



SING, BUT KEEP WALKING...
IF YOU ARE GOING ONWARD,
YOU ARE WALKING. SAINT AUGUSTINE

HOME OF THE MOTHER



No. 216 September - October 2020



HEALING AND SALVATION

I asked if anyone in the residence had COVID-19. The answer was that one person tested positive...



ELISABETH LESEUR

Her weapons were prayer and sacrifice, because reasoning with her husband was useless...



CARLOS SANTOS

The Lord "threw me a curveball." When I was told I would be working in the ICU, I almost passed out...

CONTENTS

3 EDITORIAL

4 POPE

Pope Francis' Message-Annual International Youth Festival in Medjugorje

5 I KNEW SR. CLARE

By Sr. Mary Rose Gallaher, SHM

6 BY THE WAY, I HAVE A CANCER

SUFFERING WITH JOY

By Sr. Ruth M. O'Callaghan, SHM

8 MATERNITY - A TEST OF FAITH

By Ana Isabel Jimenez, LHM

10 BELIEVE IT!

AD TUENDAM FIDEM (III): DEFINITIVE DOCTRINE

By Sr. Miriam Loveland, SHM

12 TRUE FREEDOM

By Sr. Kristen Gardner, SHM

14 MARY IN THE AKATHIST HYMN

By Fr. Félix López, SHM

16 MAMIE AND THE SICK CHILDREN OF PEDROSA

By Sr. Beatriz Liaño, SHM

18 INTERVIEW - AMPARO MEDINA

PRO-LIFE ACTIVIST

22 HEALING AND SALVATION IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC

By Luisa Eugenia Lucas

25 ELISABETH LESEUR,

FOR HER HUSBAND'S CONVERSION

By Sr. M. Carmen Checa, SHM

32 HALLOWEEN AND EVIL'S LIMIT

By Sr. Beatriz Liaño, SHM

30 INTERVIEW - CARLOS SANTOS

35 BLESSED PIERINA MOROSINI,

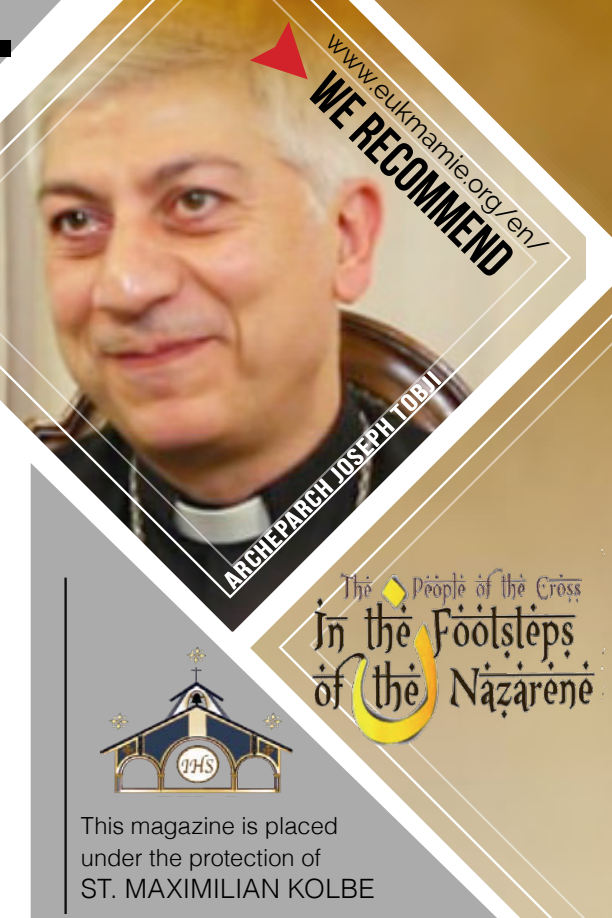
MARTYR OF CHASTITY

By Sr. Isabel Jordán, SHM

37 THE GATE OF HEAVEN


By Sr. Alison Van de Voorde, SHM

39 LIGHT ON THE PATH



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ARCHBISHOP JOSEPH TOBIN



The People of the Cross
in the Footsteps
of the Nazarene

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EDITORIAL HM

► by Fr. RAFAEL ALONSO



It is always easier to look at the negative aspect of things or events. However, right now, it is more urgent than ever to look at the positive aspect of things and play our part so that the positive can become greater than the negative. **Man's freedom, enslaved by an accumulation of negative events, must be freed.** The current situation of the pandemic and spiritual revolution, full of injustice and fear, might well suppose a change of direction, as Saint Paul VI—Pope Montini—had prayed for, pointing out how necessary it was for the world to undergo a change of course.

In Garabandal, Our Lady prophesied that many priests, bishops, and cardinals were going down the road of perdition, and were leading many other souls with them. I refuse to be among those who want to correct or find fault with Our Blessed Mother. Jeremiah prophesied the terrible downfall of the people of Israel because of their sins: the abandonment of God's commandments and idolatry. It is probable that in our society today, both inside and outside the Church, the commandments of God's law and even some commandments of the ecclesiastical law are considered a joke. It is also probable that wealth, power, and other new idolatries are processing into our churches. However, it is also certain that there is a remnant of Israel groaning and crying out to the Lord for His divine intervention. We can also say that there are priests, bishops, and cardinals walking along the path of holiness and are bringing many more souls along with them.

I do not have the authority to point my finger and judge whether someone is on one side or the other. It is the Lord who points that out in every man's conscience. If a conscience is well formed and upright, the person will know where God is present. We must have the courage (parrhesia) to face the truth and leave behind all this nonsense of political

correctness—which does not build up the Kingdom of God—in order to begin to truly value the Person, life, and words of Jesus. **In our Baptism the Lord marked us with His seal, and He gave us the Holy Spirit so that we might be able to recognize the Word of God and the correct path that will lead us to a safe harbor.** What must be valued above all are the Word of God, the sacraments, prayer (both personal and liturgical), and fidelity to God's will, manifested to us by means of our legitimate pastors—those who walk along the path of holiness.

The sense of fidelity, the sense of the faithful, helps us to trace out well where the virus is going and where we can find a solution for it. This viral comparison is very important today because **there is also a spiritual virus that destroys human beings. If the sacraments are important—and we should never doubt that they are—how we approach them is even more important,** because the same wonderful sacrament, for example, the Eucharist, can produce two very different effects—one, of condemnation: "He who eats and drinks without giving value to the Body and Blood of Christ, eats and drinks his own condemnation" (cf. 1 Cor 11:29), the other of salvation, as the soul filled with grace is given the pledge of future life and is transformed into Christ. **The Eucharist is the source of all holiness.** If, in addition to prayer, we add joyful and enthusiastic participation with pure and sincere hearts, open to God's desires, then there is no doubt that faith turned into prayer will move mountains, tear down walls, and fill up valleys.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "R. Alonso".

Annual International Youth Festival in Medjugorje

Pope Francis' Message



COME AND SEE

The annual youth meeting in Medjugorje is a time rich in prayer, catechesis and fraternity. It offers all of you the opportunity to encounter the living Jesus Christ, especially in the Eucharist where he is praised and adored, and in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Do not be afraid! Christ is alive and desires that each of you live. He is the true beauty and youth of this world. Everything he touches becomes young, becomes new, full of life and meaning (cf. Apost. Exhort. *Christus Vivit*, 1). We see it precisely in that Gospel scene when the Lord asks the two disciples who are following him "What do you seek?". And they answer: "Rabbi, where are you staying?". And Jesus says: "Come and see" (cf. Jn 1:35-39). And they go, see, and stay. Beloved young people, **have you encountered this gaze of Jesus who asks you: "What do you seek"? Have you heard his voice which tells you: "Come and see"? Have you felt that impulse to set out on a journey?**

Take time to be with Jesus, to be filled with his Spirit and to be ready for the fascinating adventure of life. Go to encounter him; stay with him in prayer; entrust yourselves to him who is the expert on the human heart.

Jesus invites you to encounter him and this Festival becomes an opportunity to be able "to come and to see". The word "come", in addition to indicating a physical movement, has a deeper, spiritual meaning. It points to an itinerary of faith whose aim is "to see", that is, to experience the Lord and, thanks to him, to see the full and definitive meaning of our existence.

The Church's great model, of a youthful heart, ready to follow Christ with freshness and docility, is always the Virgin Mary. The power of her 'yes' and of that "let it be to me" that she said to the angel always strikes us. Her 'yes' means being involved and taking risks, with no other guarantee but the certainty of being the bearer of a promise. Her "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord" (Lk 1:38) is the most beautiful example that tells us what happens when a person, in her freedom, abandons herself into God's hands.

May this example fascinate you and guide you! **Mary is the Mother who "watches over us, her children,** on our journey through life, often weary and in need, anxious that the light of hope not fail. For that is our desire: that the light of hope never fail. Mary our Mother looks to this pilgrim people: a youthful people whom she loves, and who seek her in the silence of their hearts amid all the noise, the chatter and the distractions of the journey" (*Christus Vivit*, 48).

Dear young people, **"keep running, attracted by the face of Christ, whom we love so much, whom we adore in the Holy Eucharist** and acknowledge in the flesh of our suffering brothers and sisters. May the Holy Spirit urge you on as you run this race. The Church needs your momentum, your intuitions, your faith" (*ibid.*, 299). On your route through the Gospel, also enlivened by this Festival, **I entrust all of you to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary,** invoking light and strength from the Spirit so that you may be true witnesses to Christ. I pray for this and I bless you, and I ask that you, too, pray for me.

I KNEW SR CLARE

BY SR. MARY ROSE GALLAHER, SHM



YOU'RE INVITED TO MY WEDDING! WOULD YOU LIKE TO COME?

Sr. Mary Rose is from California (USA) and entered the Servant Sisters on May 23, 2010.

I met Sister Clare during a Holy Week Encounter that the Home of the Mother organized in 2010 in Florida. The first thing Sr. Clare said to me—and she said it with great enthusiasm—was, “You’re invited to my wedding! Would you like to come?” At first, this invitation seemed strange to me, until I discovered that on September 8 of that year, Sr. Clare was going to take her perpetual vows.

As the days passed by during Holy Week, I noticed that she was telling everyone the same thing, “You’re invited to my wedding on September 8! Would you like to come?” Having witnessed her enormous enthusiasm and the candid way she expressed her desire to give herself to the Lord has always helped me increase the desire to give my own life to the Lord.

At that time, in the spring of 2010, I was studying at Ave Maria University in Florida in the United States and I felt God’s call to be a Servant Sister of the Home of the Mother. The story that I am sharing not only impacted me at that moment, but I have often remembered it whenever I thought about my own “wedding day.” I wanted to live that moment with the same enthusiasm with which she lived it. Sister Clare, help us, your Sisters, to give ourselves to the Lord with the same enthusiasm and generosity as you did!

Since I met Sr. Clare, I shared many moments with her: very happy moments and as well as difficult ones. I have to say that I have never seen her without a smile on her face, without hearing her joyful laughter, without the perfect joke said at the right time. I saw her constant attentiveness to the needs of others and the way she wanted to make sure we all had a good time. But at the same time, when she had to, she was not afraid to put her foot down and say things the way they were.

I especially remember the summer of 2012. We were in Gavilanes in Avila, Spain preparing the first English Camp organized by the Home of the Mother in Spain. Sister Clare and some candidates, including myself, got sick with a horrible virus. I remember that we were lying on some mattresses in the coolest corner of the house. Even there, Sister Clare was cracking jokes.

Another moment I remember was just before she left for Ecuador in 2012. I had just entered the novitiate and asked her what she would say to a novice to help her live the novitiate well and make the most of it. She told me that the best thing about the novitiate is that you have to do a lot of humble tasks, tasks that perhaps have no importance at all. She said, “That is what we all need, to see ourselves as unimportant, to realize that we are nothing, and then put God at the center of our lives.”

