

Triumph of the Heart

FAITH IN CHRIST
CHANGES OUR LIVES

Family of Mary

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*Today he desires to come here to confirm you
in this faith, faith in the living Christ,
who dwells within you.*

Pope Francis, July 25, 2013, Rio de Janeiro

The Most Beautiful and Perfect Way

*St. Louis Marie de Montfort (1673-1716) is among the greatest
figures in Church history, and is yet unknown to many.*

*His vast efforts as priest, missionary and reformer
changed and molded a large portion of western France.*

*God entrusted a unique Marian and prophetic mission to him with his
“Treatise on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin”,
which has a universal significance today.*

*L*ouis Marie, a fiery soul, was the eldest son in a large family from Montfort-sur-Meu in Brittany, France. On the outside he was a tireless man of deed, a giant in stature, energy and bodily strength with a bit of an explosive temper; at the same time he had the nature of a very sensitive and modest artist with brilliant intellectual abilities.

In his earliest years he turned completely to God and Our Lady—she was his world—and at the age of 17 he admitted to a friend, “*There is*

no greater joy than being with Mary and letting her teach us every truth. She is my help and my support.”

Louis Marie truly needed this support because early on God made him familiar with the mystery of the Cross. The 20-year-old’s deep faith and uncompromising behavior while studying theology in Paris met great resistance; his way was considered a “pious exaggeration”. Nevertheless, Louis endured the persecutions with amazing

meekness and he remained friendly and helpful. People said, *“He is either crazy or a saint.”*

His love for Mary developed enormously and found theological foundation in the famous seminary Saint Sulpice where he zealously studied nearly all the available works about Mariology. He matured into an articulate apostle of Mary and a fighter for the truth. He felt already at that time, *“There is a great desire in my soul to work so that Our Lord and his Holy Mother will be loved. As a poor priest I would like to explain the catechism to the peasants and lead sinners to venerate the Blessed Virgin.”*

*E*ven after his ordination to the priesthood in 1700, 27-year-old Louis Marie did not know for many years how his vocation would develop. He allowed himself to be led through complete dependence on Mary and Divine Providence. Two attempts to join communities of priests

failed. For his fellow brothers, his ideals were too high, his continual efforts too stressful and his missionary methods too provocative. Disagreement, slander and flat out rejection led again and again to setbacks and him being driven from one town or diocese to the next. The enthusiastic apostle often suddenly stood before nothing, condemned to weeks of bitter inactivity.

Louis never became discouraged though. He accepted all resistance with an incomprehensible tranquility and recognized in it the power of the Cross as a *“weapon to conquer”* the soul. He used this *“weapon”* to help grace be victorious in the hearts. Louis Marie was so convinced about the importance of suffering for the success of his apostolate that he later complained during a mission, *“We are being honored, everything is going okay. There will be no fruits here because there is no cross.”*

Silent monastery reform

*L*ouis Marie preached to the people with glowing enthusiasm about Mary and the Cross, the secret of his life and work. Through the Cross he made them conscious, on the one hand, of God’s love and mercy and, on the other, of the painful effects of sin. Mary, however, should console and prepare their hearts with her motherly love and plead, maintain and fortify the grace of conversion for them. Occasionally, however, he led the people to a deep spiritual renewal without many words:

In 1703 the Archbishop of Paris gave him the unexpected assignment of visiting and reforming Mont Valerien, an association of monks who had become tepid and lacking in unity. The monks found out about the upcoming visitation and armed themselves interiorly to resist the *“threatening disaster”* of having to change.

When Louis arrived, however, the feared attack, much to their surprise, did not take place. The missionary, only 30 years old and completely inexperienced as regards monastic life, did not

know how to tackle the abuses and withdrew, at first, for weeks to his little cell and the chapel. He did not speak with any of the brothers, did not become involved in their arguments and did not criticize the obvious faults. Rather, he began to carefully study the monastic Rule of Mont Valerien. When he had finished, Louis Marie started to live the Rule. He wore the monk’s white habit and precisely observed the daily schedule without worrying about those who disobeyed the Rule. During the prescribed hour of recreation he spoke with the other monks about everything, religious and humorous, without ever talking about anything that had to do with his assignment.

*I*n this way, Louis Marie became their most pleasant brother by living out how happy their life could be if they only did what they were supposed to do. The monks finally found trust in Louis and came to him on their own to ask for advice in all their struggles. In a short time, peace returned to the monastery.

A timeless missionary method

Shortly thereafter the Bishop of Poitiers gave Louis the task of holding missions in his city parishes. The unshakable apostle decided to start in the part of the city which was in most need, the poor quarter Montbernage. Louis Marie withdrew in prayer for ten days to ask for clarity about the method he should use in the fight against evil.

Then he started down a very unusual path for the time. He started by seeking contact with the people, with the landlords and prostitutes, the simple laborers and pimps, the neglected women and children who would have otherwise never come to his homilies. Winning their trust was the most laborious and essential part of the mission. Day after day he tirelessly walked through the alleys, greeting everybody warmly and trying to help wherever he could.

Of course the black robe reaped much mockery, mistrust and hatred for his efforts; they threw stones and trash at him. He accepted this flood of rejection with great meekness until they became used to seeing him. In ever increasing numbers, they asked him to come to the sick, and the children quickly began to trust him because Louis Marie was the only one who was good to them. During these weeks he studied attentively the habits of the people, their needs and also their good sides. It was important for him to find out what was causing the spiritual illness in the town, whether it be hidden vices or old hostilities.

