me the grace that the fervent piety of someone, who often receives you, may fill me with a holy reverence and holy zeal. And just as I must love more and more and serve you better so also must I receive you more frequently with deeper Christian dispositions. Give me, O Lord, this attitude, deliver me from the world and make me worthy of tasting, in the reception of the Blessed Sacrament, your precious Body and Blood, the hidden sweetness, so that always fully satisfied I still remain hungry for the Bread of the Elect. Then I will have on this earth a real foretaste of the Invisible Bread with which I will be fully satisfied eternally in heaven. Amen.

Father Triest had proved himself to be courageous and faithful to the directions of his bishop. The fact that he was allowed to carry on his work as acting parish priest until a new man was appointed proves that the diocese did not disapprove of his behaviour, but was, on the contrary, grateful for and glad with his determination and inflexibility.





RONSE



At that time, Ronse belonged to the archbishopric of Mechlin-Brussels, and was known for its Chapter of Canons of the collegiate St Hermes church. As early as 860, St Hermes's relics were taken to Ronse from Sankt Cornelimünster and the then St Peter's was raised to the status of a collegiate church so that the monks became regular canons. Ronse became a place of pilgrimage for the mentally ill and rabies patients as St. Hermes was the traditional patron saint of the mentally ill. In 1129, a bigger church was consecrated; it was served by secular canons while St. Peter's and the nearby St. Martin's became annexes to the collegiate St. Hermes's. It was a well-known tradition for the provost of the chapter to provide the family of a mentally ill person with a testimony on the condition that they had faithfully done the novena in honour of St. Hermes. This was no guarantee that the person in question would be cured, but only an official certificate which stated that this person was ill and not a criminal and in case he happened to commit suicide, he could still be given a church funeral. As from the 16th century, the devotion to St. Hermes was on the wane, partly because of abuses in the management of the finances. These finances, meant for the maintenance of St. Peter's and St. Martin's were used for other purposes so that both churches became decrepit. It was only around 1750 that the restoration of St. Martin's was started as there were no funds available for St. Peter's. St. Peter's went to ruin so that its parish priest held services in the nearby *St. Hermes church*.



the oath of hatred

On 1 September 1797, the anti-religious law was approved integrally, which meant that only priests who had taken "the oath of hatred of the kingdom and the monarchy, and of loyalty to the Republic and its Constitutions" were allowed to fulfil their priestly functions. The Cardinal was arrested in October of that same year and deported to Germany. All church property was declared confiscated. Only priests who had taken the oath received compensation and could continue to serve their church or chapel. In spite of these dramatic events, as a curate, Triest faithfully participated in the annual examinations for becoming a parish priest. Along with many more priests, he is on the lists of 1793, 1794, 1796 and 1797 for a limited number of vacant parishes. His non-participation in 1795 was most certainly due to sickness; and that he was selected only after the fourth year of participation was due to the limited number of vacancies. Moreover, some priests enjoyed preferential treatment. Triest was given a place on the list



St Hermes

*Whom people have invoked for centuries
When they suffered from affections of the
mind,*

To you we turn confidently.

Be our defender, our advocate,

Before Christ, our Saviour

Who withstood the power of the Evil One

*And who healed so many sufferers, also of
the mind.*

Obtain our deliverance

For which we pray so zealously.

And bear witness for us, holy martyr Hermes,

To the healing powers of the Christian faith:

That we are loved by the Father,

Thanks to Christ, His Son and our Brother,

With the power of the Holy Spirit of Love,

*Today and all the days of our lives, until eter-
nity. Amen.*

St Hermes, be our advocate!

St Hermes, be our witness!



for 1797 and was appointed parish priest of St. Peter's at Ronse on 28 August 1797. But Triest had refused to take the infamous oath, so he was forced to live in hiding. No official farewell from the Hanswijk parish was arranged, nor an official arrival at Ronse. However, we find the first traces of Triest's presence as the new parish priest at Ronse on 27 September of that same year. A new period in his life had started, but once more under ominous circumstances. Yet, this period would prove to be of great importance to the development of Peter Joseph's personality.

Fr Gosse, the parish priest of *St. Peter's*, had passed away on 23 January and had been replaced by a curate, Fransman, who had been "deservitor" till the arrival of Fr Triest, the new parish priest. On 29 September, we find the first funeral registered, signed "P.J. Triest, Pastor Scti Petri". Together with his two curates, Fransman and Magherman, Triest was forced to live in hiding as they were all three unsworn priests. This situation of stress was to last until 1802 when Napoleon signed a concordat with the Church. The result is that we have little information about Triest's activities during that period as he had to do everything secretly. Baptisms, marriages and funerals were held in barns. The arrangements for Sunday Mass were passed on orally as there was always the fear of being found out. As from August 1797, a brigade of three French gendarmes was permanently in Ronse. They had to see to it that the French laws were upheld. Sergeant Cotton was in command of that brigade. He stayed at St. Eligius Hospital which had been evacuated to make room for the brigade. Cotton was a young Frenchman who hailed from Nancy. Soon he acquired the reputation of an uncompromising persecutor of the Church. Churches were desecrated, except St. Hermes's as some canons had taken the oath of allegiance to the Republic. In 1798 the situation worsened almost every day. Several unsworn priests were arrested, among them Triest's two curates, who were deported to Ghent and imprisoned in December. Many priests were deported to the island of Oléron. Frs Fransman and Magherman returned to Ronse in February 1800. The 1799 Decree, issued on 28 December, put an end to the persecution of priests, but most unsworn priests remained in hiding as the oath was still imposed and the majority of priests refused to take it. It is surprising that Triest managed to keep out of the snares of the persecutor when we think of his total commitment to his task at Ronse. He was prudent, though, and had the necessary contacts to disappear in thin air at the right moment. He never reported to the authorities although they had asked him to do so regularly. But others who did so were arrested.



This time in hiding was for Triest an opportunity for chastening and prayer. His timetable, written in 1799, witnesses to it:

After the meditation, recite primes and terts; then preparing sermons and instructions.

Thereafter, preparing for Holy Mass; say a decade of the Rosary; then study.

11 o'clock: recite sexts and nones in church. Do adoration of the Sacred heart; second meditation from "Pugna Spiritualis"; examination of conscience; lunch and colloquium.

2 o'clock: recite vespers; say a decade of the Rosary; study, or visiting the sick.

5 o'clock: adoration; Rosary; recite matins and lauds.

7 o'clock: supper.

9 o'clock: evening prayer in my room; while on my knees, reading the Bible till 10 o'clock and a fragment of Steyaert's "Aphorisms", and a chapter in one or other spiritual book.



This impressive order of the day must have been Triest's anchorage in the hard times he experienced. It also throws light on his interior life: he is a man of regular prayer who holds the breviary in high esteem, is faithful to Eucharistic adoration and who meets Jesus lovingly in his Sacred heart; his day is interspersed with prayer to the Virgin Mary and Bible reading to feed his evangelical life. Among the titles of the books he mentions is "Aphorismi Theologicae Practicae" by Steyaert, a basic manual which he studied at the seminary. It is certain that other authors like St. Francis of Sales and St. Vincent de Paul, were among his normal reading. While these four years in Ronse resembled those of a hermit for Triest, they stood him in good stead when he was a very active priest so that he could act from an inner inspiration and a thorough spiritual foundation. He had to cross the desert in order to preach and live the Gospel with greater confidence than ever.