3RD LETTER

BY THE WAY, I HAVE CANCER



SUFFERING WITH JOY

By Sr. Ruth Maria O'Callaghan, SHM

My Dear Friends,

I'd like to share this letter with our dear brother, **Fr. Henry, Servant Priest of the Home**, who passed away in April. It has been an immense joy and privilege to have a brother like him. He was chaplain in a hospital, **had a great love for the sick**, and could see first hand the work of God in the souls of those who suffer. He had a special gift of opening hearts to the grace that awaited them in the sacraments. His great personality brought joy to everyone.

I had the grace of coinciding with him a few times in the hospital when we helped the chaplains. I always remember him walking through the hallways with his white lab coat in search of souls. He took advantage of every situation to touch lives and he really **enjoyed his apostolate there**.

Now, instead of praying for his soul, **I entrust myself a lot to him**. If he had so much love for the sick,

how is he not going to have even more love for his Sister who is sick? I speak to him with a lot of trust, and the truth is that I feel his presence very close. In the morning, I have time for prayer in our small chapel with the Blessed Sacrament, and I invite him to pray the Morning Offering to the Lord and Lauds with me. I put his photo next to me, and I can almost hear him reciting the prayers with his characteristic voice. The purity and goodness of God in his gaze helps me a lot. Now, he transmits everything that he desired with that gaze.

He greatly loved his time of intimacy with the Lord and you could perceive it in his homilies and his meditations. When he spoke about the Lord he would get enthusiastic and say, "Look, look, look...the Lord is so good to me..." and then he would tell us about how the Lord manifested His love to him even in the smallest details. He was really in love with God and the Blessed Mother, the Immaculate. When he spoke about her, his face would light

up with joy. It has truly been a grace to have known him. To think that he is my brother fills me with joy and gratitude.

Dear Fr. Henry, brother, I want to thank you for the example of your life. **Thank you for having responded to the call of God**. Thank you for the effort you made to learn Spanish and for what you suffered with your studies. Thank you for not giving up. The first time I saw you was in my parish in Ireland. There you were in your cassock, so tall and so American, always smiling and friendly. Thank you for transmitting the simplicity of your relationship with the Lord, so child-like and yet with a heart on fire with love for Him and His Mother. **You went through your own illness and know what it's like to silently suffer the pains of every day**. You know how hard it can be sometimes to offer the next step. You know what it means to overcome fear by trusting totally in the Lord. You know what it means to entrust your life in the hands of God even when you

BY THE WAY, I HAVE CANCER

don't understand the reason behind things. You know what it means to find joy in the mystery of suffering. And now, by the mercy of God, you know what it means to rejoice in Him. I can almost hear you say to me: **"It's worth it. It's all worth it."** I ask you to help me now, now that it's my turn to suffer an illness. **I beseech you to help me reach the end.**

One of his homilies when he spoke about illness, commenting on a passage from the Scripture, has helped me a lot: "Many followed Him because they saw the signs He had done."

*"Dear brothers and sisters, those who are sick are always very loved by the Lord, and the Lord does a lot through people who have illnesses. I work in the hospital and can see the wonders that the Lord does. I have seen Jesus cure sick people. The Lord is able to perform miracles. He did it two thousand years ago and continues to do it. He can heal. It's a sign. He says to us, 'I am God. I am alive and I have the power to do anything, absolutely anything. Nothing is impossible for Me.' And this should allow us to have great confidence in Him, because **sooner or later we're going to suffer something for Him...***

Providentially, I read this article from John Paul II: 'To all who carry on their shoulders the heavy cross of suffering: Dear brothers and sisters, take heart! You have a very great task to perform. You are called to complete in your flesh what is lacking in Christ's sufferings, for the sake of His Body which is the Church. By your suffering you can strengthen hesitant souls, call back to the right path those who have gone astray, restore serenity and confidence to those who are doubtful and distressed. Your sufferings, if accepted and offered generously, in union with

the Crucified One, can make a first-rate contribution to the struggle for the victory of good over the forces of evil that so often beset contemporary humanity. In you, Christ continues his redeeming passion. With him, if you wish, you can save world.'

Long live John Paul II! God can heal but God can also perform miracles in the midst of suffering. That's why He doesn't always take away our sufferings. He gives more, He gives His grace, His love, His strength, His joy, allowing us to know that we are united in His redemptive work. I have seen this. There's a lady who now comes to my mind... She was a lady who suffered terribly with cancer and whose body was covered in bruises. She was weak, very thin, and whenever I had to bring her Communion I was captivated by her smile. That lady was always like that. And one day I approached her and said, 'Amparo, how can you always be so joyful when you're sick?' She just looked at me and smiled tenderly, saying, 'Father, first of all, I trust in the Lord. He is my support. Secondly, I am resigned to what He wants to give me. And thirdly, I have a family that loves me to death. What more could I want?'



It's good to think about this... Nothing is impossible for You, but if You want me or anyone else to suffer something, Lord, we accept Your will. And not only that, I'm going to offer everything that You send me, trusting that I am participating in your redemptive work... When the suffering is for Christ and with Christ, it's not so heavy. Grace produces a kind of joy in us where we realize that we are united with Him and we can see that everything that is happening to us or that we have to suffer, has an finality and a goal: the salvation and conversion of souls. And this, dear brothers and sisters, is our lot: to suffer with Christ and afterwards rejoice with Christ for all eternity. Amen."

MATERNITY A TEST OF FAITH

By Ana Isabel Jiménez, LHM

“ I WAS
ASKED TO BE A
MOTHER BEFORE
BECOMING
A WIFE.”

It would be impossible for me to talk about my experience of maternity without speaking about the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our Mother.

She gave me the gift of marriage on January 1, the celebration of her Divine Maternity, nine months after getting to know my stepchildren. You could say that Mary instilled her own maternity in me towards them. **I was asked to be a mother before becoming a wife.**

I got to know my husband as a widow with two children. His first wife, the mother of my children, died of cancer at the age of 33. When we decided to marry, I immediately began to reach out to the two oldest children with motherly love, following the wise advice of a good spiritual director. All Christians would benefit from listening to a good spiritual director! Once married, the Lord gave me the gift of having three more children. I have also had two miscarriages. We'll see each other in Heaven! **First, Juan Maria was born,** after I had been a step-mother for two years. I didn't get pregnant until I received the legal adoption paperwork. Coincidence? God knows!

I consider my stepchildren as gifts given by God Himself, the Source of all graces. He gave me the grace to open wide my heart and love them even more than my biological children. That's why I say that my children "aren't from my womb, but from my heart."

When the Lord gave me the gift of becoming pregnant, I also experienced it as a great gift from God. All of a sudden, just like that, you find yourself directly collaborating with God the Father in giving life. God temporarily entrusts children to you. They belong to you and He wants you to prepare them for what awaits us, Heaven, by teaching them how to gain eternal life. I was able to experience this in a direct and painful way with my second son. **Javier was born 22 months after my first child, Juan Maria.** He was a beautiful and healthy baby and the pregnancy and birth went perfectly. It was a real blessing from God.

When he was 5 months and 2 days old, the Lord called him to Himself. It was a sudden death, the kind of thing that doesn't seem like it will happen to anyone and especially not you. **I found him lifeless in his crib. It was a truly terrible experience.** Thanks to that experience, however painful, I can now witness to you that life is fleeting, but even fleeting life is a grace. Children are not ours. They are given to us for a time, but we do not know for how long. They belong to the Lord. They come from Him and are going to Him, in the same way that we all hope to go to the Father's House to live there and be eternally happy with Him and our loved ones. **We are temporary guardians of our children and our main mission is to prepare them for Heaven.** We must speak to them about eternal life, without hiding how temporary, fleeting, and passing this life is. It is not always a path strewn with roses. We have to



Above: Ana Isabel
with her son Javier
Right: a photo of her
entire family



accept what God gives us and live with joy. This is not easy, of course, but who said it had to be easy?

Before the death of my beloved son, what could I do? How can one possibly react before the premature death of her own little son? "It's impossible. This can't be real, Lord. I can't live up to this," I repeated. "I don't know how to bear such a great suffering." I had to undergo the mystery of suffering, a suffering which Our Lord went through first. **I experienced that I could really identify with Mary**, she who suffered as she watched her innocent Son die on the Cross. She wanted me to understand her and console her, because only someone who has gone through a similar experience can understand. My heart was completely shattered. **I truly felt like my insides were being torn apart.** It was a painful grace from God. The identification with

Mary at the foot of the Cross was a grace directly that has never left me and never will leave me. I wanted to offer myself to help other mothers who go through similar situations through my prayer.

After this, I became pregnant again. During the seventh week, the baby's heartbeat couldn't be heard anymore. Again, I had to offer another child to the Lord. Two and half years after this, I became pregnant with twins. Unfortunately, one of the babies developed in my right fallopian tube, while Miguel, "the strength of God," which is what we called him, developed in the uterus. I wasn't feeling well and around the eighth week I had to go and see the doctor. I had an internal hemorrhage which could have cost the lives of both babies and my own.

It was a test of faith. I had to choose between my life or the

life of my children. Of course, I chose them. Thank God, the medical team that helped me was excellent. They fought for life and encouraged me to go through with the pregnancy until the last moment.

Extrauterine or ectopic pregnancies never reach full development. During the next three weeks, I received a lot of physical and spiritual aid. I entrusted myself especially to Sr. Clare and the five candidates who died with her during the earthquake, as well as St. Maravillas of Jesus. They intervened and **thanks be to God, little Miguel was born!**

Whether we are physical, adoptive or spiritual mothers, **we are called to open our heart wider than ever.** Be courageous, mothers! We have a great calling and the best Mother, Model and Teacher: Mary. Long live mothers and long live Mary!

AD TUENDAM FIDEM (III):

DEFINITIVE DOCTRINE

BELIEVE IT!

By Sr. Miriam Loveland, SHM

BELIEVE IT!

With this article we will conclude the study we have undertaken of the different types of Magisterium and doctrine. **It is a subject whose understanding may require an effort, but it was the same Lord who announced that “the truth will set you free” (Jn 8:31). We also know that we can count on the assistance of the Holy Spirit who asks us not only to deepen our knowledge of the truth, but also to be always ready to give a reason for our hope.**

The third section of the Profession of Faith, which was published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1988, and which is also reflected in CCC 752, refers to the doctrines of the authentic Magisterium. The Profession of Faith reads as follows: “I adhere with religious submission of will and intellect to the teachings which either the Roman Pontiff or the College of Bishops enunciate when they exercise their authentic Magisterium, even

“
**THE TRUTH
WILL
SET
YOU FREE.**

JN 8: 31
”

if they do not intend to proclaim them by a definitive act.”