Louis Marie was radical in that he was never satisfied with a mission which had a superficial or flighty effect but did not move the people's innermost being. Mission for him meant wrestling the devil for souls and proclaiming Christ to them in a way that they could accept him into their lives and let him transform them interiorly.

How could Louis win over these wounded hearts which had no interest in giving up their

bad habits? Through the children! First, Louis Marie invited them to his "Pastoral Center", an old barn which he consecrated to Mary, "Queen of Hearts". With simple religious songs, Bible stories and fundamental truths of the Faith it was easy to inspire the children to lead good lives.

As soon as he found their hearts ready, he taught them the Our Father and the Hail Mary and prayed the Rosary with them. The little ones immediately started telling everybody how nice it was "*with good Father de Montfort*". A short time later, the first curious mothers came and so he did a catechism and prayed with them after the children's hour. They were thankful that somebody transmitted love and hope to them, and with time they were also helped by him to lead better lives. The same thing happened with the men and pretty soon the people started to see a true father and priest in Louis Marie.

Only then did the missionary start to encourage them to break away from sin and start a new, truly Christian life. In order to do so, they should make a procession together to the church, make a confession with sincere contrition and receive Holy Communion. Surely this was the decisive moment in which grace had to work; and, amazingly enough, the people followed their pastor. Poitiers experienced a spectacle like never before.

In the end, Louis left behind the statue of Our Lady in the barn under the condition that they continue to pray the Rosary every night, which they did. This was always the last step of a mission, which generally lasted four to five weeks: to make something which lasts and to which the people should remain faithful, a fraternity or a Stations of the Cross, in remembrance and as proof of their new-found love of God.

Sometimes Louis Marie let the Cross speak in his place. One evening, he climbed to the pulpit in the overflowing church, took his missionary cross and, without saying a word, lovingly meditated at length the crucifix with tears in his eyes. Then he silently left the pulpit. Those present were deeply moved by the “wordless homily” and even more so as the saint passed through the pews with the cross and offered to let them all kiss it with the words, “Behold your Redeemer! Are you not sorry for having offended him?”

Totus tuus - totally yours

Louis Marie found the basic ideas for his Marian teaching in the Mariology being taught in Saint Sulpice which recognized Mary as a central means for finding Christ and becoming similar to him. He deepened and completed this thought in an exceptionally enlightened way and through the preparation for the consecration to Mary made it livable in everyday life for all people and for all times.

In its essence, the total consecration to Mary is a complete renewal of our baptismal vows because in a conscious and free act of our will we give ourselves anew to Christ with all that we are and have, and that, through Mary’s hands. We completely entrust ourselves to her as our mother forever because Jesus himself went this way before us *“and called us that we go to him in the same way as he came to us, namely through Mary.”* She is *“the surest, the easiest, the shortest, and the most perfect means of going to Jesus Christ,”* and as practical experience and the example of countless people who have gone this way teaches—she is also the most beautiful!

The effect of the consecration are wonderful, *“When she sees someone giving himself entirely to her ... she gives herself completely in a wondrous manner to him. She engulfs him in the ocean of her graces, adorns him with her merits, supports him with her power, enlightens him with her light, and fills him with her love. She shares her virtues with him. ... Just as one who is consecrated belongs entirely to Mary, so Mary belongs entirely to him.”* *“The more the Holy Spirit finds Mary his dear and inseparable spouse in a soul the more powerful and effective he becomes in producing Jesus Christ in that soul...”*

The goal of consecration to Mary, the “mold that fashioned a God-man”, is the transformation of our whole interior self into Christ. Toward the end of his life, Louis Marie entrusted to a friend, *“I enjoy the special grace of Jesus and Mary’s continual presence in my soul.”* He thus confirmed the truth and power of his teaching through his life and activities.

Blessed John Paul II took this inheritance from St. Louis and chose “Totus Tuus” as his motto. In doing so, it became known around the world. It was not by chance that he intended to make the French apostle of Mary a Doctor of the Church.

Apostolic missionary

In 1707, 34-year-old Louis made a pilgrimage on foot to Rome. Pope Clemens XI approved of his special missionary methods and gave him the title “Apostolic Missionary”.

Father de Montfort finally had a confirmation from the Church for his approach to mission. He wandered for nine years as a tireless missionary through the dioceses of Nantes, Luçon

and La Rochelle and through his dedication, transmitted to the people a desire to live better lives. He had such a great influence in these areas, that it can still be felt today, 300 years later.

He finally found a permanent home in the diocese of La Rochelle. He held his largest missions here and in 1712 wrote his most important work, "Treatise on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin". He finally founded the congregations he had desired to found for so long: the "Daughters

of Wisdom" and the "Company of Mary". During his last mission in the town of St. Laurent-sur-Sevre, 43-year-old Louis Marie died on April 28, 1716, severely weakened from a previous attempt to poison him and completely consumed by his apostolic fire. He died with the names "Jesus and Mary" on his lips. In his sixteen years as a priest, this man of God travelled approximately 15,000 miles on foot, held around 200 missions and changed the lives of thousands.

The apocalyptic end times

A true prophet, Louis saw how God would work through Mary in the apocalyptic end time. "The salvation of the world began in Mary, it must also be completed in Mary. ... In the end times, the children of God will see Mary as clearly as it is possible in faith. They will experience the fullness of her mercy and recognize how much they need Mary's help. ... It is reserved for her to form and train the great saints who will come forth as the world nears its end—filled with the Holy Spirit and the spirit of Mary. Through them the heavenly queen will work great miracles in the world. They will destroy the enemy and set up the

kingdom of her son Jesus Christ over the ruins of the kingdom of the corrupted world. And these holy people will accomplish it all through the total devotion to Mary. ... They will be a consuming fire. ... Wherever they preach, they will continually leave behind the gold of love which is the fulfillment of the whole law."