Some incidents at Ronse are proof of Triest's courage and his mature desire to tackle the problems of poverty and injustice in a structured way. A remarkable story is that of sergeant Cotton's wife. Cotton had married Isabella Rosa, the daughter of the local village policeman, De Smet, in 1799. A baby daughter, Camilla Eleonara was born on 6 February 1800. Sadly, the baby died on 14 February and the mother was in danger of losing her life too. As mentioned above, Cotton had been living with his wife and child at St. Eligius Hospital. In mortal danger and in the absence of her husband, Isabella Rosa begged for a priest to receive the last sacraments. It is probable that her 4-year younger brother, John Baptist, informed Fr Triest about her request. Triest may have doubted the case or even thought

of a possible trick of Sergeant Cotton to catch him. At any rate, he went to assist the wife in her dying moments. Just as Triest was administering the last sacraments, Cotton arrived home and stood face to face with the priest. We turn to Pieter De Decker, Triest's biographer, to get the picture of the situation:

One night, he was called away from his hiding-place as someone informed him that the wife of the sergeant was dying. What should he do? Will he let her die without the consolation of religion? Or will he venture into the mouth of the wolf, into the hands of the sergeant who persecutes him so furiously? He listens to the voice of duty; goes to the sergeant's home; goes straight to the dying woman to offer his services. The sergeant arrives home; he finds Fr Triest sitting near the sickbed of his wife, and is so touched by Triest's generosity that he promises on oath never to arrest a priest again.



It is a fact that after 1800 no priests were importuned at Ronse. Availing himself of the greater freedom, Triest endeavoured to establish an orphanage in 1800 with the help of François Soudan, the postman. *The register of the "Weesenhuys" (orphanage)* at Ronse says:

The workhouse of charity started in the year 1800, under the leadership of Reverend Father Triest of St. Peter's in Ronse, together with me Francisus Soudan; as mother, Anne Theresia Bruneel; and as assistants, Anne Maria Beatse and Elisabeth Bufkens, as well as Johanna Vande Walle.

Although the initiative did not come to full fruition due to the political upheavals, we may assume that it was Triest's intention to found a "congregation of pious daughters" who would care for the orphanage. Fr Triest remained interested in the charity-school in Ronse while he lived in Ghent, and he supported it financially. The "Workhouse of charity" can be considered a foretaste of his later foundations.

Although the control over priests had diminished in intensity after the incident at Cotton's home, Triest was aware that it was still illegal for him to stay at Ronse as unsworn priest. On 4 February 1801 he was taken by surprise, in the company of his two curates Fransman and Magherman and another priest Van der Gauwen, when he was leading a funeral service at the house of mourning of a certain Arnold Van Cauwenberghe. In a chronicle of Ronse, the event is described as follows:

On 4 February 1801, Fr Triest, parish priest of St. Peter's and his two curates, and Fr Van der Gauwen, and another priest, were arrested by the superintendent of the local police and the gendarmes while they were celebrating a secret funeral. But the case was timely treated and softened, and the gendarmes were bribed so that they set them free.

Although Triest and his colleagues were bought free, where Cotton may have had a finger in the pie, we know from the rest of the story that the case was investigated so that both the superintendent and the mayor were suspended and replaced. On 8 June 1801, Ferdinand Eugene Fostier was appointed as the new mayor and although he was a former pupil of the Oratorians, he was outspokenly anti-clerical so that the persecution of priests flared up again. Triest had to be extra cautious. From May 1801 till the beginning of 1802, he was nowhere to be found, and we have no idea of his whereabouts during that period. Still, we know that he went on a pilgrimage to Kevelaar on 12 September and that he celebrated Holy Mass there.

The 1801 concordat, presented on 15 July, was sanctioned by Pope Pius VII on 15 August. Napoleon I promulgated it on 8 April 1802 so that the dioceses could start functioning normally again. Politically, Ronse belonged to the Department of the Scheldt that had G. Faipoult as prefect, but according to the concordat it belonged to the archbishopric of Mechlin. From 2 June 1802, the boundaries of dioceses and of departments were made to correspond so that Ronse fell under the bishop of Ghent. Etienne Fallot de Beaumont had been appointed bishop on 10 April. Hence, Fr Triest came under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Ghent.

Having lived in hiding for more than four years, Fr Triest could address his parishioners for the first time on Ascension Sunday, 27 May 1802; he delivered a carefully prepared and completely written out sermon with some feeling. Some paragraphs are moving and typical of Triest:

O happy day on which I may address my dear parishioners for the first time... As for me, I forgave my enemies long ago. I repeat before you in public that I have forgiven them from the bottom of my heart; I give them the kiss of brotherly love and wish them no other retribution than to be able to reconcile them with God... Mind the task you have received from the Lord and fulfil it (Paul). ... My third duty, besides instructing and setting the example, is my service: I should give you my waking, my caring, my labour, my rest, not just once but always, every night and day, in spite of remote and bad roads. Call me when you feel like it, and do not spare me nor fear to annoy me. For I am happy to give you my rest, my health and even my life, after the example of Jesus Christ, my Lord...

The last part of the above quotation is a kind of summary of the way of living and working of Fr Triest in the past four years, as well as a declaration of intention for his further life as a priest in the service of many. The idea of establishing a nice apostolate in Ronse, and in St. Peter's parish in particular, was soon to be interfered with by the meddlesome and

anti-clerical mayor Fostier. Although he had no legal ground on which to fight non-juring priests, he tried to make life difficult for them. For example, he repeatedly complained of the great disunity among priests of the Ronse parishes to prefect Faipoult. The latter passed on this information to bishop Beaumont, who felt obliged to interfere. On 30 November 1802, St. Peter's parish was abolished and Triest became parish priest of St. Martin's. For this purpose, he took the oath of allegiance to the government in the hands of prefect Faipoult on 26 December, after the Gospel reading during a solemn Mass in St. Bavon's cathedral in Ghent. On 3 January 1803 he was solemnly welcomed in St. Martin's parish as its parish priest. On that occasion, he delivered a festive sermon of which we quote a few passages:

In the competency to which Divine Providence has appointed me I have to do two things, acting as a Christian and as a shepherd. As a Christian, I should work at my salvation; as a shepherd, I should work for your salvation, devote myself completely to your service. I should set the example in order to urge you to a virtuous life; I should instruct you so that you know your duties; and I should make myself available to help you in all your needs...

What may I expect from you? Your love and gratitude. God is my witness that I love you and that I wish you every good thing which I wish for myself. Therefore, I feel comforted by the idea that you too love me. And your gratitude consists just in this friendship, in your trust in me, in your support and your prayer. Hence, pray for me, you children, for God likes the prayer of the little ones. Pray for me, you youth, I carry you in my heart. Pray for me, you fathers and mothers, for I share your worries about your family. Pray for me, you elderly, for I will support and protect you. Pray for me, you poor ones, for you are my suffering members whom I will honour, love and help. Pray for me, you sick, for I want to share everything with you that I have.

At the end of this homily, he looks back on the past and reflects on the hardships he and his parishioners have endured:

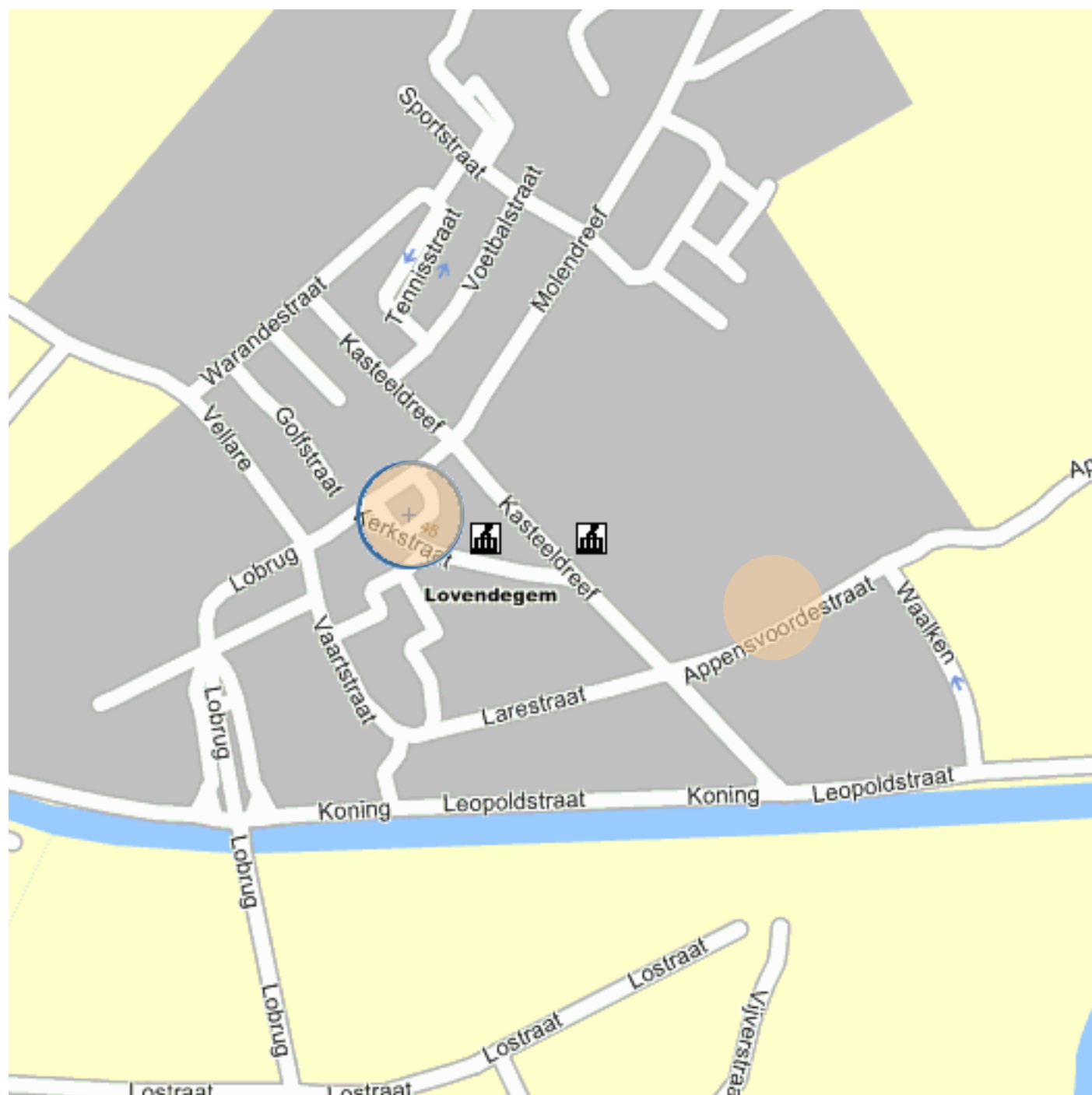
I cannot refrain from shedding tears when I reminisce on the unhappy situation in which we were plunged, and when I think of all the wishes and sighs you sent to heaven at that time, quieten down then, stop crying, for our wishes have been fulfilled.

Triest must have been unaware of another accusation which mayor Fostier had levelled against him to prefect Faipoult: as a parish priest, Triest had given some marriages a religious blessing before they had been registered officially. The 1802 Act of 8 April provided that the church marriage could

be blessed only after the civil formalities had been carried out so that it had been registered by the civil authorities. Triest stood accused of having blessed two marriages, one on 23 November 1802 although he had done so in good faith believing that the marriage was already provided for at the town hall. A few days after the religious marriage, the bridegroom took ill and died without having been married legally. The second accusation concerned a religious marriage on 9 January 1803, celebrated again a few days before its registration at the town hall. The former case in particular gave rise to complications because the bride claimed to be with child but could not claim the hereditary right for her future baby as the mayor did not want to legitimise the marriage. A court-case ensued which involved Fr Triest who had to account to prefect Faipoult. The latter understood that the mayor had designs on Triest, and wisely passed on the case to the bishop who deemed it appropriate not to take any sanction. However, when prefect Faipoult received the second dossier, he could not but demand "proper" measures to be taken by the bishop. His solution was to move Triest to another location. On 4 February 1803, Mgr de Beaumont informed Triest by letter: *"I deeply regret to inform you that you can no longer remain in Ronse. ... I am looking for a suitable parish for you. I am going to dispose of the one you are in now; therefore, make ready to depart."*

And that concluded Triest's time in Ronse.





LOVENDEGEM



Triest probably spent some time with his family in Brussels to recover, for it took him a month to reach Lovendegem. He had never thought that he was going to deliver the same sermon that he had addressed on 3 January 1803 to the parishioners of Lovendegem on 26 March of the same year, when he took up his function there officially.

It was striking for Triest to see how his first introduction to his parishioners confirmed the bishop's words exactly. In a pastoral letter of August 1802, Mgr Fallot de Beaumont wrote:

Too many among you are given over to buying and selling on Sundays, giving great scandal to decent-minded people, as well as to pernicious drunkenness and debauchery, to luxuriousness in inns, with shameless dances, songs and games.

In one of his early sermons at Lovendegem, Fr Triest reacted to these abuses:

"If you prayed more to Our Lady, the three capital sins of my parish would diminish. These three sins are drunkenness, blasphemy and unchastity. Remember that Our Lady will be present at the hour of your death when she will say, "You have often greeted me during your life, here am I to comfort you; you have called me full of grace, here I am to grant you this grace; you have so often said that the Lord is with me, now I can assure you that you will be with the Lord for ever; you have called me blessed, now I can announce to you that you are blessed for all eternity."

While speaking out about all the abuses he noticed, the new parish priest also indicated the remedies against them: regular receiving of the sacraments; devotion to Our Lady; and family prayer. In another sermon he gave the following advice:

It is natural and reasonable that a patient seeks relief with a physician, a pupil with his teacher, a child with his father or mother, a person in difficulty with a lawyer. And yet, I wonder what place Jesus takes in our life. Dare we bring our problems before Him, dare we still reckon on his grace? Do we still believe in Jesus' real presence here on earth and that He is concerned about us, that He loves us? But where is our return of love, and what about our confidence? If we love the Lord genuinely, we shall go to Him regularly and commit our worries to Him. (Lovendegem, 1804)





The parish church

The original parish church of Lovendegem was built in the 15th century, but it was rebuilt at the end of the 19th century in neo-gothic style. The church is dedicated to St. Martin. Father Triest arrived and was solemnly installed on Saturday 26 March 1803, a fortnight before Easter. The church was in a state of decay. The close-down by the French Revolution had not helped and the bell had been taken away in 1794 in order to be used as rough material for the production of cannons.

Together with his new curate and his maid, Marie-Anne De Meester, who had looked after his household since his days in Asse, he settled in at the presbytery: "Het Gulden Huys". It was only a few steps from the church. There was a park attached to it and it stretched out as far as the present town hall.

Foundation of the Sisters of Charity

Having only just been appointed as parish priest at Lovendegem, where he was confronted with needy and neglected children, P.J. Triest got the idea of founding a religious society to look after those children.

Maria van Doorne (M.V.D), the historian of the Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary, writes:

Moved by the miserable situation of the poor orphans in his parish and by the danger to which their virtue was exposed from birth for lack of Christian education, Fr Triest began to long for founding a congregation of pure souls whom he could entrust with the education of poor children and orphans of his parish.