With this section, reference is made to a third category of doctrines that could be called “Doctrine of Authentic Magisterium.” **Ratzinger explains in an illustrative note that “all those teachings—on faith and morals—presented as true or at least as sure, even though they have not been defined with solemn judgment or proposed as definitive by the ordinary and universal Magisterium.” This means that they are truths that help to arrive at a greater understanding of revelation. It is a doctrine proposed by the Church to help us recognize where we might fall into error. In the face of such truths, the Catholic faithful must respond with a religious assent of will and understanding.**

Ratzinger gives as an example of these doctrines, in a general way, the teachings proposed by the authentic and ordinary Magisterium in a non-definitive way. Referring to number 17 of the Instruction *Donum Veritatis*, Ratzinger also mentions the importance of taking into account “the proper character of every exercise of the Magisterium, considering the extent to which its authority is engaged.” With this

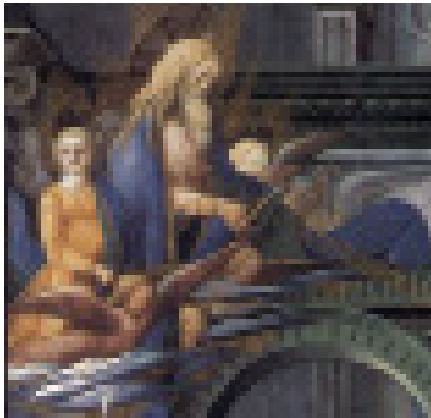
he wants to recall what we saw when we began to speak about the different types of magisterium, i.e. not all magisterium has the same rank or demands the same response from the Catholic faithful. The teachings require a differentiated degree of adherence according to the mind and the manifested will. This manifestation is shown by “the nature of the documents, by the frequent repetition of the same doctrine, or by the tenor of the verbal expression.”

As a Mother, the Church shows us the way so that we do not fall into error. With this type of doctrine, the Church often points out to us the conformity of certain teachings to the truths of faith. This means that she warns us whether or not such a teaching is in conformity with the revealed truths. Thus, it helps us to advance on safe ground to our heavenly home. Let us remember, therefore, as Ratzinger reminds us, that Christ wants His Church to walk in the full truth and has promised us the assistance of His Spirit. With a disposition of humility before the gifts the Lord gives us, let us continue to ask for light for our shepherds so that they will always have the clarity and strength necessary to remain faithful to Christ to the end.

CHRIST WANTS HIS CHURCH TO WALK IN THE FULL TRUTH AND HAS PROMISED US THE ASSISTANCE OF HIS HOLY SPIRIT.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger

TRUE FREEDOM



The fact that
the Lord
asked her
something **did**
not limit her
freedom...

By Sr. Kristen Gardner, SHM



The Annunciation by Fra Filippo Lippi

Recently, I read a book about the Virgin Mary by an author that was seemingly trustworthy. Nevertheless, a commentary he made about the Annunciation caught my attention: Our Lady was free at that moment because she could have said no without offending God.

Nowadays, we are constantly under the influence of a moral vision that **contrasts freedom with the law of God**. This particular author made Our Lady's freedom dependent on there not being a law obliging her to say yes under penalty of sin; that is, she would

not have been free if God had said to her: "It is a sin. You will offend Me if you do not say yes." If we take this to its logical conclusion, we also are not free when God gives us a particular commandment such as: "You shall not kill" or "You shall not commit adultery."

Many others see the moral law as an obstacle to freedom, and think that creativity of the individual conscience should have the last word in a concrete moral decision. If anyone dares to affirm, for example, that adultery is always and in every circumstance a grave moral evil, he is immediately labeled a fundamentalist and

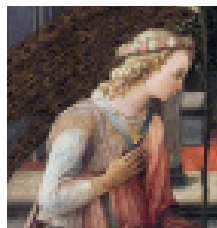
a rigorist. **"You shouldn't be so strict,"** you are told. "You have to get to know the person and his conscience in the particular situation," as if moral truth were something that would not help him right now; as if it were something imposed on him from the outside.

All of this is based on a mistaken vision of both moral law and freedom. Moral law is not something that God—way up there in Heaven—decides and arbitrarily imposes on us, and which we have no other choice but to accept. **God is truth and goodness,** and by creating us, He has made us in His image and like-

ness. Our own being participates in God's nature, and that is why we are ordered to that truth and goodness. **The law of God is the order that He has established in His creation**, not on a whim because He wants to annoy us and place limits on us, but out of love, which allows us to participate in His own being of goodness and truth. Therefore, our own nature carries within itself this mark of the order of God: **we have natural law inscribed in our hearts.**

Moreover, the ultimate criteria for determining the morality of an action is both objective and interior. There is no contradiction between objectivity and interiority. **The law is not something imposed on us from the outside, which takes away our freedom.** On the contrary, we carry that law within us: **we are made for goodness and truth.** We are more free when we choose the good and the truth.

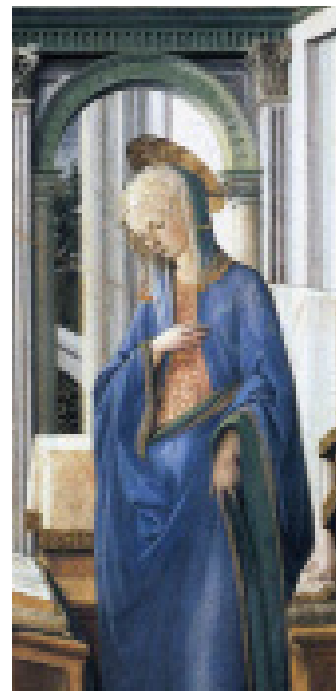
The problem is that we are influenced by a misunderstanding of freedom, which comes from **William of Ockham**. He saw freedom as the possibility of choosing from among many different options. According to Ockham, God leaves us free to choose as long as we do not sin, as long as we do not overstep the limit that He has imposed on us. This limit would be His Divine Law, His Commandments, which are exterior and with which God limits our freedom. We are free to choose things without offending Him, as long as we do not cross that line, which are the limits that God obliges us to respect with His Commandments and which mark what is and what is not sin.



True freedom is the complete opposite: it is when our will and our reason choose the true good. **We are more free when we choose the good** and we are less free when we are mistaken and stray from the true good by choosing false goods. God, who is love and only looks for our happiness, wants to help us to be more free. For that reason, He has created our nature with natural law, able to participate in goodness and truth. For that reason, He teaches us His law in Revelation with words, with the Ten Commandments, for example. For that reason, **He gives us His divine grace to help us from within to choose the true good.**

The question of whether Our Lady would have offended God or not if she had said no to the Incarnation is wrongly posed. If she had said no, her will would not have been totally united to the will of God, which is the perfect good, and therefore, she would have been less free, less happy, and it would have been very sad for all of humanity. The fact that the Lord asked her something did not limit her freedom; rather, it made her freer because she had greater possibilities to achieve the true good.

God has a plan for each one of us just as He had for Our Lady. We must not see God as a slave



master who forces us to obey Him. He is a Father who looks for our good and asks for our "yes" as a response to His plan to make us happy and to help Him bring other souls to true happiness. If we do not respond to His plan, our lack of generosity offends Him, above all because He sees that we will not achieve true freedom and happiness, and because we are not collaborating with Him in the salvation of the world.

Our own being longs for that true goodness and is directed towards it. At the same time, we have the responsibility to speak about this truth. Everyone longs for this goodness, but our nature is damaged by sin and the true good remains obscure. "The devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). How can we be silent? How can we not speak and help others achieve true freedom and happiness?

MARY

IN THE

AKATHIST

HYMN

By Fr. Félix López, SHM

The Akàthistos, or Akathist Hymn, is the most sublime hymn by which the Byzantine liturgy sings the praises of the Mother of God. It is a true masterpiece of Byzantine literature and theology.



The author of the hymn, which seems to have been written in the second half of the fifth century, is anonymous. Its verses are replete with dogmatic concepts.

It is a truly inspired composition, which contemplates the Virgin Mother in the historic, salvific plan of God since creation until its ultimate fulfillment, indissolubly uniting Christ and the Church. This is why the author has intentionally filled it with symbolic numbers that represent Christ and the Church. The number 2 indicates the two natures of the Son—the divine and the human—converging in the one Person of the Word, and the number 12 reveals the heavenly Jerusalem described in Revelation as the Lamb's bride (cf. Rev 19 and 21). Thus, **the Akathist hymn consists of 24 stanzas divided into two parts of 12 stanzas each.**

The name of the hymn is linked to history.

In the year 626, the Persians were preparing for the siege of Constantinople. Emperor Heraclius, who had been waging an almost endless war against the Persians, upon learning of the siege of the city, sent twelve thousand men to reinforce the defense. **The city had placed all its hopes of salvation in the *Ipermàchos Stratigòs* (the Invincible Captain),** that is, the Mother of God. An unexpected hurricane destroyed the Persian army, forcing them to give up the siege. The city was safe! The people, exultant and moved by the miraculous salvation, gathered in a church dedicated to Our Lady, where the patriarch Sergius celebrated an all-night service of thanksgiving. **All the faithful remained standing—in Greek *akàthistoi*—and sang the hymn. That is why**

it is called **Akathistos**. Although the hymn already existed, from that moment it took a place of honor in the Byzantine hymnody. The Latin Church is also familiar with the Akathist Hymn, whose stanzas have had a notable influence on Marian devotion in the West.

REJOICE, FLOWER OF INCORRUPTION

With regard to the sources on which the hymn is based, it seems that it takes its doctrine from the Council of Ephesus and that of Chalcedon, together with some Church Fathers like St. Proclus of Constantinople and the Cappadocians. Although the hymn contemplates the whole of Marian theology, we are going to focus especially on the mystery of Mary's virginity.

In stanzas 13 and 14 of the hymn, the virginal conception and birth of Jesus are proclaimed:

13. New was the Creation which the Creator showed to us His creatures, when He sprang forth from the seedless womb; and He preserved it incorrupt, even as it was, that we, seeing this Miracle, may praise her saying:

Rejoice, Flower of incorruption. Rejoice, Crown of self-restraint.

Rejoice, O shining Token of Resurrection. Rejoice, you whom reflects the life of the Angels...

14. Seeing a strange childbirth, let us estrange ourselves from the world by transporting our minds to Heaven; to this end the Most High God appeared on earth a lowly man, that He might draw to the heights those who cry out to Him: Alleluia.

The virginal conception is a new creation because the Creator has been generated in a new way. Blossoming from his Mother, he kept her intact in her virginity. E. Toniolo affirms: "According to the theology of the Fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries, virginity was considered a gift that had been given at creation and was lost by Eve. Thus, corruption entered the world. **With Mary, the New Eve and with an incorrupt form of life, the virginity that had been lost reappears on earth, making us similar to the angels.** Through the virgin birth, the

greatness of the Incarnation is manifested. God has descended to attract us to the heights; first to contemplation, then to glory."

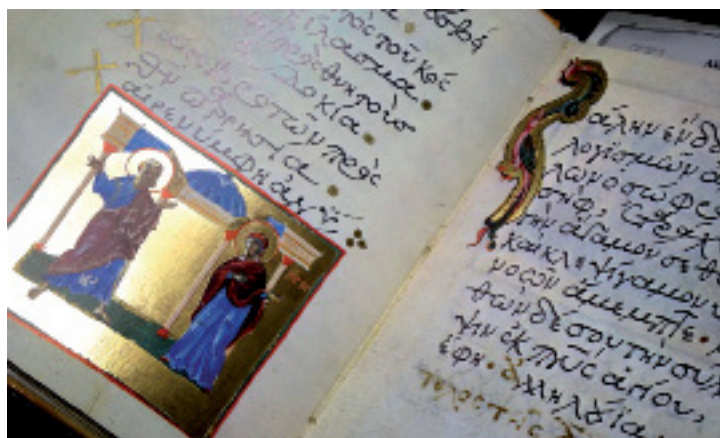
Stanza 17 is dedicated to the virginal birth, presented as an ineffable mystery: "Orators most eloquent do we behold mute as fish before you, O Theotokos; for they are at loss to explain how you could remain a virgin and yet give birth. But as for us, marveling at this mystery, we cry with faith:

Rejoice, Vessel of the Wisdom of God. Rejoice, Treasury of His providence.

Rejoice, you who prove the philosophers fools. Rejoice, you who prove the logicians illogical..."