Louis Marie prayed, inflamed with desire, "Come down upon the earth, Holy Spirit, furnace of fire and form priests completely of fire! Through their work, renew the face of the earth and make fully new your bride the Church."

translated from: Hildegard Waach,
Grignon von Montfort, Franz-Sales-Verlag 1966

With enlightened words, the French mystic Marthe Robin wrote to the Superior of the Company of Mary:

"Louis de Montfort was not aware of what he was writing; it would have made him too proud. He wrote down what the Holy Spirit dictated to him."

*St. Louis Marie trusted greatly
in the transforming power of the Rosary.
Therefore he repeated often:*

*“In the same way the salvation of the world
began with the angel’s Hail Mary,
so the salvation of each individual is bound up with it...
It will cause the Word of God to take root in the soul.”*

Does Your Life Coincide with Your Teaching?

If one looks at only statistics, then Christianity does not count for much in Japan. The fascinating, well-educated nation has a unique history, culture and religious practices. That, combined with three centuries of bloody persecution of the Church and modern-day materialism, has contributed to the difficulties of spreading the Faith. When a Japanese heart is won over, however, it counts among the best and most faithful imaginable!

*G*od made use of a Japanese murderer named Anyiro from Malakka, Malaysia, in 1547 to tell the great Jesuit and Indian missionary Francis Xavier about Japan for the first time. The Japanese’s reasonable questions awoke in the fervent apostle an even greater desire to bring the Christian Faith to the “Land of the Rising Sun”, an empire of islands which had been discovered

by the Portuguese just four years earlier. When Francis Xavier asked if the Japanese would also be open to Christianity, Anyiro answered, “My fellow countrymen will not become Christians so quickly. First, they will ask many questions and then wait to see how you answer and how much you know. Above all, they will want to see if your life coincides with your teaching...”

Two years later, on August 15, 1549, Francis Xavier set foot on Japanese ground for the first time with two of his brothers and Anyiro to translate for them. It was in the port city of Kagoshima. Shortly thereafter he wrote with enthusiasm to the Jesuits in Rome, *“The people we have dealt with so far are the best that I have ever met, and it seems to me that there is no better nation among the non-believers as the Japanese.”*

Within a short period, however, he also became acquainted with the other side of the highly cultured and educated nation, because they often treated strangers like some sort of exotic animal. They had a contemptuous curiosity, laughed and made fun of their inability to speak the language and the children chased after them throwing stones.

If somebody finally showed interest in the teachings of the new faith, they would invite them to their homes and bury them with questions in never ending discussions. Francis Xavier had to admit that despite all his efforts and kindness with which he tried to win the trust of the Japanese, he did not find the openness that he had expected. Instead of fishing for men with the nets he used in India, here he tiringly used rod and reel, one soul at a time!

What impressed the Japanese, however, for

whom personal honor meant more than wealth or even their life, was the Jesuits’ example of fearlessness and meekness. The first Christian in the prominent city Yamaguchi was a well-respected man who initially attended the sermons merely to contradict them. It so happened that during a homily of Br. Fernandez somebody from the crowd spit in his face. *“Without batting an eye,”* his companion wrote to Europe, *“the brother wiped his face and continued with his preaching. ... The reaction brought the man so much light that after the sermon he followed Br. Fernandez home and asked Francis Xavier to prepare him for baptism.”*

*I*n less than two months in Yamaguchi he baptized more than five hundred people, many of them from noble families. Again and again Francis Xavier found precious souls who—like the Japanese cherry blossom—opened beautifully to God’s grace.

One of these was a young street musician who later became Br. Laurentius, a zealous apostle and the first native Jesuit. Despite opposition, Francis Xavier maintained a high appreciation of the Japanese. When he left Japan and the 1500 hard-won Christians in 1551 after two years of strenuous mission, he hoped in his heart to soon be able to send many more apostles.

Blossoming and suppression

*S*t. Francis Xavier’s seed—his lifeblood—blossomed richly in the following years. The Jesuits who succeeded him, and then the Franciscans and Dominicans as well, continued his mission with great success. They set up churches and seminaries for the natives, and by 1582, in just 30 years, there were already 150,000 Christians in Japan. Even some of the feudal lords, the Daimios, were baptized and began to play an important role in spreading the Faith.

A short time later, however, after the unification of the Japanese empire, the attitude toward Christians became increasingly negative. The influence of the Catholic missionaries and the Portuguese traders drew the attention of the authorities and was deemed a threat to the empire’s peace. False accusations were confirmed by dishonest witnesses but convinced the Japanese General Hideyoshi to enact the “Padre Expulsion Edict” in 1587. This enforced the temporary sup-

pression of missionary activity and Christianity altogether. Similar measures followed which gradually expanded to the first gruesome persecu-

tion of the young Japanese Church. Nevertheless, the number of Japanese Christians grew to nearly 600,000 in only ten years.