The first person he approached was Maria Judoca Lammens, an industrious daughter of a simple Christian working family. Her father had been a slater and weaver, and her mother was blind. By doing some spinning, Mary contributed to the livelihood of the family of six children. Fr Triest's question to her to help out in educating poor children came like a bolt from the blue; but after an initial refusal she accepted the proposal. In order to start this work of charity, Fr Triest demanded financial support from the churchwardens and guardians of the orphans. They gave him 6 Brabant florins per month, which enabled him to hire a room in Noesche Road. There he gathered a small group of young children for catechism lessons. Afterwards, Maria Lammens revised the lessons with the children. Some time later, Jacoba Theresia Claeys, daughter of a poor weaver and also 30 years old, joined Mary. A bit later, the duo was joined by Catharina Wieme, a devout spinster. This Catharina brought some household utensils with her which she took back with her when she left later that year. On 24 October 1803, Maria Anna Convent arrived. She hailed from Mechlin and

Triest had known her when he was coadjutor at Hanswijk. After these four women had declared themselves willing to form a religious community, Triest asked his bishop, Mgr Fallot de Beaumont, for permission to start a religious community. The bishop must have been glad to notice that Triest had found his feet at Lovendegem after a relatively short lapse of time, and he granted him the permission. Thanks to a gift from Miss Limnander, Triest could hire a small farmhouse at the hamlet Appensvoorde where the convent and charity school would be located.

The convent was called *"Our Lady of Angels"*. Before settling in, the postulants did a retreat at Miss Limnander's chateau.

Thus, Triest had founded his first Congregation - the Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary. M.V.D. gives further comment on these early days:

The Spirit of God had inspired him (Triest) for a long time with much zeal which, matched with a fiery and lively character, had been a trying time for him during many years. He saw evil happening before him without being able to remedy to it.

Think of the former years Triest had spent in Ronse to understand M.V.D.'s meaning. Another biographer, P. De Decker, narrates how the aged Triest reminisced about that moment of grace:

"Fr Triest liked to think back on that decisive moment in his old age, and tearfully spoke of God's goodness who had encouraged his zeal and greatly supported his steady efforts for the neighbour's welfare."

The arrival of Joanna De Martelaere from Welden in 1804, and the rising number of schoolchildren made the house at Appensvoorde too small to cope. Again, Miss Limnander intervened by offering financial support so that Triest could buy nine small houses on a private plot in Mill Drive. Fr Triest signed the deed while Miss Limnander paid.

On 1 May 1804, Maria Theresia Van der Gauwen offered her services to the community. Jacoba Claeys examined her motives and skills; but because the candidate could not spin, she was considered unsuitable and sent home. When Triest heard what had happened he was quite surprised, for he knew the Van der Gauwens from Etikhove near Ronse very well. Maria Theresia had been a novice in the Cistercian Abbey of Maegdendael at Pamele near Oudenaarde, and had received some formation in the religious life. Maegdendael Abbey had been abolished during the French Revolution in 1796. The following year it was sold, and it had not had the opportunity yet to be reorganised. The then French regime only allowed religious communities who were committed to charitable work, and it was very reluctant to accept contemplative orders. Maria Theresia returned. Isabelle Claeys joined the community so that there were again six Sisters by June 1804.

Triest thought that he would be able to start with this group. That is why



he approached his bishop to obtain the permission for the six Sisters to take religious vows. The bishop's answer was positive and on 2 July 1804, the Sisters promised "chastity to God, obedience, and voluntary poverty to the superior" in the parish church of Lovendegem. They kept their worldly names, except for Maria Theresia Van der Gauwen who took the religious name Placida, probably the name she had at Maegdendael Abbey. As she was also elected superior of the community, she was promptly called "Mother Placida".

Two anecdotes illustrate the spirit with which these Sisters lived and worked. On the day of her first profession, Maria Lammens, the first follower of Triest, felt unworthy of becoming a nun and asked Fr Triest to be allowed to be a simple maidservant of the Sisters. Triest, who knew how much goodness was hidden in Maria, gave her the candid answer: "Just hurry to church. I'm coming immediately." The same Maria Lammens was to become the first superior at Lovendegem, novice mistress and vicar general. In the register of professions, three Sisters put a cross behind their name, indicating that they could not write. Nevertheless, these unassuming women laid the foundation of a mighty charitable work.

Tombstone of Peter-Joseph Triest

Peter-Joseph Triest was buried in the churchyard in Lovendegem at the foot of the cross to the east of the church. At the beginning of the 20th century a new parochial churchyard came into use. The grave of Fr. Triest was transferred as well and the tombstone was placed at the northern side of the choir against the exterior wall.

The monument carries the names of the sculptor P. Parmentier and his brother and the date 1839 on its side. When the medallion was finished already, they noticed that they had forgotten a medal. It is very noticeable that it was added afterwards. The fronton has a bas-relief sculpture; a chalice, grapes and ears of corn.

The following Latin text was carved in the tombstone:

*In honour of God Almighty
and in pious remembrance of Rev. Fr. Peter-Joseph Triest;
to the earth he was born in Brussels, for heaven he was born in Ghent.
First he was the parish priest of St Peter's and St Martin's in Renaix;
later on he became parish priest in Lovendegem.
Here he founded the congregation of
the Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary;
in Ghent he founded the Brothers of Charity,
the Brothers of St John of God
and the Sisters of the Childhood of Jesus.*

He was titular Canon of St Bavon, Administrator of the civil hospices and the tireless helper of other charitable institutions. He died as the Belgian Vincent de Paul on 24 June 1836. May he rest in peace.



The Burial Chapel

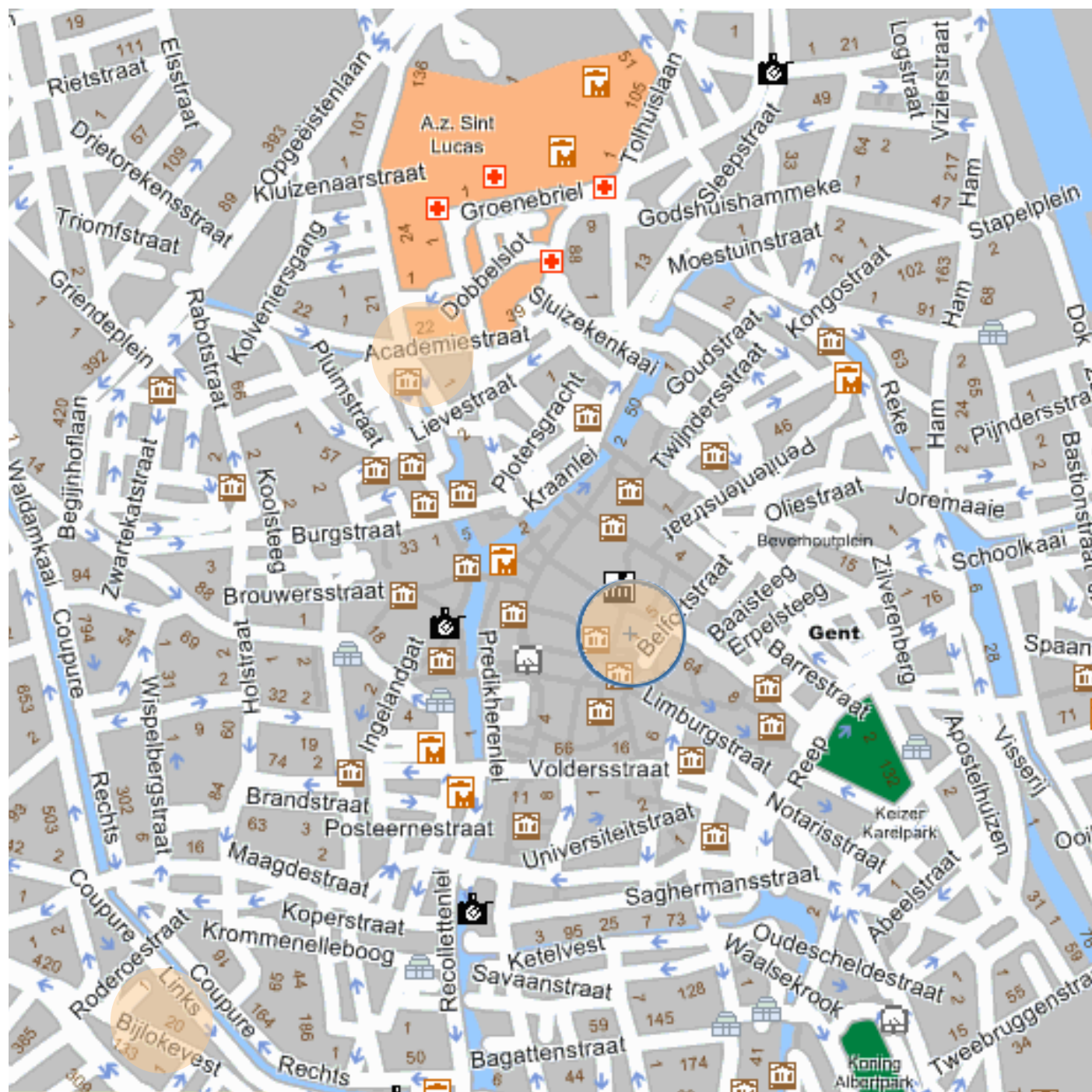
The sisters of Charity in Lovendegem have their own cemetery at the edge of their garden. Originally it was only to be used for the burial of the first sisters and later on only for those who died at Lovendegem. The Superiors General too were buried there. The sisters wanted Father Triest to rest there as well.