At the end of the fourth century, the controversy over the virginal birth of Jesus arose. All the great Fathers of the East and West came to its defense. The mystery of the virginal birth "became for the Fathers of Ephesus probative evidence of the hypostatic union and the divine motherhood. Inasmuch as He is man, the Word was born of Mary; inasmuch as He is God, He preserved intact, even after the birth, the virginity of the Mother. **The virginity in partu belongs to a precise will and to a divine operation that human reason cannot explain, and that only faith can joyfully believe**" (E. Toniolo).

Of this hymn John Paul II said: "It is a song centered on Christ, contemplated in the light of His Virgin Mother. It invites us 144 times to repeat to Mary the Archangel Gabriel's greeting: *Hail, Mary!* We have retraced the stages of her life and offered praise for the marvels worked in her by the Almighty: from the virginal conception, the beginning and principle of the new creation, to her divine motherhood, to her sharing in her Son's mission, especially the moments of His passion, death and resurrection. Mother of the risen Lord and Mother of the Church, Mary goes before us and leads us to genuine knowledge of God and to the encounter with the Redeemer" (Homily, December 8, 2000).



Mamie

"The children perceived Mamie's affection above the material value of her gifts."



Mamie in Pedrosa Hospital with some children. To her right is Miguel Fuentes and behind her is her confessor, Fr. Ramón Rodríguez Alcalde.

AND THE SICK CHILDREN OF PEDROSA

By Sr. Beatriz Liaño, SHM

We already explained in the last article that after she was widowed, one of the places in which Mamie poured herself out in her great capacity to love was in the children's ward of "**Pedrosa Hospital**," a large sanatorium that had more than 600 beds and specialized in bone diseases, tuberculosis, and all kinds of infectious illnesses. The Daughters of Charity were the heart of the institution, serving the patients more like authentic mothers than like nurses.

The hospital was in the town of **Pontejos**. It was just 12 kilometers away from the capital, bordering the **Bay of Santander** to the south. Sometimes her confessor, **Fr. Ramón Rodríguez Alcalde**, drove her there. At other times she went with a young man named Miguel Fuentes, whom she had met in a prayer group. The age difference was never an obstacle for Mamie to start an

intense friendship with someone. **She and Miguel got along very well from the first moment.**

The nice thing was, at this stage, Miguel moved around Santander with a motorcycle, and **he took Mamie on the motorcycle with him to Pedrosa.** You have to remember that Mamie and her husband François liked to ride motorcycles a lot. Sister Reme Rodríguez remembers: "**Her husband drove the motorcycle and she would ride in the sidecar.**" When her daughter **Simone** was born, she went with her in the sidecar. And since the family liked to travel, they moved around on the motorcycle to go on trips in the countryside, take walks in the woods, and so on. Later on, when Mamie met **Fr. Rafael**, she continued to travel by motorcycle with him. But we will talk about that in due course.

Mamie truly loved the sick children! Sr. Reme comments: "Mamie knew that bone diseases are very painful and, besides, they were children who did not have that much experience of suffering. Mamie felt very sorry for those children and she began to visit them there. I think she went either on Saturdays or Sundays."

Their suffering moved her deeply and she tried to alleviate it with her love, her good humor and with some little gift. **She never went empty-handed.** She bought candies, small toys, key chains... Each gift or each handful of candies was wrapped in a small package, prepared with care by Mamie. Sr. Reme also remembers: "Mamie did not like to go with all the candies thrown together in her purse. She

liked to make individual packages so that each child would understand that she had prepared a gift for him. It was her way of showing that she loved each one." **The children perceived Mamie's affection above the material value of her gifts.**

In fact, sometimes she coincided with other people who also brought candy to the children. However, Mamie remembered: "When I came in, I may have given them much less, maybe only one or two pieces of candy each and a chocolate, or whatever, but the children would come running to me. And it was not because I was the person who gave them the most candy, but because with those little details I expressed more affection for the children."

To entertain them, she spent hours telling them stories. Even

though she was only 59 or 60, the children called her **"granny storyteller."** She would usually sit by the bed of a child who could not move; there was always someone who could not move. The others would gather around her. Mamie would tell stories, but also show interest for each of them and ask them things. She took advantage of the atmosphere of love and trust that was created around her to educate them. She also **enjoyed seeing how the children forgot about themselves** to take care of the other children who were sick. They helped their companions, waited for the slowest ones, let the other children go first, etc. A sick child can live out his illness with maturity and learn to grow spiritually, or he can see himself as a victim and grow in selfishness.

At that time, Mamie still did not know much Spanish and frequently made mistakes, some more noticeable than others. Sometimes the children could not help but smile or innocently laugh. Mamie did not mind. She was the first to laugh at herself. But when she perceived a tone of mockery, she would talk to the child to explain, for his sake, why it was wrong: "Look, I'm making an effort to speak in your language, which I don't know well, but I know my language very well. Do you want us to speak in my language from now on?" The children understood and usually corrected their attitude. Mamie said that she had learned a lot of Spanish by talking to them.

Mamie truly enjoyed volunteering at the Pedrosa Hospital! But, after a few years, she had to abandon this apostolate that she loved so much. **The Lord was calling her to another mission that, at that moment, she could not even imagine.**



In the photo above:
Mamie in the sidecar of
the motorcycle owned by
François, her husband.



In the photo below:
Mamie with one of the
sick children.

INTERVIEW

In her past life, she belonged to radical left-wing groups. She was a guerilla fighter, pro-abortion leader and official of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). She is currently the Executive Secretary of the Scope of Life and Family for the Ecuadorian Bishops' Conference and the Archdiocese of Quito.

AMPARO MEDINA

PRO-LIFE ACTIVIST

Could you introduce yourself?

My name is Amparo Medina. I am the mother of three children and one grandchild and the wife of a wonderful man; we've been married for 30 years now. I am 53 years old and for the last 15 years I have been walking in the Lord's love and mercy in the Church founded by Christ: the Catholic Church.

What do you do for a living?

I have been a human rights activist for the last 16 years and I am currently undertaking civic and social actions for the awareness and promotion of respect for the right to life of all human beings, from the moment of conception until the moment of natural death; for the rights of the woman in light of her complementarity with man; and the right to live in true freedom and in

accordance with human nature.

How did you enter the pro-life battle?

This is a complicated question. The truth is that I never decided to be pro-life. The Lord has led me down this path. He made me fall in love with this apostolate and gave me the tools I needed to be able to carry it out.

It all began during the first stages of my conversion when my spiritual guide asked me to get involved in a case against the morning after pill in the Constitutional Court. Since I had worked as a consultant for the sexual and reproductive health project with the UNFPA, I had the same data as the UN. The data proved clearly that the third abortive effect of this abortion method is mortal for the baby and for the mother.

We won that case and I met several pro-life leaders in the Catholic Church. I started to attend rallies to advocate pro-life laws and religious freedom.

What led you to start working with pregnant mothers who were considering an abortion?

It started with a reflection from within the pro-life groups about how much we were really doing. I felt that there were very few of us, and I asked myself: What are we really doing to avoid abortions? How can we help mothers in difficult situations who are considering abortion?

We realized that we needed to inform ourselves about the work being done in other countries to reach out to pregnant mothers in need, to help men and women who suffer from the after-effects of an abortion, to

The Lord has led me down this path. He made me fall in love with this apostolate...

support those who have undergone sexual abuse, and to deal with pregnancy prevention in teenagers and the transmission of STDs, all from a human and Christian standpoint.

After discovering initiatives in a number of countries, we analyzed how they worked and got in touch with their leaders. Within Ecuador we asked for the support of private institutions and committed lay Catholics. Under the spiritual guidance of a priest, and with a primarily pastoral vision, we initiated formation encounters for a group of professional volunteers who could help us put these projects in motion.

In 2006, the first program was launched to support pregnant mothers on the verge of having an abortion. In 2010, a similar project was launched in another diocese in Ecuador. We are now present in 12 cities, with 16 emotional support centers very close to abortion clinics. Professionals from many fields are working with us, including lawyers, doctors, social workers, psychologists and priests. Together, we have been able to save about 20,000 babies from being aborted, and in many cases we have also helped their mothers and families for the glory of God.

What other programs have begun as a result of this initiative?

We are currently working on many projects and collaborating with other organizations. The SOS Mom Project was begun to help pregnant mothers who live in difficult situations that can lead them to having an abortion. There are also programs for healing after an abortion, like the Hope Project and Rachel's Vineyard retreat. From Pain to Grace is a program for accompaniment and healing after violence and sexual abuse. For those who seek healing from same-sex attractions, there is the Latino Courage project. There are formation programs on sexuality within a Christian Anthropology. The Caravan for Life is a mobile unit equipped with state-of-the-art technology to promote the awareness of the gospel of

life and of the family through audiovisual media, art and culture in public squares and educational centers.

Other supplementary programs include online music contests, fashion shows to increase modesty and chastity awareness, and "belly-painting" contests to help show the community the beauty of maternity.

In your experience, what usually drives a woman to have an abortion?

There are many reasons that can lead to having an abortion: emotional pressure, economic problems, personal situations, cases of violence or sexual abuse, unemployment, health reasons, or fear of abandonment.

FAMILY: One of the most common reasons in Latin America is fear of how the family is going to react. Young women are afraid of disappointing their parents, being beaten or kicked out of their houses. Others want to avoid repeating the family situation they grew up in, especially if the child is fruit of an extramarital relationship. Many are afraid of their husbands' reactions, especially if they are already on the verge of separation.

SOCIAL FACTORS: Many seek abortion because they are afraid of the rumors that are going to spread about them if they have the baby. Others do not want to deal with another child because they are separated or widows.

ECONOMIC FACTORS: Some economic factors are the unemployment of the mother or her partner, fear of losing her job or ruining her financial plans, or not wanting to spend savings.

PERSONAL REASONS: Some women are not willing to interrupt their careers or leave behind the plans they had for their futures. Others are worried about losing their figure. Younger women often think they are not ready to be mothers. Sometimes the reason can be simply not wanting to have a child.

RAPE OR HEALTH REASONS: Some women want to abort because they have had a recent cesarean, or because there is danger of health problems for the child due to genetic disorders, or deformities, often due

After the rallies, I started to ask myself: What are we doing to avoid abortions and to help mothers...?

INTERVIEW

A woman never needs an abortion; what she needs is help. She should be accompanied...



to substances taken to provoke an abortion or addictions of the mother or father. Another factor can be the presence of eating disorders in the mother.

What kind of help do you offer these mothers?

We offer attention based on counseling, accompaniment and support programs. Some of our programs are focused on supporting teenage mothers with unexpected pregnancies, especially those who are going through situations of family violence, health risks or legal problems. We follow the Crisis Counseling method used in several centers in the United States, Spain and Latin America. Our counselors are volunteers who have attended a rigorous formation program and continue their forma-

tion through weekly workshops. The counseling has a 95% success rate.

Our accompaniment includes the following support programs: family counseling in the parish, pediatric medical help offered by volunteers, gynecological and ultrasound assistance in specialized centers, legal assistance offered by lawyers in university centers, financial support, psychological support for those who suffer post-abortion syndrome, assistance for legal recognition of children, courses in Natural Family Planning, and bi-monthly formation meetings. We also distribute food to the families in need during the formation meetings.

What kind of results do you see? Do many women decide not to have an abortion?

Out of the 100 cases we have dealt with in the SOS Mom Project so far, all 100 have decided to carry their pregnancy to term. This has led us to the conclusion that a woman never needs an abortion; what she needs is help. She should be accompanied, supported in her needs in an integral way, and helped to be reintegrated into her family.

Have any of the mothers who have received help regretted not having an abortion?