The 26 martyrs from Nagasaki

*I*n 1596 the captain of a distressed Spanish merchant ship threatened Japan too boldly with war, and General Hideyoshi reacted with severity. As a deterrence he had six Spanish Franciscans, fifteen Third Order Franciscans and three Japanese Jesuits—among them Paul Miki—arrested and condemned to death. To humiliate them, they cut off part of their ears and led them covered in blood for 350 miles in carts throughout the icy countryside to be mocked by the pagans. Yet the procession of joyous faces and song was more like a victory march and it gave Christians courage and strength. A number of faithful who had fallen away through the persecution returned, and many who had never heard of Christ found their way to Christianity. Two others who helped the condemned along the way were also locked up in the carts quickly thereafter.

They reached the place of execution on the Tateyama Hill close to the beach of Nagasaki on February 5, 1597 where a large crowd, among them other Christians, parents and friends, had already gathered to witness the gruesome spectacle. The pagans in the crowd were silenced

with emotion, especially when they saw the three youngest Christians coming: twelve-, thirteen- and fifteen- year-old altar servers.

Paul Miki, a gifted 33-year-old catechist and homilist, spoke so beautifully about love and forgiveness that the executioners momentarily forgot what they were supposed to do. They finally tied the condemned to crosses that had been prepared and hoisted them into place. Even from the wood of the cross they sang psalms and hymns, they prayed and preached to the on-lookers until the soldiers pierced their chests with lances. Even 13-year-old Antonio died with the words, “Paradise, paradise” on his lips.

The witness of the first Japanese martyrs, who were canonized by Pope Pius IX in 1862, enkindled the light of faith in many of the spectators that day. The plan to crush the Faith truly backfired when God worked a number of miracles after the martyrs’ death. The bodies, which were not to be removed from the crosses under the threat of strictest punishment, did not decompose for months. They exuded a pleasant odor and glowed visibly in the night for the ships coming into port.

Twenty-five years after the first martyrs from Nagasaki, 55 other Christians were decapitated or burned at the stake in the same place in September 1622. Among them were priests and even entire families with children who had hidden the persecuted priests in their homes. A young Japanese Jesuit brother studying oil painting in the seminary was an eye-witness to the martyrdom and immediately made a sketch of the scene. He used it for an oil painting which was made in the port city Macao. From there it was sent to Rome where it has been preserved in the church “Chiesa di Gesù” by the Jesuits ever since.

Take up my soul!

In the midst of all the persecutions, the following years were still counted as a time of flourishing in the Japanese Church. Under the newly named shogun, the empire's military dictator in present day Tokyo, all foreigners were expelled from the country.

In 1615, after 65 years of missionary activity, he forbade the spreading of Catholic teaching anywhere in the empire, with the goal of systematically exterminating Christianity. A relentless persecution of the Japanese Christians broke out, and tens of thousands offered their lives.

During this time as well, many people found their way to the Faith because they saw men, women and children praying and singing peacefully to their God as they were going to their death. How they must have held their breath as they saw Christian mothers doomed to a "slow death at the stake" with their four- and five-year-old baptized children in their arms and the little

ones calling out, "Jesus, take up my soul," or when six- and seven-year-old boys and girls knelt down before the priests and asked for a final blessing and then exposed their necks with their own hands for decapitation. The love and faithfulness of the Japanese Christians was so strong that, even though they had not been tied up, they did not run away when the fire was lit around them.

The number of "undesired" conversions through the martyrs' testimony to the Faith was so high that they often reverted to hidden physical and psychological torture of the Christians in prisons, trying to force them to apostasy. Yet even in the prisons the catechists developed a fruitful apostolate and led many other prisoners and visitors to baptism. In 1683, Japan completely separated itself from the rest of the world. Only a few Protestant merchants from Holland were tolerated on an island off Nagasaki for trade purposes.

The catacomb Christians of Urakami

For more than 200 years there was not a single priest in Japan until, in 1843, a French missionary Fr. Faucade landed on the southern Ryukyu Islands where he lived like a prisoner for several years. Although he could not have an official mission, he nevertheless did something very significant—he consecrated Japan to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Ten years later, in the course of the emerging industrialization, the West forced Japan to open its borders and priests were able to enter the country again. Fr. Bernard Petitjean, who had been sent to Nagasaki from Paris for the pastoral care of the French, made a sensational discovery on March 17, 1865. Fifteen Japanese men and

women came to his parish named "Twenty-Six Japanese Martyrs" in the city quarter Urakami and quietly shared, to his great astonishment, "We are Christians!" They belonged to the *kakure kirishitan*, to the "hidden Christians", who, since the persecutions beginning in the 17th Century, had held on faithfully to their beliefs in the underground without priests, Bibles or Catholic writings. This showed once again the most impressive characteristic of the Japanese Christians—their faithfulness!

Although the imperial government continued to prohibit baptism, Christianity was finally officially permitted in Japan in 1873 due to foreign diplomatic pressure.

Especially Our Lady is to thank that the Christians remained faithful through the centuries of persecution because a statue of the Buddhist goddess Guanyin—a woman figure often represented with a child—was frequently used as a so-called Mary Guanyin to venerate the Blessed Virgin. This was the only inconspicuous sign of their precious Christian faith.

Christianity in Japan today

*H*istory shows that it was always something special to be a Christian in Japan and, even more, to discover the Faith and become a Christian. The following testimonies from our day show that God takes advantage of circumstances in order to lead the Japanese to the Catholic faith.

Benedict Ito, today a 50-year-old accountant, was invited to Sunday School by some women from a Protestant church when he was in first grade:

“Although my grandmother was a practicing Buddhist, she said, *‘Christianity is a good religion, go ahead and attend Sunday School.’* Through their example, the women taught us to pray, and the beautiful way they prayed made a deep impression on my childhood soul.