In 1904 Mgr. Stillemans, bishop of Ghent, and the local authorities of Lovendegem granted permission for the transfer of the Founder's body to the sisters' cemetery. To avoid a crowd of onlookers, the transfer was organized at night. The wooden coffin had mouldered completely. The zinc coffin inside the wooden one was only slightly flattened and still contained all the bones that had remained quite recognizable. His faded stole was taken out of the coffin. A big fragment was given to the Sisters and bits and pieces were given to the Brothers of Charity. The chaplain of the house took out three teeth, passed on two, and kept one himself. The remaining parts were put into a new coffin together with a bottle containing a parchment with the names of the witnesses.

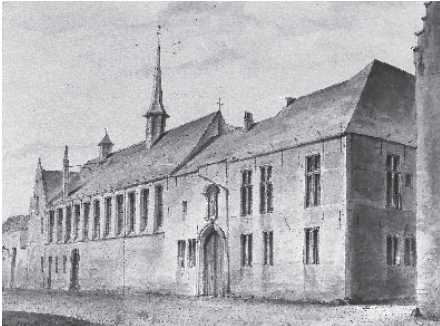
Later on a burial chapel was built on the spot where Fr. Triest had been buried for the third time. The crypt contains eight niches. Next to Fr. Triest rests his first successor Canon Benedictus De Decker, and five Superiors General of the Sisters of Charity.

Prayer to obtain the intercession of Canon P.J. Triest

Heavenly Father, God of Love,
You have favoured your servant Peter Joseph Triest
with exceptional gifts to approach the most needy as his brothers and sisters.
We thank You for the love that You have shown us and in which we may take part.
We ask You through the intercession of Peter Joseph Triest to go with the same love
to our fellow men and to serve them in the same way as we serve You.
At his intercession we also ask for the favour of a life full of grace and especially.....
(mention the specific favour)
Allow love to grow in our lives until the day that we may share in your eternal Love. Amen.



GHENT



Abbey Terhagen

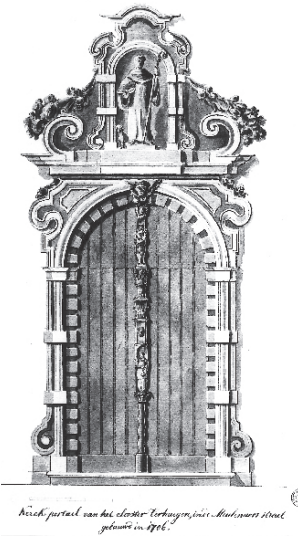
Terhagen Abbey was one of the five abbeys of the Cistercian Sisters which were to be found in Ghent at the time of their abolition by the French occupying authorities in 1796. Terhagen had originated near a village in Zeeland, Flanders, but after many upheavals the nuns established themselves in Miller Street in Ghent in 1606. There they remained till 27 December 1796 when 19 nuns, 1 novice and 8 lay nuns were expelled from their monastery. The buildings were leased to several people till the city authorities became proprietor of the whole monastery in 1803? They were planning to change it into a hospice for incurable patients. It would take another two years before Triest and his Sisters of Charity could settle there.

Making the abbey fit for habitation again was a difficult task and the first challenge for Triest and his nuns. During the first days, they did not even have a bed to sleep in and passed the night on chairs. By August some real help was given by prefect Faipoult. He donated a sum of 3,500 francs for repairs and basic furnishing of the establishment. The first patients arrived a few weeks later. As there were not enough beds, Triest gave up his and slept on a chair for the next ten nights. In spite of all the problems, the chronicles say that the nuns, "hospitable in their poverty, lived their call of servants of the poor full of joy and confidence."

From the report by M.V.D. we can establish that Triest was the pivot on whom everything hinged:

In a short time and with few means, the General Superior managed to have everything repaired. He saw to it that the community had space enough on the premises; he did not have any means to train the nuns in such a way that they would be ready for any good work that was needed in the service of the poor... First of all, he had to educate the sisters themselves in the life of spirituality and perfection without which one works and exhausts oneself in vain in the service of the poor. The means he used included strict silence, obedience and meditation, and especially humility which he considered the foundation. For then, God will be all in all, and we shall say in all honesty and simplicity: "God alone and his Holy Will."

Although Triest was, indeed, concerned about the care of the poor and the sick, he was not less concerned about the development of the religious life of his nuns: the one aspect could not be separated from the other. We can trace Triest's views in several texts:





Those who are called to the tasks of an active life should apply themselves to them faithfully, for sure. Doing otherwise would mean deviating from God's plan. Nevertheless they must guard against self-deception. Therefore, it is necessary to turn to God regularly and to live a contemplative life as well. Do your charitable work always in a spirit of faith, thinking on God. Devote yourself in generous self-forgetfulness. And when you feel empty with giving, turn to the Lord, knock at the door of your only Master. Whoever rely on their own power, mislead themselves. God's mighty hand withdraws from the proud; they are left to their own insufficiency and powerlessness. In order to love with all our might, we must rely on grace, beseeching merciful God continually. Live according to the Gospel, and never stop praying. One who has not got the spirit of prayer is like a warrior without weapons, like a city without ramparts, like a body without a soul. Prayer restores man. It lifts him above the transient and enables him to dwell in God alone who created and redeemed him. Your whole being should be intent on the Lord. Just as it is your duty to serve the sick at any time, your heart should be open to prayer. Always remain in God's presence.



House of Father Triest

It was a happy initiative that bears witness to their reverence for their Founder that the Sisters of Charity saved the house of Fr. Triest from ruin and turned it into a convent. The community "Effeta" situated at 6, Fire Brigade Street in Ghent is part of the former abbey Ter Haegen and still shows some traces of the old interior.

The house contained the following adjoining rooms: parlour, dining room, kitchen, drawing room, carriage entrance, stable and washhouse. Fr. Triest's bedroom was on the first floor, near the Molenaarsstreet, so that through the window he was able to see the tower of the chapel and the inner court yard at the main entrance.



On the ground floor opposite the main entrance was his office. In an inner garden along the carriage entrance was a summer house with a birdcage. Father Triest lived in those surroundings from 1805 till his death in 1836. He himself used a small bedroom next to the men's sickroom because he wanted to help as much as possible at night as well. In the beginning, when the number of patients exceeded the possible number of admissions, he gave up his bed for ten days and spent the night on a chair. This gradually became the focal point of all the charitable works that were to be founded in Ghent. Here the flame of divine love was enkindled, drawing others to the consecrated life. Here the infirm and the destitute found a warm heart and people who were well disposed towards them. Here Fr. Triest battled to bring about the kingdom of God in the world for more than thirty years.