Of the mothers we accompany, we have not had any who regret their decision. This is primarily because we carry out a process of renewal and healing of the bond between the mother and the baby. The most difficult cases are those

20,000 babies have been saved from abortion for the glory of God.

of pregnant mothers who are working in police or military corps because they lose all of their career benefits. The cases of mothers who are on the streets or involved in prostitution are also difficult because their dependencies make them fear what their future will be like with their children in their current situations. For both of these cases, there is a lot of help available on a psychological, legal and spiritual level that allows us to provide them with viable alternatives and save both lives.

What would you say to a woman who is reading this and considering an abortion? Or what would you say to a woman who thinks that abortion is good and would have an abortion if she were to find herself in a difficult situation?

The best thing would be to share the experience and the words of a seventeen-year-old mother who has benefited from these programs. I think it is a great message for young people: *I am seventeen years old and I love my two-year-old child. The help that I have received through SOS Mom Project makes me feel very good about where I am. It is beautiful to know that God still exists in families and that He makes Himself known through support programs like this one for teenage mothers. For a young mother like me, it is very difficult to decide to have your baby if you know you can't rely on your parents' help. I do have my parents, although I am currently living with my grandmother and my father. In my life, I missed my mother a lot, and that is one reason I had to carry on with my pregnancy and believe in God more and more.*

Above all, I want my parents be with me forever—I hope to never let them down again—and I want my baby to stay healthy. When I got pregnant, I thought my dad would hit me and insult me, and he would have been within his rights to do so because I had let him down. But no, he just started to cry. That didn't leave any marks on my body, but it did leave its mark on my soul. Seeing him like that, and knowing it was my fault, was very hard. I wanted to believe what a lot of people said: that once the

baby is born everything is easier, that there is a lot of joy and so forth, but for me it seemed so difficult. You have to spend the night awake taking care of him, making sure he eats when he should, figure out why he's crying... On top of it all, I had decided not to drop out of school and to keep studying. I had to make a real effort to do both things. At the beginning I was dealing with my pregnancy all alone, but now that my baby is bigger, his dad has decided to try to be there for us. The only thing I can say to other young people is that they should enjoy this time of their lives, that they shouldn't get involved in grown-up business, that they shouldn't live a life of debauchery, and that they should believe in God. Before I got pregnant, I didn't believe in God, but later on, I slowly realized that He is my salvation, that He was giving me the peace and the strength necessary to not give up or consider abortion. Now I know that God is with me and that He will never leave me. Believe in God!

Would you like to add anything else?

In all my experience helping pregnant mothers who are going through difficult situations, I have learned that the goal of these projects is not only to save the life of the unborn baby, but also to accompany the mother without judging her. The mother should be able express everything she is going through without being afraid of being judged or being rejected because of an unwanted pregnancy. That way she will be able to give a Christian meaning to this bringing a new life into the world. Through all the work we do, we are trying to promote a greater awareness in our society of personal freedom and responsibility within the family. Relationships between spouses or between parents and their children need to be marked by virtue. We are working towards a greater recognition of the dignity of women, an attitude of awareness towards responsible parenting, a greater interest in the education of children, and a greater concern for how families can come together and remain united.

The goal of these projects is not only to save the life of the unborn baby, but also to accompany the mother without judging her.

HEALING AND SALVATION

in a Time of Pandemic

By Luisa Eugenia Lucas



Our father has been sick **with Alzheimer's** for the past three years. At first, our mother was able to take care of him physically, providing him with the necessary care, but in a short time, the progression of the degenerative disease required more specialized aid and means, which were materially and humanly impossible to provide for him. We began to talk to our mother about taking our father to a residence, but the idea of staying home alone and having to separate from him caused her to put off and postpone the decision. Meanwhile, my sister and I took on the responsibility of taking care of both of them. Suffering was mixed with helplessness in the face of his progressive deterioration and our weakened strength. Towards the end of February, we started to look for a residence for him because the situation had reached its peak. On March 9, we miraculously managed to get him admitted. When we brought him in, they had just sent out a notice in which they stated that the residences were closing and no one else could be admitted or receive visitors.

When I spoke with the director about letting my father out, I stressed to her that I wanted him to attend Mass when possible and asked the priest to give him the Anointing of the Sick. It was something that the Lord put in my heart, without knowing how the events were going to unfold: the need for the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. **From that moment on, he passed from being in our hands to being in the hands of Jesus.**

When I went to Mass on Thursday of that week, I met with a priest and told him about my father being admitted, and asked him if he would be willing to give him the Anointing of the Sick if he fell ill, to which he laughingly replied that my father would not get sick. Finally, he said yes. Two hours after that conversation, I received a phone call from the residence telling me that **my father started to have a fever.** I could not believe what I was hearing. How was it possible? My father had been admitted healthy, without any other underlying illness except Alzheimer's, and he had

“
It was
the Holy Spirit
touching the
heart of
one of the
workers in
His vineyard...”

not been in contact with anyone because he had not left the house! So it occurred to me to ask if anyone in the residence had COVID-19. The answer was that one person tested positive, and they had known since Tuesday, the day after we had admitted my father, who had been in contact with the person who tested positive that same day... What bad luck! When all of this occurred, not much was known about the presence of COVID in residences, but now **the possibility of him having the illness was very real.**

“My Lord, why did You permit us to admit him at this precise moment? But at the same time it was what he needed...” **We were completely confused**, but remained hopeful as we waited to receive the results of the analysis that they had to carry out on him. From that moment on, we took refuge under the protection of our Mother with greater intensity...

One word was going to change everything: POSITIVE. At that moment, the ground disappeared under my feet and I felt like I was falling into the void. Many questions ran through our minds, but more than ever we had to trust in the Lord and lay our father at His feet and offer everything for him. This trial that began for everyone was going to be the moment that God had chosen to reach out to him: his illness.

The days passed and his fever did not go away. It increased, pneumonia prevented him from breathing well, and he needed oxygen. The Lord sustained us in prayer and miraculously, the Eucharist did too, because they had already stopped distributing it my diocese. I remember talking with my sister and saying to her that **the logic of God is not human logic...**

We understood that **his only medicine would be the Sacrament of Anointing.** Anointing of the Sick is the sacramental encounter with Christ the Physician, who continues to be close to sick Christians to heal, alleviate, and deliver them from evil. I prayed that Jesus would accompany my father in his passion, since we could no longer be with him physically.

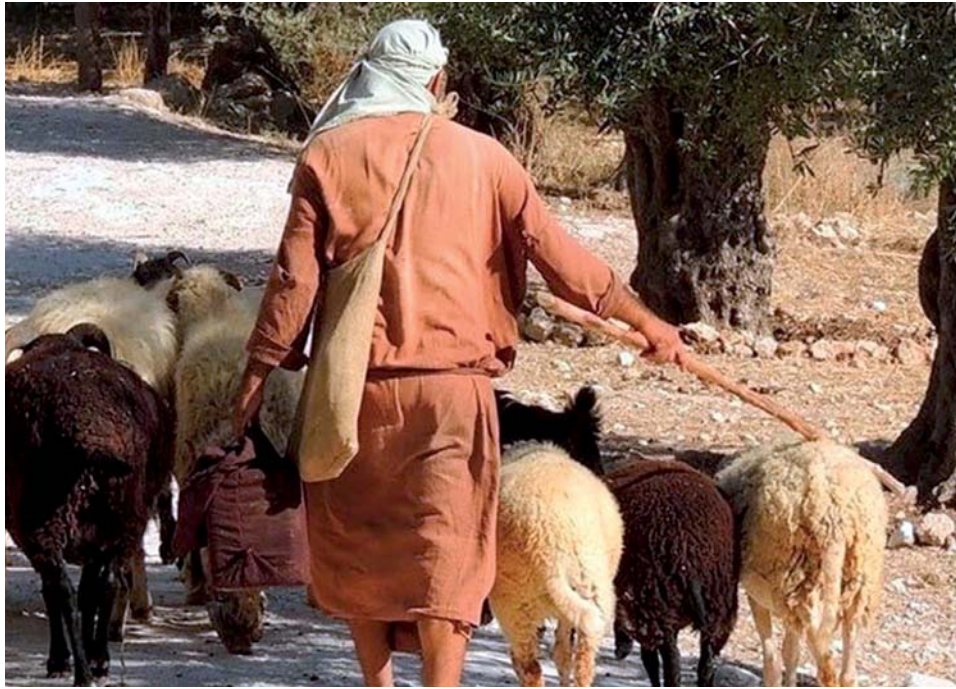
We did all we could to have a priest enter the residence, who would have all the necessary protection as if he were going to the ICU. Given the situation of such great confusion, it was little less than mission impossible. The responses we heard were of doubt, silence, or at best that we would have to wait a little more. I could summarize it with one word: FEAR, or what equals it: LACK OF FAITH. **The images that came to my heart were of the Good Shepherd** who freely lays down His life for His sheep, or that abandons the rest of the sheep to find the lost one, and the Good Samaritan, or **Mother Teresa of Calcutta** taking care of so many poor sick people after having renounced the comfort of her school to attend to them. My father was lost and weak, and we begged for his salvation.

When I spoke with my sister on the phone, I told her that the best we could do was to wait. With things as they were, I said to the Lord in prayer: “I did everything that was in my power to do. Now it’s up to You. His salvation depends on You.” Two hours later, my sister called and told me that she had received a voice message from a priest who led the Stations of the Cross in her parish. Observing the place where she used to sit in the parish, he felt the Holy Spirit moving him to call her and ask how she was doing. I want to clarify that **this priest had no idea about my father’s situation.** He did not know that he had Alzheimer’s and was in a residence, and much less did he know that he had COVID. I told her that the Lord had heard us and that she should call him and tell him about our situation. It was a sign—more than a sign—**it was the Holy Spirit touching the heart of one of the workers in His vineyard.** May the Lord be blessed and praised!

HEALING AND SALVATION in a Time of Pandemic



The images that came to my heart were of the Good Shepherd who freely lays down His life for His sheep, or that abandons the rest of the sheep to find the lost one...



After we told the priest everything and asked him, he asked for time to pray about it, but one phrase changed everything: "If it was your father, what would you do?" To that he responded that he was convinced and that the next day he would go. **Father said "FIAT" just like Our Lady.** The Lord only wants our "yes" without hesitating and He does the rest. In the prayer intentions for Lauds on the day he received Anointing, we prayed: "May we know how to help the needy and console those who suffer, imitating You, the Good Samaritan." God wanted to answer our prayers and my father received the only medicine that he truly needed in this sacrament of healing... The priest was able to hear his confession. He received the Viaticum and he was consecrated to Mary.

After we left our father's room, the other sick patients approached the priest just like they did to Our Lord, but he could not give them the Anointing since their families had to give previous permission. What hunger and thirst for God! Even **the nurses and doctors asked him to pray for them** and not forget about them. When we spoke with him afterwards, the first

thing he said was that he was deeply sorry for having doubted whether to go. He had received a very big lesson from the Lord and he thanked us for our testimony. My God, what humility!

The implicit graces of the sacrament became immediately visible to all of us when the nurse confirmed that **all the symptoms began to disappear:** he no longer had a fever and could breathe normally. Thank you, my Lord and my God! The Lord was healing him, not only spiritually but also physically. God's generosity knows no limits. The results of the new analysis came on a very special day. It was as if the Lord "winked" at us. He let us know my father had overcome COVID-19 on Holy Thursday, the day He instituted the priesthood. Lord, You know everything and nothing escapes your control...

Jesus took advantage of an illness so that His Love could reach the sick heart of my father and encounter Him. The Lord's timing is perfect. From apparently great evils, the Lord takes out much fruit: fruits of purification, healing, and conversion.

ELISABETH LESEUR

For Her Husband's Conversion

Elisabeth Leseur's cause for beatification began in 1934. She was a woman who had to endure many trials in her married life. Her way of living, as well as her prayers and sacrifices, ultimately led to the conversion of her husband, Felix Leseur, an adamant atheist who had so often opposed and ridiculed Elizabeth for her faith.