“Later on I attended a Christian university, but mostly because they had a good baseball team and low tuition fees. I never went to church; yet I liked flipping through the Christian magazines and books at the bookstore. That is how I learned the difference between the Catholic and the Protestant Churches, and I also discovered that Catholics venerate the Mother of God.

“A few years after I started working, my mother was diagnosed with cancer, and the doctor said she had only three months to live. A Protestant coworker of mine visited my mother frequently in the hospital, prayed for her and invited me to do the same. So I started going to church again with him.

“Then I remembered Our Lady of Lourdes, whom I had read about in some book, and that many incurable diseases had been cured there in the grotto. So I decided to fly to Lourdes immediately; and, since my boss was a Christian, he gave me time off. There was a beautiful atmosphere

in Lourdes.

“When I returned to Japan, I gave my mother the water that I had brought with me from Lourdes. She drank it every day, but unfortunately she died all the same. On that day, a nurse at the hospital gave me a Rosary. Even though I continued going with my coworker to the Protestant church where the people had prayed a lot for my mother, I decided, nevertheless, at age 30 to be baptized in the Catholic Church.”

*T*he 63-year-old housewife Monica Hiruda, who lives with her family in Fukuoka in southern Japan recounts:

“We moved when I was in second grade. It seemed I was unable to handle the change and I had to spend a week in the hospital. Every night before I went to sleep a Christian nurse came. She sat down and looked silently out the window until once I asked her curiously, *‘What are you doing?’*

“*‘I ask God for forgiveness and tell him how thankful I am for this day and pray with trust for tomorrow,’* she answered.

“From then on I also prayed, sitting alone on my bed, to this God whom I did not even know. I did not learn about Christianity until I attended a Catholic school as a teenager, and I wanted to be baptized right away. During our breaks I would go to the chapel of the children’s home close by. There I prayed and sang what I had just learned at school. That was, so to say, the unconscious adoration by someone who had not been baptized.

“My husband and I had a civil marriage and we had a baby girl when I was 27. Since I felt incapable of raising a child and giving her clear values, I visited the Catholic Church once in a while and soon started with catechetical instruc-

tion which was difficult because we lived in the mountains.

“Before my father died, he asked me, ‘*Are you going to church? Christianity is good.*’ Two years later my whole family—my husband, my three children and I at the age of 35—were finally baptized, and my husband and I also received the Sacrament of Marriage.”

*M*onica Hiruda’s husband Andrew, a scientist, explains how he discovered the Catholic Faith:

“My first encounter with the Catholic Church was when I met my wife. A religious sister and the priest who later baptized us also played an important role. The sister was exceptionally kind and always invited me for a cup of tea when I brought my wife and children to catechism and

waited for them in the car.

“I was also helped by the good example of a believing neighbor who invited me to go fishing, helped me in the garden or gave us fresh vegetables.

“When it was time for my family to be baptized, I somehow felt left out. So I also went to Holy Mass, and when the priest talked to me about it, I answered, ‘*I also want to be baptized.*’

“Only once I was a parishioner at our church did I realize that the priest brought home with his car the faithful who lived further away from the church. This touched me so much that I took over this service.

“A few years ago I gave a speech about the environment and the relationship between sea, earth, heaven and people. After the talk a man asked me if I am Christian. When I admitted that I am he said, ‘*I thought so.*’”

*A Japanese Christian...
surely one of the choicest beings
which nature and grace
have ever formed.*

*Andre Bellesort
French travel author
and expert on Japan*

A Vessel of God's Love

*T*hrough her humble service to the poorest of the poor regardless of denomination or race, Blessed Mother Teresa proclaimed without words, “Still today, God loves the world through you and

through me; and he sends you and me.”

Thousands of young women, as well as men, have followed her example as Missionaries of Charity. In addition, countless others around the

world—among them Christians, non-Christians and non-believers—of all social classes and ages have been inspired by Mother Teresa to be a “living vessel of God’s love” for their spouse, children and neighbors “because love starts at home. You must also try to bring God’s love into your family. Maybe there is an elderly ... an ill member. ... Have you ever considered that you can show your love for God simply by smiling or giving somebody a glass of water? ... Everyone has many opportunities throughout the day to show Jesus their love in these little things.”

*M*other Teresa’s life’s work is made up of a great number of “modest acts of love”, and the work her sisters do could actually be done by others. Yet Mother Teresa often repeated, “I am not in favor of doing things with great style. The individual is important to us. Every person is Christ for me, and since there is only one Jesus, there is at any *one* time only *one* person in the world.

“I will never forget a French girl who visited us from a university in Paris. She told her parents, *‘Before I take the final exams for my doctorate, I would like to spend two weeks in Calcutta with Mother Teresa.’*

“After two weeks she put her arms around me

and said, *‘I found Jesus.’*

“Where did you find him?”

“In Kalighat, in the home for the dying, and I went to Confession and Holy Communion for the first time in fifteen years.’

“I cannot tell you what a beaming smile covered her face because she had found Jesus in her heart. She received Jesus with such radiant joy. Then I asked her, *‘What else did you do when you found Jesus?’*

“She replied, *‘I sent my parents a telegram telling them that I had found him.’*

“She had in fact found Jesus in the simple work. ... There are so many young people here who come to Confession and Eucharistic adoration because they have found Jesus in modest work and come in contact with Jesus in the shocking disguise of the poorest of the poor.”

In many places around the world, Mother Teresa accompanied countless dying in their last, crucial hours, and “brought the souls to God and God to the souls.” People who had been abandoned or rejected often experienced for the first time what selfless love is. “Time and again I saw our people in the homes for the dying after they had made peace with God. How wonderful it is that we can help people return home to God with joy and a big smile.”