After a short illness he died on 24 June 1836. He died as a saint, united with God trusting in Mary, concerned about the life of his Congregations – so important for the poor. His last words were: “Date et dabitur vobis,” give and it shall be given unto you. He was loved by the common people as: “Good Father Triest,” and after his death people filed past his mortal remains for two days.

Prayer in the room

>Prayer for beatification<

Lord Jesus,

After your example, your servant Peter Joseph Triest opened his heart completely to the love of the Holy Father.

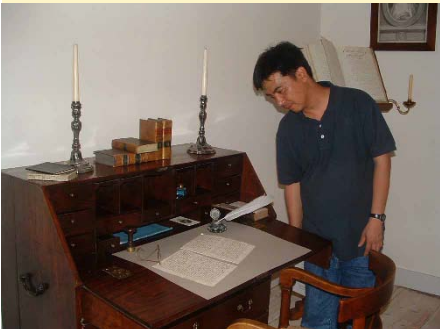
He became a priest moved by charity and worried about the wellbeing of the poor, the sick and of those who suffer. By helping them and assisting them he wanted to let them participate in the joy of the resurrection.

Assisted by those who followed his example, he translated the evangelical message of love in his time and he laid out a trail of charitable initiatives wherever he went.

Permit that his memory remains alive in all those places where people live and work, inspired by his words and by his actions.

And permit that his presence is rendered lively in the Church by elevating him above the faithful as an example

For that should allow us to understand even better that God is Love and that it was your sole desire to live in his love. Amen.



“Most loveable Heart of Jesus,
Because You ask for my heart,
I give it to You.
Only You are worthy of it and only You can make it happy.
I give it to You so that you may heal it of all its wounds
Of pride, selfish love, attachment to earthly things
And of a still greater attachment to myself,
Of a lack of love for my neighbour;
In one word, of all my wounds.
Let no wound remain,
Except the wound caused by Your love.
Jesus Christ, my God.
I desire but one thing:
A place in Your Heart.”

Byloke

- Founding the Congregation of the Brothers of Charity

Being a member of the Commission of Hospices and manager of the Civil Hospital, Canon Triest was in direct contact with the old-age home on the Byloke campus. Since 1805 elderly men of St. Anthony's Court had been accommodated in an unoccupied building of the Byloke Abbey. A former Franciscan Brother, Theodorus Caluwaert, was in charge of it and ran the home with the help of a few willing residents. The situation was all but satisfactory: according to the chronicles there was "carousing, serving and drinking, and improper things happened there." Towards the end of 1806, Caluwaert threw in the towel and he was replaced by another former Franciscan Father, Balduin Caesens, who could not keep up discipline either. Urged on by this mismanagement, Triest got the idea of mobilising a few young men at Lovendegem who might be willing to come and look after the elderly. Having approached some young men, Triest applied to mayor della Faille, who welcomed the proposal. On 24 December 1807, Triest put his plan on paper. It was submitted to the Commission on 26 December and accepted on the spot.

With your permission, I introduce five virtuous young men into the old-age home; I find in them the talents needed to acquit themselves properly of the tasks we give them. I dare say as an absolute truth that if no Christian and disinterested love inspires the ones who start serving the needy elderly, it is absolutely impossible that they acquit themselves of it properly. ... These young men could form a community under the protection and supervision of the Commission of Hospices; a community managed by the civil director of the hospital with regard to the services of the house and by a spiritual leader appointed by the bishop with regard to all matters spiritual and the regulations. In order to avoid being considered religious with solemn vows, they would keep their private goods in absolute possession, as well as the income and produce of their work; and their lawful heirs retain the right to their inheritance.

Triest showed again that he was a practical, yet inspired, organiser who thought of everything. The stipulation about the solemn vows had to do with the problem of having the new community officially recognised. His reference to the motivation of these young men illustrates his views on the manner in which quality care is given, namely on the basis of a religious attitude marked by love. Somewhere else he puts it as follows:

You have to go to the sick with respect and recognise Christ in them. A firm belief will make it possible. If your sensitivity is taken aback by a repugnant wound, apply this firm belief. True, such care often goes against nature, but in the light of faith your love will replace nature. Love gives



power which nature cannot give.

Triest's intention was clear: he wanted to found another religious community, but this time for men, and put them in charge of the care for the elderly. In practice, they would work under the responsibility of the Commission while he would take care of recruiting, training and guidance. He proposed to have them called "brothers", and said: "The elderly will have to show subjection and obedience to the brothers, and not murmur." Having obtained the permission of the Commission, he lost no time in getting ready three young men to go to the Byloke two days later, on 28 December 1807. They were Joseph de Caster from Drongen, who was a servant and gardener of Fr Triest at Lovendegem; Peter De Neve and Alexander Struyvelt, both living at Lovendegem and weavers by trade. They were shown around at the old-age home in the company of the mayor; the bursar of the hospital was asked to provide them with some food and accommodation for the time being. Their first evening at the home was rather depressing. They felt really abandoned and the elderly showed themselves rather hostile in the knowledge that their unlimited freedom was coming to an end. The next day, Canon Triest joined them to distribute the tasks. One was put to work in the kitchen, another in the sick-bay, and the third one became the gate-keeper. The elderly were told again to respect and obey the brothers.



On 2 January 1808, the fourth candidate, Anthony Blaton from Etikhove, joined the community and became bursar and superior. Thus the small community started off. On 21 January, mayor della Faille approved the revised regulations; they included a number of articles that were meant to ensure a monastic atmosphere indeed: *"Silence during meals and in the dormitories; at the sign of the bell, rising, going to table and to chapel; on Sundays, no going out; daily Mass with missal or rosary; morning prayer in chapel; devout prayer before and after meals"*. Article 26 in particular bore the mark of the spirit which Triest wanted to introduce into the home:

As soon as the elderly arrive in the dormitory in the evening, they will maintain the strictest silence in order not to disturb those who want to pray or to ponder divine things, for the elderly should always remember that the purpose of the founders of this home was not only to provide them with physical help but all kinds of spiritual benefits so that this help itself might prepare them gradually for eternal happiness.

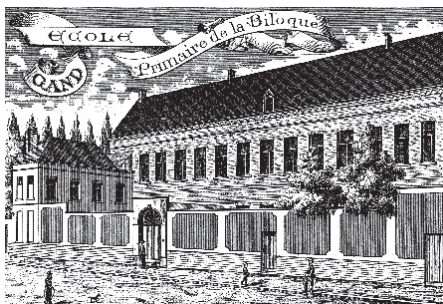
If the regulations were meant for the elderly, the brothers were no less supposed to keep and observe them. During the first months of 1808, new candidates entered the community: Livinus de Greve from Bassevelde; Jan van Hoelen from Evergem; Jan Provoost from Etikhove; and Leopold De Vos from Lovendegem.



Article 1: The brothers will keep in mind that the aim of this congregation is to serve the elderly and sick people of this hospice, as well as doing other charitable work in the service of poor and miserable people according to the discretion of the right reverend Bishop, and where they will be sent by the superiors.

Article 2: They will no less keep in mind another aim of this congregation which the brothers must strive after with great fervour - their own salvation and evangelical perfection. Accordingly, they will consider themselves as people called to the religious life; and to that aim, they will dedicate themselves to God through the three religious vows of obedience, poverty and chastity, by which they will be bound as long as they remain in this congregation with the help of God's grace.