By Sr. M. Carmen Checa, SHM

Elisabeth Arrighi Leseur, daughter of **Antoine** and **Marie-Laure Arrighi**, was born in 1866 into a wealthy and sophisticated family in **Paris**. She and her siblings were brought up and educated like any other Catholic family of the time. From her childhood, Elisabeth stood out for her devout way of life.

In 1889 Elisabeth met **Felix Leseur**. They fell deeply in love and seemed to be an ideal couple. However, before the wedding, **Felix** confessed to his beloved that he **had lost his faith during his medical studies** and that he only went through the motions out of respect for his family. Elisabeth's own faith at this time was merely conventional and so, although saddened by Felix's confession, **she did not give much thought to a possible conflict** between her religious practices and his skepticism. They were engaged on May 23, 1889 with the condition that Felix would respect her Catholic faith, and a few months later they were married. For a while, everything went well. At the end of the summer of that same year, **Elisabeth fell sick** because of an abscess in her

intestine and several months were needed for a full recovery. This was to be the first of a series of health issues that she would have to suffer for the rest of her life.

Despite their religious differences, Elisabeth and Felix loved each other very much. However, as time passed, Felix—influenced by his atheist environment and the secular newspapers he read and even wrote articles for—grew more and more intolerant towards his wife's faith. He began to increase his criticisms of the Church and soon openly ridiculed his wife's beliefs, filling their library with collections of books justifying atheism. This intellectual-literary campaign was accompanied by a frivolous environment of trips and meetings. After seven years, **in 1897**, after returning from one of these long trips and swayed by Felix's attitude, **Elisabeth abandoned her relationship with God.** To ensure that his wife would renounce the faith once and for all, Felix gave her a book entitled *The History of the Origins of Christianity* by **Ernest Renán**, an author renowned for his hatred towards Catholicism. Elisabeth, however,

was an intelligent reader with a fine capacity for discernment. She found Renán's arguments to be superficial and contradictory, and once more **she turned to the Gospel. Reading and reflecting upon the Word of God inspired in her a desire to learn more about her faith.** Thus began the rebuilding of her spiritual life. She began to read the Church Fathers, mystic authors, and above all, Sacred Scripture. She also studied several different languages and began to write her thoughts and reflections in diverse publications.

In 1899 Elisabeth began a diary. When she was 33, she wrote: "By the serenity that I mean to acquire I will prove that the Christian life is great and beautiful and full of joy." From then on, the strength of her love for God and her trust in Him were her greatest motivation. She soon became conscious of her husband's need for conversion, but **any effort to reason with him was useless** and served only to cause greater conflict between the two. **Her weapons became prayer and sacrifice.** She made the heroic decision to endure the attacks against her beliefs pa-



Felix mercilessly ridiculed ridiculed his wife's faith.

tiently, to pray for Felix's conversion, and to hide her sufferings from others. She wrote in her diary: "My God, one day...soon... You will give me the immense joy of a full spiritual communion with my beloved husband—the same faith, and a life for both him and me that may be directed towards You!" From then on, **praying for her husband's conversion became the focus of her entire life.**

She also began to work in various projects of charity to help the poor. Encouraged by her spiritual director, she took the call to embrace the lay apostolate seriously, living her duty of being a witness to her Catholic faith in her home and in her community.

The indifference and hostility she received from Felix and other members of her social circle made her suffer. However, she always emphasized the necessity of tolerance and made a sincere effort to under-

stand the convictions of others who possessed a different faith or no faith. Her motto was: "Do not accept everything, but understand everything; do not approve everything, but forgive everything; do not adopt everything, but seek the grain of truth that is contained in everything. Do not reject any idea or good will, though it be weak or misguided. Love all souls, as Christ loved them..." **Elisabeth's apostolate was founded in the practice of prayer and the sacramental life.** She admitted that sometimes she became distracted and failed in her schedule, or at times she was obliged to substitute her works of charity for service to her family. Nevertheless, from the moment of her conversion, **Elisabeth remained faithful in her continuous effort** to not only be a well-informed Catholic, but a devout Catholic. She lived the practice of asceticism and accepted with patience and goodwill the challenges—both

great and small—that her daily life presented to her. Once she wrote: "At times silence is an act requiring strength. Laughter as well." She referred to the times in which she would have liked to express her own suffering, but had chosen not to do so because she thought about others first.

After a mystical experience during a trip to Rome in 1903, every time Elisabeth received the Body of Christ she would experience this mystical union with the Lord. Nevertheless, on many occasions she was unable to receive the Eucharist because of her husband's objections.

Elisabeth's mental and spiritual sufferings were extremely intense. **Felix mercilessly ridiculed his wife's faith.** She wrote: "God helps me maintain charity on the inside and remain calm on the outside despite how much I suffer every evening

hearing my faith ridiculed, attacked, and criticized. How much effort and interior anguish this implies!”

Elisabeth fell ill with breast cancer. By 1907 her health had deteriorated to the point where she was forced to lead a completely sedentary life. In 1911 she underwent surgery and radiotherapy. When sufficiently recovered, she went—accompanied by Felix—on her last pilgrimage to Lourdes. Her cancer, nevertheless, continued to spread. In July 1913 she was obliged to remain bedridden. **She had predicted her husband’s conversion in the journal she wrote in 1905.** Felix himself would later write, referring to this period: “I was impressed at the strength with which she was able to dominate both her body and her soul... She endured her illness with serenity.”

Elisabeth passed away on May 3, 1914. She was only 48 years old.

After his wife’s death, Felix decided to write a book against the miracles of Lourdes. He never finished the project. On a visit to Lourdes he was to have the first experience that caused him to seriously reconsider his position as an atheist. In a note that Elisabeth had written him in 1914, the year of her death, Felix read the following words: “In 1905 I begged Almighty God to send me sufferings with which to pay the price of your soul. The day I die, that price will be paid. There is no greater love to be found in a woman than when she gives her life for her husband.”

When he journeyed in Lourdes (after Elisabeth’s death), Felix had an intense experience of both his wife’s presence and God’s. This incident sparked his slow return to Catholicism.

“After Elisabeth’s death,” Father Felix Leseur wrote in the prologue to Elisabeth’s Spiritual Testament, “when everything around me seemed to fall apart, I discovered the spiritual testament that she had written for me, as well as her journal. I read and re-read it, and a revolution began to occur within my entire being. I discovered that Elisabeth had made a sort of bargain with God. She offered Him her life in exchange for my return to the faith. I remember that one day she said to me with absolute certainty: ‘I will die first. And when I die, you will be converted; and when you are converted, you will become a religious.’”

Felix continued: “From her journal I was able to perceive with clarity the interior significance of the life of Elisabeth, so great in her humility. I came to appreciate the splendor of that faith of which I had seen such marvelous effects. The eyes of my soul were opened, and I turned toward the God who called me. I confessed my sins to a priest and was reconciled with the Church.”

Three years after Elisabeth’s death, Felix returned to the bosom of the Church in which he had been baptized. In 1919 he became a Dominican friar, and in 1923 he was ordained a priest.



“When I die, you will be converted...”

HALLOWEEN and Evil's Limit

By Sr. Beatriz Liaño, SHM

When the date of **October 31** rolls around, it causes me great sadness. It falls on the eve of a most luminous day, the eve of **the Solemnity of All Saints, and we have witnessed this date convert into a night of darkness and sin: the night of Halloween.** I experience that night in my soul as if it were Holy Thursday and we were accompanying Jesus in His agony in **Gethsemane.** The words that the Lord pronounced at the moment of His arrest resound in my soul: "This is your hour, the time for the power of darkness" (**Lk 22:53**). Black masses, satanic rituals and sins of every kind multiply on this night. I close my eyes and the image that comes to my mind is that of our Lord among the olive trees, calling on His friends and saying to them, "My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch with Me" (**Mt. 26:38**).

I imagine that someone reading this article might think: **"Sister, you're getting a little carried away. It's just a party."** Well, I would have to respond by saying no, I'm not getting carried away; nor is Halloween just a party. **Halloween is an event of preternatural origin; in other words, it is demonic.** And the devil knows what he wants to achieve on this night. **Fr. Javier Luzon**, who for many years was the exorcist in the Archdiocese of Madrid, knows what he is saying when he says: "All those who celebrate Halloween, aware of it or not, are opening doors to the enemy—that is, Satan." I cringe when I think of the ignorance of so many fa-

thers and mothers who encourage and allow their children to participate in the celebrations of Halloween. Once you leave a door open, Satan will surely go through it sooner or later. I remember a conversation I had when I met an exorcist. I could not help my comment of surprise when he told me that, at the time, he was attending to some fifty people with diabolic possession. He answered me, "You're surprised at fifty people? Well just wait, **the worst is yet to come.** Our schools are filled with ten and eleven-year-old children who are already playing with **Ouija boards, the Charlie-Charlie game, and so many other things...** Within a few years, they'll be lining up at my door asking for an exorcism."

In the face of this black sea of sin, which seems to invade everything around us, threatening to swallow everything up in its foul waters, we are sometimes tempted to get discouraged. We wonder if there is a limit to evil, or if evil will end up swallowing everything up. **St. John Paul II**, who knew and suffered firsthand the enormous tragedies of the twentieth century, also wondered if there was **a limit to evil. He asked himself if something could be done to put a stop to this infamous tide.** He found the answer and lived it because **yes, there is a limit to evil, a limit that the devil cannot cross. That limit is the Cross of Christ.** The one who embraces Jesus crucified, Love crucified, widens the horizon of good and contributes to putting an end to evil.





Before this black sea of sin, there's a limit: the CROSS OF CHRIST...

Thanks be to God, satanic meetings and the more or less unconscious demonic celebrations will not be the only events on Halloween night. To counter them, **in many places around the world, many of us will gather in a spirit of reparation**, to “watch and pray” with Jesus (**cf. Mt 26:41**). Jesus calls on His friends this night, in the new Gethsemane driven by “the power of darkness.” When a heart suffers, it needs the comfort and companionship of those it loves. But Jesus does not call us just because He needs us by His side. Jesus calls us, above all, to protect us from the power of the evil one. As a hen gathers her brood under her wings to protect them from danger in the face of a threat, so does Jesus, on this night when Satan seems to reign in our streets. He stretches His arms out over us to protect us (**cf. Mt 23:37**).

We are in the midst of a great battle, a spiritual battle in which two banners confront each other: that of Christ and that of Satan, just as **St. Ignatius of Loyola** described in his Spiritual Exercises. It seems incomprehensible, even to reason, that there are those who choose to serve Satan as can be seen on Halloween night. Others have still not made up their minds. They would like to be saved, of course...but without giving up anything. But in this battle, **there is no such thing as neutrality**. Those who do not choose Jesus Christ with determination, end up serving Satan instead. What is worse, they end up as slaves to Satan—who does not know how to love because he is a being that has destroyed his own capacity to love—and the only kind of



relationship he knows is one of domination, of mastering and destroying the one who follows him.

But be on guard because sometimes we look outside the Church thinking that outside of it are those who harm and offend Jesus. **But can the Lord look at us and find true friends?** Too often, we say to Jesus, “Yes, I am your friend, but this... this is off limits.” Satan gains strength when Christians do not love Jesus with an unconditional love. **This year, on Halloween night, when the battle rages, let's choose a banner once and for all.** I recall **Sr. Clare Crockett's** testimony when she spoke about her conversion. When she kissed the Cross on Good Friday in the year 2000, she understood all that Jesus had done for her. She also understood that in order to correspond to Jesus' love, it was no longer enough to sing songs, write poems, or tell jokes... She later said, **“There was nothing I could do to console Him except to give Him my life.”** To console Jesus, to limit evil, to serve under the banner of Jesus Christ, our Captain, once and for all, each one of us must give his or her life in the way the Lord desires.