*“Put love into everything you do;
the smaller it is, then the greater the love.
It does not matter what you do, but how much love you
put into what you do that counts.
And remind yourself, ‘You’re doing it for Jesus!’”*

*“The tender love and care
which we will give to the poorest of the poor
in their homelands will show them the love
that God has for them.”*

“*The last time I was in New York, where we have a house for AIDS patients, a young man called and said, ‘Mother Teresa, I am going to the doctor now, and if he tells me that I’m infected, then I want to come to you and die with you.’*

“And I said, ‘Yes, you are most welcome.’

“The next day he called back and said, ‘I have it.’

“In response I invited him, ‘Come immediately. I would be very happy to have you with us.’

“He came and you could see the joy on his face that he was wanted, that a priest would be there to forgive him and help him to become friends with Jesus. He wasn’t even there for two weeks, and we prepared him for death. He died a beautiful, holy death ... with a peace and joy that no human can give.”

Mother Teresa told her sisters once, “We have to make an effort to say often, ‘My God, I love you!’ Then in our work we can show this love for God, his sympathy. Little Sunhil, for example, lost his father when he was one and a half years old. In her despair, his mother drank something poisonous and the little one sat next to her as she died. I brought him to Shishu Bhavan (a home for abandoned newborns, for sick or handicapped children and for the unwanted), but he refused to eat. So I found a sister to take care of Sunhil who looked like his mother. The child started eating again and recovered. A few days ago, Sunhil, a 21-year-old in the meantime, came to me and said, ‘I want to do for the poor children what you did for me.’”

Again and again Mother Teresa experienced how her silent example inspired others to share and thereby participate in her “work of love”. Once, a man approached her in the street car, “‘Are you Mother Teresa? ... I always wanted to help with your work, but I am very poor. Will you allow me to pay for your tram ticket?’

“I would have hurt him had I refused and so I said, ‘Yes’.

“The man opened a dirty old cloth bag and gave the tram conductor ten Naya Paisa, not even worth one cent. He said overjoyed, ‘Finally I have been able to share.’ Maybe he went without eating or had to go a long way on foot, but he was so happy!”

“*I was very touched recently when a little girl from the United States wrote me. Actually her father wrote for her. She sent me some money. An only child, she told her parents before her First Holy Communion, ‘Please don’t buy me a new dress for First Communion, don’t buy me any gifts, and don’t have a party for me at home, but let me have the money. I want to send it to Mother Teresa for her children. I can celebrate First Communion in my school uniform.’* What courage! All the other children were beautifully dressed, only this little girl, out of love for God’s poor, for the little ones in Calcutta, went in her school uniform. It really touched her mother and father as well. So she quit smoking and he quit drinking. This is the beautiful love of God, the tenderness of God’s love. It touched the little child, and through the child it touched the parents, brought peace, unity and love in the family—through this little act.”

“I have seen many times, even in wealthy countries, how terrible loneliness is, and perhaps we have people like this in our own families. One day, I pulled a lady out of a trash dumpster. She had a fever ... but repeated continually, ‘I am hurt. My son did this to me.’ Once we returned to our house it took a long time before we could pray together—to pray to forgive her son. If she had been hungry ... I could have given her bread. It needed a long time before I could get her to say, ‘I forgive my son.’ Thanks be to God she said it shortly before she died. Do you see this terrible suffering ... in one’s own family? Maybe my brother, my sister, my wife, my husband feel unwanted, unloved, exhausted, searching for understanding, and I don’t have any time. This is a great poverty, and I think that as long as we do not start to love at home, with the same love with which Jesus loved us ... we cannot hope for peace.

In the eyes of the world we might do social work, but we are really contemplatives in the heart of the world because we touch the Body of Christ 24 hours a day. A minister in New Delhi understood this and said, ‘We do it for something. You do it for someone.’”

Translated from: Brian Kolodiejchuk, Mutter Teresa –
Wo die Liebe ist, da ist Gott, Pattloch 2010

In the Sign of the Cross

This past January, a famous South Korean soprano, Sunhae Agnes, visited our Motherhouse in Slovakia. She is a sought after opera singer who travels the world. For this reason, she was all the more thankful to spend a few days of quiet reflection with us.

*S*unhae Agnes has already proven her artistic diversity in the most famous opera houses of the world and has been a guest in the largest national theaters and numerous concert halls in the United States, Europe and Asia.

While sitting at the dining room table, she spoke candidly about some of the beautiful events from her moving life. She then listened attentively in the chapel when Mother Agnes emphasized during evening prayer, *“We can do everything out of love for God, even singing and playing music.”* Mother Agnes illustrated this with the example of Bl. Elizabeth of the Holy Trinity who as a young, very talented pianist said before entering the Carmel, *“When*

I play, I forget everybody who is listening and believe to be alone with my Divine Master. Then I play with all my soul for him.”

With that in mind, Sunhae wrote on a thank you card before she left, *“God taught me something important here in the Motherhouse: From now on when I sing, I will do it for our God alone. And if the people think about him through Sunhae Agnes’s singing, it would be a great grace for me!”*

She wrote a short time later from Berlin, Germany, *“Here at home I have the picture of Bl. Elizabeth on my piano. She watches me when I sing and she makes my spirit pure when I play.”*

My parents’ example

*“B*eing a military officer’s daughter, I was born close to the border of North Korea, but I grew up with my two siblings in a suburb of Seoul where I later studied singing at the university.