Article 3: Humility, meekness, patience, sobriety, obdience, chastity, love for the poor, and above all, love for God and true love for the neighbour and compassion with the oppressed and miserable members of Christ was, according to the spirit of Jesus Christ, the good spirit of St. Vincent de Paul after which all brothers of this congregation of charity should strive with dedicated zeal.



The Byloke school

In the early years of the foundation of both the Sisters and the Brothers of Charity, most attention was paid to the care for incurable sick, poor elderly and mentally ill, in the service of the Commission of Civil Hospices of Ghent and other towns and municipalities where Triest was asked to send a few Sisters or Brothers. As early as 1809, though, on the occasion of a canonical visitation, Triest had the postulants subjected to the question whether they were ready "to consider the education of poor children as the aim of the congregation." We also think of Bro Jan Bertyn's initiative to teach the children of the Byloke neighbourhood from his porter's lodge. In a letter of 1814 we read that Fr Bernard states that "in our leisure time, we teach children how to read, without any remuneration". It may indicate that the Byloke school had become a fact, for in an inspection report of 1826, we read that the school had been in existence for ten years. Meanwhile one had bought a house in the Byloke Square to accommodate the school.

Take your task of educator to heart. Work on the spiritual and material wellbeing of the children. Be always friendly. If you have to admonish, do it with meekness. Never show sympathy or preference, but consider in every child the face of Lord Jesus.

The particular rules contained a chapter on “schools and teachers”:

They shall have great affection for all children without any discrimination, and resist the aversions they may feel to some children for love of God and their neighbour. They will never admonish in a fit of anger but, after it has passed, tell the children their faults lovingly. They will never admonish passionately. They apply punishments seldom, but prefer the way of sweetness, of reason and of religion. They will never hit the children. They will teach the children how to spell and read, teach them catechism, and join them in their games and tell them edifying stories during recreation. They will sing hymns with them. They will never make public what the children have told them in confidence.



Memorial to Peter-Joseph Triest

In the Bijlokehof, at the end of the Godhuizenlaan and the beginning of the Martelaarslaan, this monument was erected on June 25th 1961. Only in 1961... and this in the city where Canon Triest had achieved so much. A bit late, but richly deserved! Did the people of Ghent think they were relieved of their obligation because there was a mausoleum in Brussels? The memorial was at last erected thanks to the initiative and the tenacity of a committee of delegates of the three remaining congregations and the past pupils of the Sisters and Brothers of Charity.

The architect Warie drew up the design, the sculptor M. Witdouch executed it and G. Minne looked after the bronze casting. The city council granted an aid of 25.000 fr. – a tenth of the expenses – and gave a piece of land on the same spot where one of the most flourishing congregations of Fr. Triest was founded. This counts no doubt as proof of their gratitude and admiration for the man who was for almost thirty years the pivot of the charity in Ghent and the organizer or reformer of all charitable institutions in the city.



On the monument we read the following text:

Qui pertransit benefaciendo. Act. Ap.X 38

CANON

Peter-Joseph TRIEST

1760-1836

Supporter of the poor, the orphans and the abandoned,
Educator of working-class children,
Benefactor of the blind, the deaf, the sick and the infirm.

Founder of the

Sisters of Charity 1803

Brothers of Charity 1807

Brothers of John of God 1823

Sisters of the Childhood of Jesus 1835

The rules I give you are extracts from the writings of saintly and pious men, and they set out part of your obligations which regulate your exterior deportment. As to your interior dispositions, it is the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, who will make them known to you and will teach you all truth and remind you of all that our divine Saviour taught in the Gospel. ... As a result of your election, you are called to follow the Lord in his difficult and painful life, in his zeal for the glory of his heavenly Father and for the salvation of souls. Called also to follow Him in his affability, in his compassion for those in all kinds of needs, for all sorts of sick and infirm who came to Him and were brought to Him, and all of whom He cured if they, or those who brought them, believed in Him. (1809)

Value the fact that you are called to serve the sick. Charitable work is as old as the Church itself. By serving the sick, you are a co-worker of God's Providence and you imitate Christ in his redemptive task. Do not be dismayed by the pain the sick may cause you. Remember the words of the Lord who gave his life for others. Cannot we then also give our life for others?

Without any temerity, I may say with Holy Scripture: "You are gods on earth. Indeed, you imitate Divine Providence, for you feed the poor of Jesus Christ, you make manna come down on the hungry, you quench the thirsty. You know the sad state of the unfortunate, poor and sick people who never enjoy a pleasant day; for whom we might say that the sun is no longer shining, and that the earth carries flowers for the rich only, whereas for the poor only thorns and thistles; unfortunate ones who, bereft from everything, resemble more the dead than the living. Providing clothes for such people to cover themselves, preparing medicine for their ailments which will completely cure or at least relieve these ailments; providing them with a bed and making it to rest their wounded and ailing body on it; nursing their dirty and smelly wounds to give them some relief; is that not creating sunshine for them, producing a new earth? Is that not resuscitating them and saving them from the jaws of death? (Letter to the Sisters of Charity, 30 december 1828)

It seems as if Christ has lived for the poor only: always He was among them. In all humility, you are therefore another Christ when you go to the needy, destitute of body, of intelligence, or of heart, destitute of soul. You are another Christ when you feed them bread, knowledge or goodness, when you help them to open up to God's grace.



Gerard the Devil Castle

At the asylum for men, the orphans' warden Haeck managed the house at 0.82 francs per person per day. In order to make an extra profit, the Gerard the Devil's Castle was open to the public on certain occasions so that the citizens of Ghent could come and entertain themselves at the expense of the mentally ill.

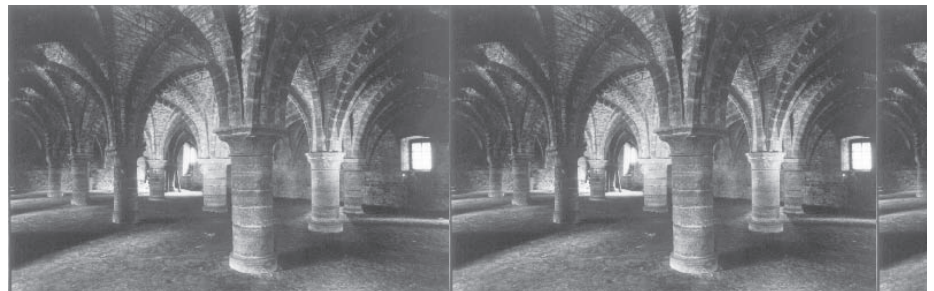
On 13 September 1815, Canon Triest substituted Fr Bernard, the superior of the Brothers of Charity, for warden Haeck. He made all the arrangements for the brothers to take over the care for the mentally ill on 30 September. In their chronicle we read:

There we saw several improper things like a dangerous madman who protested and who had to be put in irons; as he did not comply with the wishes of the servants, one of them hit the patient with the irons in the legs till he got quiet. The next day this patient had to be brought to hospital; his legs were festering, and he died a few days later. His death may be put down to that blow. ... Thus, the brothers who had been called by God to this work could get cracking with their meritorious work in the service of the miserable and poor and mentally ill people because our reverend Father considered them as his dearest friends.



Guislain's description of the situation in the Castle was very condemning:

The "Mansweesenhuys" (asylum for men) is an awful prison where nothing useful or suitable is found. A small humid cellar is the meeting place for all kinds of mentally ill people. On top of it is the communal, cold, unhygienic dormitory. Both places give on to a low-lying, narrow, wet inner court. A small part is meant for paying patients, but it is almost as disgusting and dirty as the dwelling of the paupers. A small basement, of fearful aspect, provided with two rows of cells with partitions, serves as the abode of the raging patients. It is a terrible dwelling which you cannot see without feeling much concerned about the lot of those who are condemned to spent their whole life there.