INTERVIEW



Above: Carlos and his wife
Carolina with their two
children
Right: with his wife Carolina



Carlos Santos

Carlos is a doctor and has worked for two and a half years in the Intensive Care Unit in a hospital in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

He gives us his testimony of his experience during the pandemic, especially at its peak. He shares with us how it has impacted him on a professional and spiritual level, as well as how it has affected his family.

“ My wife, Carolina, always told me, **‘There is a reason the Lord wants you there.’** ”

Do you like working in the ICU?

I never liked the ICU, and when I was called to work in the hospital, I thought I would be in a different area. I really wanted to be in the surgical unit, but the Lord “threw me a curveball.” When I was told I would be in the ICU, I almost passed out! Working in the Intensive Care Unit seemed very hard to me. I would be with patients in the most critical states of their illness and many would have a high probability of dying. Just that thought really got to me, but I said to myself, “If God wants me to be here, there is a reason for it.” Right when I was supposed to start working, I had a trip to Spain that I could not cancel. I did not think the hospital would give me permission to take off so much time from work. I explained the situation to my boss. He gave me permission to miss those 20 days and said that when I returned, I could start up work again. I really found that surprising, and I thought, “The Lord really does want me to be here.” However, I still did not understand why.

My wife, Carolina, often said to me, "There is a reason Lord wants you there, and someday we will discover it. He wants you there to help people. Pray for them!" And that's what I've done every time I have a shift.

Do you still find working in the ICU frightening?

Not anymore. Now, I know that I can do a lot for patients from a medical point of view and even more from a spiritual point of view.

What was your experience at the beginning of the pandemic? Has there been any change?

At the beginning of the pandemic, the situation in the hospital was very tense and difficult. We were there from the moment the first case arrived in the country. There was a lot of stress at work, especially because we were afraid of infecting our own families.

Our fear was understandable because very little was known about the new illness. Many colleagues began to fall sick. Others, out of fear, took sick leave. The number of patients increased, and the number of doctors decreased. That is when a crisis began.

One day in the hospital, in the middle of the peak, the number of deaths in the country had increased. Our hospital is well-known, and many patients arrived. This day really left a mark on me. When I arrived at the hospital, there was a nauseating stench of dead bodies. The containers in the morgue were full, so many bodies of the deceased were on the floor. It was a shocking sight. During that day, I witnessed many injustices. I had to assess patients in the emergency room, and it was surreal. It seemed more like a horror story than real life. I could hear all the patients in the emergency room

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The situation had gotten out of control.

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screaming in despair, crying, and asking for help. While attending one person, I would suddenly stop hearing the cries of another, because he or she had died.

The situation had gotten out of control. We felt helpless because we were lacking the necessary resources such as beds and ventilators. That day, there were only two doctors in the emergency room because the staff was falling sick. It is one of the hardest experiences I have had in my short medical career.

What did you do?

Early that morning, I called my wife, totally discouraged by everything, torn apart and in tears. She comforted me and told me not to worry. She encouraged me to ask God for strength to endure the difficult situation, and to ask for the Holy Spirit "to accompany people in their last moment. Talk to them about the Lord so they can find some peace." She also said, "Remember when we asked ourselves why you started working in the ICU? Well, I think the Lord was preparing

you for this moment. Keep going. I will pray for you. I love you. God bless!"

She asked the Servant Sisters to pray for me and explained to them how rough the situation was. At that very moment, my phone rang. It was the Sisters calling to ask how I was. I told them what had happened. One of the sisters told me, "Carlos, the Lord is good. Don't ever forget that. All He is allowing to happen is in order to bring out something good. This corrupt humanity needed something like this so we set our priorities where they should be, in Him. Never doubt that the Lord is good, and that He is with you. Pray for them and be at peace, knowing that you have an army of Sisters praying for you."

Did that change the way you lived the situation?

I felt a little better after Sister spoke those words to me, but I was still depressed. The next day I went to speak to the pastor at my parish, a Servant Priest of the Home of the Mother. That is when my disposition truly changed for the better. He

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It is one of the hardest experiences I have had in my short medical career.

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Carlos Santos



Left: the hand of a patient
Right: Carlos (on the right) in the hospital, wearing protective equipment (with a Sacred Heart scapular taped to it)



told me, “Carlos, the Lord is giving you an opportunity to save many souls. Just think: you may be the last person these people see. Take advantage of that! Talk to them about God and the forgiveness of their sins. Isn’t it beautiful to think that on your deathbed, the last thing you see and hear is someone talking to you about God? At that moment, many may repent and go to Heaven.” From then on, I had no doubt in my mind that this was what the Lord wanted from me.

The best part was when I received the Lord in the Eucharist. I took advantage of that visit with Father to go to Confession and receive Holy Communion. Being with the Lord makes every moment of crisis and despair less burdensome. From that moment, my way of facing the situation completely changed.

How did you become an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion?

Because the Lord wanted it that way. I never imagined becoming an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. Sr. Paqui, a Servant Sister, suggested it to me. Soon after, I received a call and was given permission. My heart leapt for joy.

Now, I could serve the Lord in yet another way. I love helping the sick physically, but being able to take Communion to them seems incredible to me. I still can’t believe it.

How was your experience the first day you brought Communion to the sick?

I could define it in one simple phrase: It was the best shift I have ever had in my life.

It was a complicated day, exhausting, but amazing. I was with the Lord for a little over 24 hours. Every second, I felt the presence of the Lord burning in my chest. Beforehand, I had never believed it when I read and heard people say that the Lord “burns”; but that day, I had the grace to feel it. It was as if

He was eager for me to take Him to the sick. When I gave Communion to the first patient it was an incredible experience. I was so nervous! I didn’t want to do anything wrong, and I tried to do everything with the greatest reverence possible. I hope it was pleasing to the Lord.

The first person I gave Communion to was very grateful to have received the Lord; and, thanks be to God, he recovered. Whenever I would arrive at my shift every five days, he would say, “Doctor, you’re finally here. I missed the Lord.”

That shift was the most exhausting of all. I took advantage of the moments when the situation calmed down a bit to talk to the sick and give them Communion.

I was exhausted, but how beau-



Carlos with his wife, Carolina (also a doctor), taking care of poor patients in their homes. Their work is not restricted just to the hospital.



tiful it is to know that we are wearing ourselves out for the Lord!

Do you think doing prayer and receiving Communion has an effect on the illness?

Of course! It's easier to get through difficult and painful moments when you are with the Lord. When I am with my patients, I always tell them to pray a lot and to offer up their suffering. In this pandemic, the patients were left alone, locked in cubicles, and they only saw the doctors and nurses who were going to help them. They could not even see our faces because of the medical protection equipment we were wearing. I would tell them not to feel alone because they were truly not alone! The Lord and Our Mother were with them. I encouraged them to take advantage of this time to pray, to put themselves in God's presence.

Can you tell us about any of your experiences?

One of the first experiences I had was in the coronavirus ward. There were many patients, all with serious symptoms. They needed to start mechanical ventilation, that is, to be connected to a respirator. Many of them were terrified and frantic. Their eyes reflected anxiety and pain. That reaction was normal, because in the news they were constantly hearing about deaths from coronavirus. What we had to do was try to calm them down. The patients would tell me, "Doctor, I put myself in your hands. Don't let me die." I took the opportunity to speak to them about God and to console them. I would tell them to trust in Him, and if it was His Will, everything would get better. I explained that we doctors are only instruments in His Hands and that the one who really heals and saves them is God.

It was beautiful to see how their expression changed, and many made the Sign of the Cross. One patient said, "Thank you, I really

needed to hear about my Lord. Do what you have to do and I will be with Him." My hair stood on end as I listened to her. With the Lord's blessing, she was sedated and put on the ventilator, and little by little, after going through several hard and painful procedures, the patient was able to recover.

Another experience that marked me is that of Omar, a patient who was very seriously ill. Although we were on the verge of intubating him, thank God he began to recover and we did not have to do so. He is a hospital employee. I asked him if he was Catholic and if he would like to receive Communion. His face reflected an indescribable joy, so he immediately made an act of contrition and I gave him Communion. After this, his spirits improved. He told me that he no longer felt alone and that the Lord was giving him strength. Since my shifts at the hospital are every 5 days, every time I went to the hospital, Omar would

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One patient said, ‘Thank you I really needed to hear about my Lord.’ ”

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say, “Finally, my Lord is coming.”

Thankfully, after a little over a month, Omar was released from the ICU. We kept in touch, and he gave me the room number he was in so I could continue to take the Blessed Sacrament to him. Then he was discharged from the hospital. In a text message, he told me how grateful he was for being able to receive the Lord in his time of greatest need. He left the hospital very close to the Lord and eager to give Him glory.

What does your wife think of all this?

I will let her answer this question!

Carolina: The Lord loves us so much! And we must always be open to what He asks of us. Even though we are not worthy, the Lord seeks us out. He wants to pour out graces on all our families; we just have to let Him into our lives.

It is a great joy that Carlos brings the Lord to the sick and consoles them. After a hard shift, I always tell him that the most important thing is to save the person's soul, and that when he goes to heaven his patients will be there.

Carolina, have you ever been afraid?

I was afraid he would get sick, and that at any moment I would receive a call that he had fallen ill during his shift, like many of his

coworkers. But all this fear disappeared when Carlos told me with such joy about how much he was helping. He reminded me that we must surrender everything to the Lord. It is also a great responsibility, as I told him from the beginning of everything: “We have to pray a lot. The Enemy will tempt us more, because now you are bringing the Lord to other people!”

And did this happen?

Carolina: Yes. One day after a shift, he had to be away from home all day. He was trying everything possible to bring Communion to a priest who was sick, because the hospital wouldn't let another priest enter. And then he had to do all the other visits to the sick. I was very angry, but I did not understand why I was so upset. Both of us have always had the conviction that we must do what the Lord asks of us. I had a very intense spiritual battle. As a married couple, we cannot

lose sight of our responsibilities as a family. At the same time, we have to surrender our lives to the Lord. I had a bitter feeling in my soul because of his absence. I told Our Lady, “Mom, what's wrong with me?” There was a great silence. But after a lot of internal struggle, and after praying in front of the picture of Our Mother and the Sacred Heart of Jesus that we have at home, I was consoled and everything was filled with light. I clearly saw that everything was the work of the Evil One, who wanted to trample on the grace that the Lord has given our family.

Every day, I see how good the Lord and Our Mother are to our family. The Lord has allowed me to receive Him from my husband's hand on several occasions. Every time, it is like living our wedding day again. Except that now, He was not giving me a wedding ring, but rather Jesus Himself, who has to this day been the center of our lives as spouses. It is He who unites us.

For Carlos to be an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion is to remember that as a married couple we are called...to BE HOLY! To help each other on the path towards Jesus!

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Every day, I see how good the Lord is to our family. ”

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BLESSED PIERINA MOROSINI MARTYR OF CHASTITY

by Sr. Isabel Jordán, SHM

PIERINA MOROSINI WAS BORN ON JANUARY 7, 1913, IN FIOBBIO DI ALBINO, A TOWN IN THE PROVINCE OF BERGAMO, ITALY. THE ELDEST OF NINE SIBLINGS, SHE CAME FROM A VERY HUMBLE AND DEVOUT WORKING FAMILY. "PIERINA WAS VERY PROFOUND AND HAD AN EXCEPTIONAL INTELLIGENCE FOR HER AGE. BOTH THE GRACE OF GOD AND THE EDUCATION SHE RECEIVED IN THE FAMILY HOME PERFECTED HER QUALITIES, ESPECIALLY THAT OF HEROIC LOYALTY TO WHATEVER GOD ASKED OF HER." "SHE WAS AN ANGEL, A HARD WORKER AND VERY PATIENT..."