“My mother and father, who met while volunteering for a St. Vincent de Paul charity, were always an example for us children as regards the Faith. When I was four or five, our mother used to take us with her twice a week when she brought food to the poor or helped care for the ill. Although it was often impossible for our father because of work, our mother faithfully prayed the Rosary with the three of us every evening.

We knew all the important prayers by heart even before our First Holy Communion.

“My mother, who has directed the children’s choir in our parish to this day, always had a big influence on me as far as music is concerned. I’ve been singing as long as I can remember. I always liked singing, first in the children’s choir, then in the school choir and as a teenager in the church choir, which I also often directed.

“I had doubts about the Faith in my teens because I thought, ‘You are only Catholic because your parents are Catholic. You inherited your Faith when they baptized you as a baby, and

nobody asked you!' Since I had not been able to choose my own religion, I started 'trying out' every religion possible. I was good at fulfilling my obligation and going to Holy Mass on Sunday with my parents, but then I went secretly to the Protestant church or visited Buddhist temples with friends.

On top of that, I readily spoke with people from sects on the street and accepted their invitations to visit them. These experiences could have been harmful to my Faith but, thank God, after looking

everywhere, I could gratefully say to myself in the end, *'Be happy that your parents chose the right religion for you. The most beautiful thing is to be and remain in the Catholic Church.'*

"As I was studying voice and leading parish groups, I passed on my conviction to the children and young people during various pilgrimages and gatherings. I was especially inspired by St. John Bosco because I loved to sing with the youth, praising God and happily living out our Christian faith."

"At the invitation of Korean priests, I spent three weeks in 2012 teaching music to children and teenagers in southern Sudan. Through singing and playing music together, we soon became one big family. We had Holy Mass together every morning at 7 o'clock. Since because of my job, I am a real 'night owl', it was difficult for me to get up so early. With God's help though, I did not miss a single Holy Mass during those three weeks because I wanted to be an example for those young Africans not only as a musician but also as a Catholic. In addition, I spiritually brought to Mass every morning a fan of mine: a young Korean woman studying voice like me who was suffering from a brain tumor. Her baptismal name was Joan of Arc; and, before she died, she wanted to meet me in Korea and talk together about music and the Faith. I simply asked Jesus every day to make it possible."

The true Sunhae Agnes

"*F*ollowing my training as a singer in Korea, I continued my studies and made my debut on the European stage in Karlsruhe, Germany, in 1999.

In order to secure a place as a soprano, I had to quickly assimilate the European culture. For me as an Asian, this meant serious adjustments to customs, behaviors, traditions and ways of thinking, and I had to give up some things which were dear to me.

"*T*o be honest, I had the impression that, as far as religion is concerned, 'believing in God' was considered to be truly old-fashion in Europe. On a normal work day, it proved to be extremely difficult to find a Holy Mass; in Korea it was completely the opposite. If I finally made it to a

pew, the next shock hit me—there were only a few elderly people there. This was one way in which I did not want to simply fit in and I decided, *'You are going to Holy Mass on Sunday, and daily if you can, regardless of what anyone thinks about it. Let them find out who I really am, the true Sunhae Agnes—a cheerful, adaptive Asian and musician who is not old-fashion and yet still a Catholic.'*"

Even if others wanted to skip Holy Mass, criticize the Church or even leave the Church, I wanted to stay and practice my Faith without denying the problems or accusing anyone. Since making this decision 14 years ago, the people close to me know that I am a Catholic."

Sometimes I try to make eye-contact from the stage with individuals in the audience to cheer them up or even to console them. I remember once when a very sad lady was staring at nothing until she finally realized that I was looking right at her. Her eyes lit up, a smile formed on her lips and she remained very attentive for the rest of the act. I am so grateful for things like this. It is similar with children who often grow bored and restless an hour into a concert. If our eyes meet, they always smile back, and they usually pay attention for the rest of the concert."

My new creed

“*I*n my job as an opera singer I told God, ‘*Until I find out why you opened this path for me, I will use my voice and sing,*’ because I actually always wanted to do something with my life which directly helps people. As an opera singer though, I always had the feeling that I was not able to do something really useful or important for the others until one day during a tour in France I was sitting, like so many other times, silent and alone in a church. Suddenly it was as if I saw the words ‘*Consolation*’ and ‘*Joy*’ before my eyes. I did not have to think about it; I immediately understood that God led me on this path of singing in order to give me consolation and joy. I had never seen it that way, but it was true. How good is God in his love!

“As a matter of fact, singing always brought me much consolation and it made me very happy.

I had always thought that after performances people were paying me compliments only to be polite.

“*S*ince this inner experience, I now believe people who come from the audience to tell me they have experienced consolation and joy through my singing. This became ‘*my new creed*’—as one who is consoled to console others, as one full of joy to make others joyful.

“With this, I hope to pass on a little of God’s love, like at benefit concerts with other believing musicians. For example, I gladly agreed in May 2012 when Bernarda Fink, a famous mezzo soprano, proposed to sing the ‘*Stabat Mater*’ from Pergolesi with me, accompanied by the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, to benefit handicapped children.”

Our family of faith is growing

“*T*hrough my job, I am often invited to lunch or dinner in fancy restaurants with famous musicians from many different nations. Before we start to eat, I always consciously make a simple Sign of the Cross. My associates are always very surprised at first, and some of them even freeze. Nobody expects a Sign of the Cross from an Asian; they somehow expect me to be Buddhist.