Cathedral of St. Bavo

Peter-Joseph Triest who, with the grace of God, had brought so much help to the weak and the destitute, was appointed Canon of the Cathedral of St. Bavo by the bishop of Ghent. The observant visitor to this magnificent building will notice many pictures of the coat of arms of the noble Triest family: a horn and two hounds. By birth Canon Triest was not related to this family, who numbered among them a renowned bishop of Ghent, but by the richness of his mind and the sanctity of his life, he was among the noblest people who ever lived.

Museum Dr. Guislain

To the north of the “De Brugse Poort” neighbourhood in the city of Ghent, you find the Museum Dr. Guislain. It is housed in the buildings of the former ***Guislain Hospice***.

The collection confronts most visitors to a series of pertinent questions: What was psychiatry like in those days? Who was that “first Belgian psychiatrist”, Dr. Joseph Guislain? How did psychiatry develop? What questions rise today and what opportunities are there?

Throughout the collection and the temporary exhibitions of the Museum Dr. Guislain you will find three leitmotifs.

The first one is the medical leitmotiv or the history of psychiatry. Lunatics, fools, idiots, madmen: different words for madness. What kind of operation was the extraction of a stone of madness? What does it mean to suffer from black bile? Who was weighed and found wanting? How did people deal with madness throughout the ages: a combination of magic, religion, use of force, care, nursing, and science.

A second leitmotiv is photography. The collection of photographs ranges from pictures of 19th century “cases” and of the mysterious asylum to contemporary pictures that do away with the traditional stereotypes regarding madness.

Outsiders art is art produced on the fringes of the art scene. Its directness reminds us of the creative powers inside each one of us, powers which we thought we had lost. Works selected from among the internationally reputed collection De Stadshof fill the rooms with outsider art. That is the third leitmotiv of our collection and in most temporary exhibitions.

What these leitmotifs have in common is the fascination for all things different. The museum, which is a realisation of the Brothers of Charity, invites its visitors to reflect on how we should deal with the other and with things different in ourselves. Looking back on the history of psychiatry, we are obliged to be honest about the way in which modern-day society deals



with the opposition normal versus abnormal, with exclusion, and tolerance. The Museum Dr. Guislain wants continue to draw people's attention to these topical issues by organising original exhibitions in which madness and science, art and culture are looked at from a different perspective.

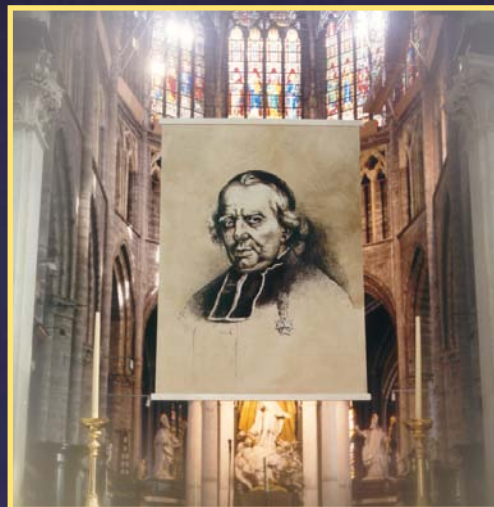
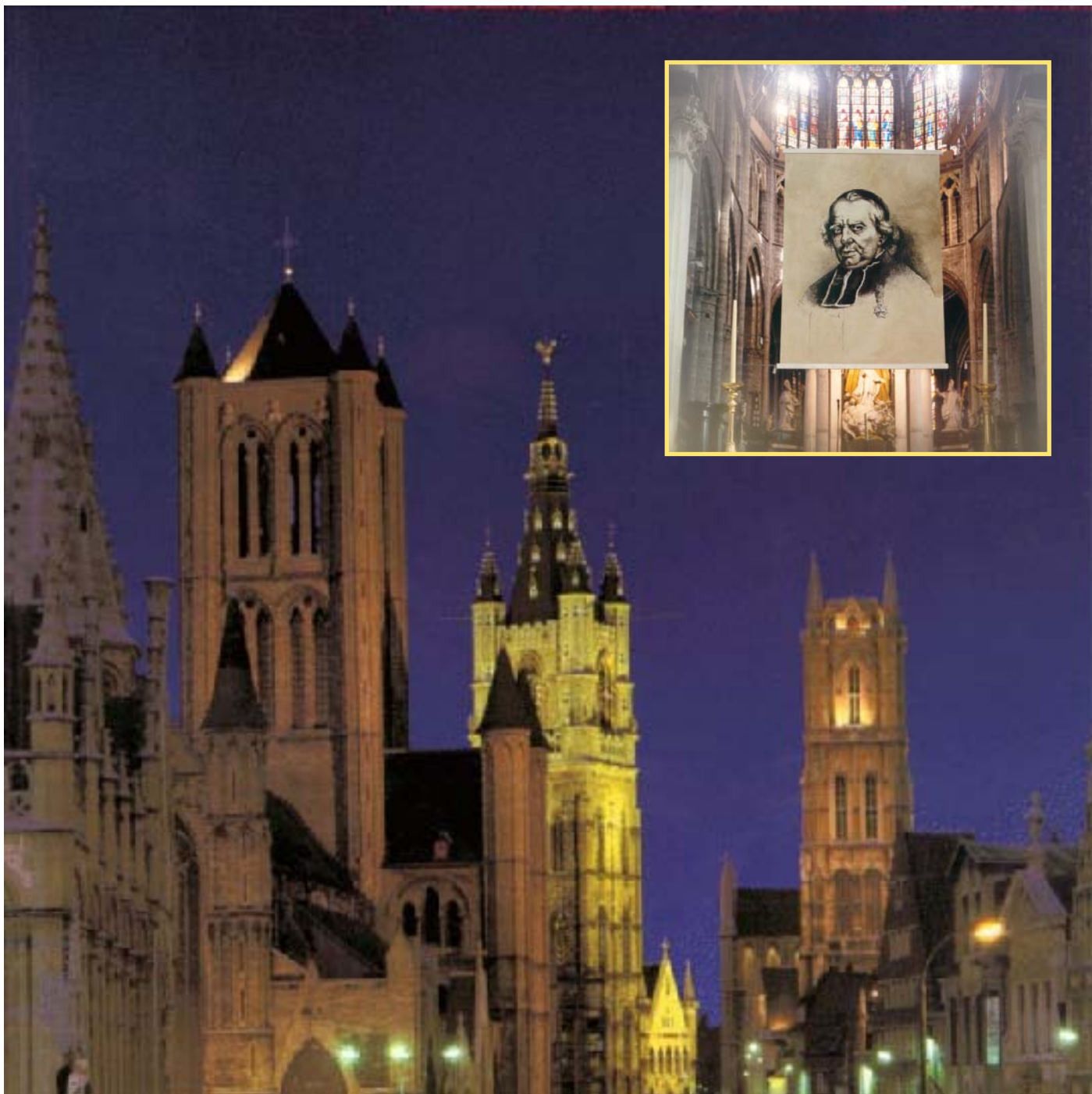
Museum Dr. Guislain

Woodsmen, jesters, silly people, fools,... All different words for madness or insanity. What's the cutting of the pebble? What does black bile sickness mean? Why are mad people smothered? Does swearing exorcism bring people back to reason? Who is weighed and found wanting?

Dealing with madness or insanity: a mixture of magic, religion, compulsion and care, supervision and science. Throughout the centuries people wanted to punish, to anoint, to take care of and to cure things that cannot be resolved in a reasonable way. A fascinating history.

In Gent Doctor Jozef Guislain caused furore during the 19th century. He broke mad people's chains and together with Canon Triest and the Brothers of Charity he organised modern psychiatric care in Belgium. More than a century later the asylum he constructed houses the Museum Dr. Guislain for the History of Psychiatry and Mental Health Care.





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