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From an early age, Perinia was noted for her extraordinary spirit of generosity. She truly lived for others and gave little or no thought to herself. She belonged to Catholic Action and came to know the lives of her favorite saints: Saint Dominic Savio, Pier Giorgio Frassati, and St. John Bosco. However, her favorite saint of all was Maria Goretti, whom she called "the little saint" because she had not yet been canonized. The life of this young martyred soul touched Pierina so deeply that she read her life story over and over again.

Pierina acquired a strong yet sweet, serene and pure character. Her great determination and self-control aroused much admiration, respect, and trust in those around her. **She went to great efforts to convey the truth of her faith and her love for Jesus to the youth and children she met.** "She was continually praying. She had a special way of convincing us to do what was good. 'Here, take this and do what is right,' she would say."

In the plenitude of her youth she discovered the beauty of simplicity and purity. She set out a way of life for herself based on Christian living. Her daily life followed this pattern: "I will get up on time, without sleeping in, and after getting dressed with great modesty, I will offer my entire day to Jesus through the hands of Our Blessed Mother."

The beatification of Maria Goretti took place on April 27, 1947, and Pierina, who was sixteen at the time, went with her parish on the pilgrimage that was organized for the occasion. One of the high points of the trip for her was being able to see the mother of Saint Maria Goretti and people who had lived with her. She would sporadically exclaim, **"I would really love to be like Maria Goretti. I wish I could be like her!"**

On the way home, she heard one of the boys in her group say, "That Goretti girl was really naïve, just letting herself get killed like that." Then turning to her, he said: "Pierina, would you really do the same as Maria Goretti?" Pierina, in front of all her peers, clearly and firmly responded, **"Of course, why wouldn't I? It would be an honor for me to die just as she did. It would be amazing! I am definitely willing to."**

Pierina worked for a year in what she called her "evangelization mill," a cotton factory by the name of Honegger. It took Pierina three full hours to get to work, crossing fields and woods, during which she prayed the Rosary, using the same rosary she always had clasped in her hands. She was known in the factory for her diligent dedication, her generosity, and her prayer in the midst of her work, which was at times very tedious. She also stood out for her decency and modesty in all she said and did. One of her sisters once asked her why she always wore clothes made of such a coarse fabric;

in the summer she wore the same heavy clothing as in winter, and always dressed in a very simple and plain manner. Pierina answered, "I don't care about worldly things. I dress as I like. Worldly cares are of no interest to me at all."

Pierina frequently visited the sick after a long day's work. In addition to her many charitable deeds, she would never forget to visit the shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows every day. Her soul was nourished in the early hours of the morning before going to work with the Holy Eucharist and frequent confession. Many a time she would arrive drenched to Mass after the long walk in treacherous weather conditions, something her parish priest always admired in her. Her spiritual director confirmed the following: "In Pierina the ordinary was extraordinary. She was a constant soul, immersed in God and guided by Him in everything she did. I know for sure that Pierina contrasted every occurrence with what she understood to be the will of God, and this practice made her outstandingly wise."

As time passed, Pierina acquired a profound knowledge of the Lord which led her to make a private vow of chastity twice a year, with the consent of her spiritual director. A sentence from her personal diary reveals the profundity of her soul: "Virginity is a deep silencing of all things here below." She even proposed to her family the possibility of consecrating herself as a religious, a decision that she was unable to carry out due to her much-needed assistance at home, according to the testimony of her parents. This was a very painful sacrifice that she suffered for years to come.

In March of 1957, during a conversation with one of her brothers, her brother asked her if she was afraid to walk through the woods on her own at such remote hours of the day (she would get up at three or four in the morning to make it on time for the seven o' clock Mass, and she would return home at seven or eight in

the evening). To this she blatantly responded: **"I would rather die than commit a sin."**

A few days after this very conversation, on April 4, after a hard day's work, and after visiting Our Lady of Sorrows, she set on her way home, rosary in hand. Suddenly a man approached her and after verbally provoking her with obscene language, began to assault her. After a hard struggle on Pierina's part, being repeatedly hammered on the head with large stones, her only words were those of forgiveness and mercy. Pierina managed to run, though severely injured, some twenty meters from her attacker; yet, weakened and disoriented by the struggle and the loss of blood, she fell unconsciously to the ground, no longer able to defend herself.

After falling into coma from which she was never to recover, her integral purity was undermined by her assaulter. **Horrifying as this was, her assaulter was unable to snatch her rosary which was tightly grasped between her hands.** Pierina's brother, restless due to her delay, set out into the wood in search of her and found the horrifying and bloody scene. Pierina was taken straight to hospital and was able to receive the Last Sacraments, but passed away some days afterwards. Though, humanly speaking, a light on this earth was quenched, a new and brighter light began to shine for us: that of a heroic martyr of chastity.

One of the surgeons that examined her was struck by the determination with which Pierina had defended her purity unto the end. **Her family, as they waited outside the hospital room, testify to the words heard from the lips of Doctor Gianforte Postiglione: "We have another Maria Goretti!"**

On October 4, 1987, Pope John Paul II said that Pierina was a beautiful example for the youth of our times, as he proclaimed her blessed together with two other martyrs of chastity: a young Italian girl called Antonia Mesina and Blessed Marcel Callo from France.



Home of the Mother 36

The place
of her death

Pierina was
beatified by
John Paul II in
1987.



THE GATE OF HEAVEN

THE GATE OF HEAVEN

By Sr. Alison Van de Voorde, SHM

I like saying that **I met Maricarmen when she was at Heaven's door.** I had the honor of being with her during the last weeks of her life. In the community of Servant Sisters in Valencia, we have been working at the University Hospital for several years now, giving pastoral attention to the patients. This is where we happened to meet Maricarmen.

I still remember the day I met her. We were administering the Eucharist to the patients who had asked to receive Communion. I went up to the fifth floor with another Sister in search of a certain "Maricarmen" who had asked for daily Communion. I thought I was going to find an elderly lady, something very common in the hospital. **I was surprised to find a young woman when we walked into the room.** She was clearly under 30, petite

and thin with dark and sad eyes. Wondering whether I had mixed up the room numbers, I asked, "Are you Maricarmen?" She said yes and confirmed that she had asked to receive the Eucharist. We gave her Communion that day, and thus began our relationship with her.

She told us a bit about herself. Maricarmen had a somewhat difficult life. A single mother with two children, a seven-year-old and a one-year-old, she had contracted AIDS in what she called her "former life." She also had a rare autoimmune disease that made things even more complicated for her. But she was in the hospital this time because she had been recently diagnosed with colon cancer. She was too weak to be able to handle chemotherapy, so it was impossible to fight the cancer. A

doctor had said he could give her morphine if she wanted, because there was nothing left to do. When she told me this, tears slid down her cheeks. This was the reason they came to Valencia: to get a second opinion.

I met her when she had already been to confession, but she had very little religious formation. She had not received much of an intellectual education either, and yet she was a magnanimous and noble soul. We also met her partner during that period, although he was not on the same level spiritually speaking. He had not gone to confession, so he did not receive Communion. When we spoke to her about God, **Maricarmen was like a sponge.** One day we talked to her about **Mary Magdalene.** She could not believe the Lord had loved



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THE GATE OF HEAVEN

so intensely a woman who had been so deeply lost in sin. Her face lit up when she learned about her.

Maricarmen was aware that she was going to die soon, and she prepared more and more for this step. One day she told us that she had asked everyone she could have hurt, especially her family, for forgiveness. She looked me in the eyes and said, "I have hurt a lot of people, you know." It was clear that the reconciliation with God transformed her and receiving Holy Communion prepared her little by little. The hospital's chaplain talked to Maricarmen and her partner about the Sacrament of Matrimony. They agreed to get married, and the chaplain prepared them to receive this huge gift.

A few weeks later, she was moved to a hospital for terminal patients called **Porta Coeli: Gate of Heaven. She spent the last weeks of her life there.** We witnessed her health deteriorate quickly: her physical strength diminished, she swelled easily, etc. In that hospital, God put the last brushstrokes on her soul.

Maricarmen and Amadeo made arrangements to get married in the Church. Amadeo

prepared himself for a good confession, and the "cherry on top" was that the chaplain obtained permission to give Maricarmen the sacrament of Confirmation in the wedding as well.

It was a grace to attend the wedding at Porta Coeli Hospital's chapel and sing for Mass. The chapel was full of patients, family members, and close friends.

She was a magnificent work of God.

When I saw Maricarmen walk in, she was beautiful! It was a very profound, interior beauty; she was also swollen and had a hard time standing. She wore a borrowed dress and a crown of pearls. **She was a magnificent work of God.** Her seven-year-old son said, "My mommy is beautiful," when he saw her. Very few of those present managed to hold back their tears.

It was one of the most beautiful weddings I had ever witnessed. Maricarmen stood up for the rite of vows and her Confirmation, but she had to sit back down right away because her poor body could not endure it. Her husband was also radiant and looked at her with moving tenderness. God's grace is a miracle in the souls of those who receive it. God's ways are sublime and beyond our understanding. Only those who had a vision of faith could see beyond the tragedy and realize that **Heaven was touching earth at that wedding.**

Filled with joy and gratitude toward the Lord for all He had done for Maricarmen and her family, we said goodbye. Weeks later, we received news that she had passed away. We were present at her funeral. Looking at her coffin impacted me. I thought, "That's it. Her suffering in this life is over." What mysteries! God showed so much goodness toward this beloved soul and prepared her for eternity. Blessed be God. It was a beautiful experience of how God does not cease to search for us so He can pour His infinite mercy upon us. **I met Maricarmen when she was at Heaven's door.**

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Light on the Path

By Fr. Rafael Alonso Reymundo

I used to find it really hard to believe... I could not understand how **John Paul II** had the joy he did as he approached the last days of his life and when, on the horizon, it was clear that things were going to change—and not exactly for the better. Yet, he always preached about hope. **He preached with a joy, assuring us that everything was going to be fine.**

There were obvious signs that things were going badly. And things have not improved; they have gotten worse. What can be done? This is the question: **Can we maintain the hope and joy that everything is going to be fine and that there is going to be a splendid change?** Well, that question should be answered with another one. If you told me that we ought to have hope and joy, I would ask you: what do you base your hope and joy on? That is what we have to meditate on. Our joy does not depend on the ups and downs of history, on how the political affairs of the world are going, on the economy, etc. **What do we base our joy on?** We cannot base it on things that are so transitory, so changing, and so moveable. On what, then, should we base our joy and our hope, knowing that things will change for the better? At the same time, we can ask ourselves: what does a change for the better consist in? Well, **we have to base it above all and only on the promises of Christ, on the life of Christ crucified and risen from the dead.**

We base our joy on the Word of God, which cannot deceive us nor be deceived, whatever the ups and downs of history may be, no matter what happens to us on a personal or community level. We do not have the right to lose hope; rather, every day we must base our hope more and more on Jesus Christ our Lord and His promises. **And like St. John Paul II, we can also say: Look at the horizon. It is a horizon of triumph.**

Hope must be well founded. If not, the day that we experience pain, the day that we have some misunderstanding, the day that those around us look at us with disapproval, we will fail, we will tremble. We will fall because the house was not founded on rock but on sand.



Light
on
the
Path

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OF THE MOTHER

**“GOD TOUCHES OUR SOULS
BOTH THROUGH JOY AND
SORROW.”**

Saint Alberto Hurtado



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