“Sometimes, when we have finished eating, they come and ask me, ‘*Are you really a Christian? Why? How do you live as a Catholic?*’ Surprising conversations develop out of what starts as ‘*Faith is old-fashion*’. In the end, many of them entrust their personal prayer intentions to me, and once in a while some even share their own experiences with the Faith.

“If we eat together the next day, everybody waits until I have made the Sign of the Cross and silently said a short prayer. Some do the same as I do and make the Sign of the Cross; others do it

like the orthodox. If there are Jewish or even atheists with us, most bow their heads quietly and respectfully until ‘*Enjoy your meal*’ has been said.

“Not long ago, a Christian opera singer apologized, ‘*I am sorry that I still don’t have the courage to make the Sign of the Cross in this environment, among associates. Thank you though for your example.*’ Then we tried to figure out in the large city that we were in when and where we could find a Holy Mass the next day. By chance a non-practicing Italian singer overheard us and quickly said, ‘*I would also like to go with you!*’ It was very unusual but we were delighted because she had not set foot in a church in years.

“In the meantime, there are a number of us who know that the other is a Catholic. We find it wonderful how the Faith holds us together, like when we pray before a concert or an opera. Even when we are on different stages in every corner of the earth, we send each other e-mails or call

when somebody is having a hard time and needs prayer. So despite being separated we know that we are united spiritually, like when one is going to Holy Mass in Sydney, another to adoration in

Vienna and that perhaps I am praying the Rosary in New York. It means a lot to us! Besides, our 'Faith family' is growing, and this is a real miracle to me."

We Will Be Born Again for Eternity

On June 13, 2013, in the Marian shrine of Divino Amore (Divine Love) close to Rome, the first anniversary of the death of a young mother Chiara Corbella was celebrated. Twenty-four priests concelebrated the Holy Mass, and well over a thousand faithful, among them many young families with children, traveled from all over Italy for the occasion.

Similar to St. Gianna Beretta Molla, Chiara also offered her life for her son Francesco and became a shining example of a mother who protects her children's lives no matter what the cost.

*T*here was nothing extraordinary in the childhood and teenage years of Chiara Corbella, who was born in Rome, Italy in 1984. Her well-to-do parents lived their Faith in the charismatic renewal movement and thus handed on to both of their daughters a living relationship to Jesus and Mary. "Piccoli passi possibili – little doable steps" became Chiara's motto after she learned and fell in love with the Franciscan spirituality during a retreat as a teenager in Assisi.

She made a pilgrimage to Medjugorje with the prayer intention of finding the husband whom God had chosen for her. And Our Lady answered her prayer immediately. The eighteen-year-old fell in love with Enrico Petrillo, and she was certain, "I will marry him." Yet it was clear

that both of them still needed to mature. In the six years of dating and engagement, they fought, separated, cried and always found their way back together. Thanks to the help of a Franciscan priest, Fra Vito (see picture to the right), they lived their time of engagement with Jesus until they said "I do" on September 21, 2008 in Assisi.

*I*t was a beautiful wedding because the bride and groom were so well prepared. "We expressed our concerns and stopped expecting so much from one another. It brought unbelievable peace and great trust in God's providence which surely accompanied us along our path together," 24-year-old Chiara testified to one of her friends.

Maria Grazia Letizia

born on June 10, 2009

Within just a few months Chiara was pregnant, something they had both hoped for. The first ultrasound, however, revealed a dreadful image. Chiara explains, *“Not everything in life happens as we want. The Lord often has different plans for us than we imagine. With the doctor, I saw on the ultrasound image that the top of our daughter’s skull had not formed. Anencephaly is what they call failed development of the brain, the gynecologist explained to me. Although the child moved perfectly, it had no chance of surviving.”*

It was not easy for Chiara’s doctor to tell her patient the diagnosis. How surprised she was with the spontaneous response, *“God never makes a mistake.”* With that it was clear that an abortion was out of the question.

“I wanted to help my child to the best of my abilities and in no way put its life at risk. But how should I tell my husband?” Chiara asked herself. *“The whole night was terrible, and I said to Jesus, ‘You want to give me a sick child, but why did you allow that Enrico was not present at exactly this check-up and that I had to hear this news alone? Why are you asking me to tell him this?’*

“Then I had to think of Our Lady. She had also conceived a son and had to explain this difficult situation to her husband. God had also given her a child that did not belong to her, who was to die, and she should stand beneath the cross and watch it happen. This helped me to realize that I would not understand everything right away and that maybe the Lord had a plan which I did not yet realize.

“Then the first miracle happened; the moment I told Enrico was unforgettable: He hugged me and said, ‘She is our daughter, and we will keep her as she is.’ We cried a lot together but it was still a beautiful pregnancy in which we could treasure every day, Maria’s

each and every kick.

“Due to the baby’s illness, I had two gallons more fluid than usual in my womb. People often asked us at the grocery store if we were expecting triplets, and then many times we heard the for us painful comment, ‘Hopefully they are healthy...’ Nobody could read in our eyes what we were going through. We were truly happy in our pain because we prayed so much together.”

The doctors advised Chiara to have a C-section so that her life would not be endangered in any way. But she trusted in God’s help, *“The birth was natural, quick and painful. Maria was born naturally after being in labor for two hours. I will never forget the moment I saw her. I knew that we would remain united the rest of our lives. We asked Jesus that she be born alive so that we would be able to baptize her. That was the biggest gift that God gave to us. This half an hour was unforgettable; it was one of the most beautiful of my life. If I had aborted her, I never would have been able to say that. We baptized her with the name Maria Grazia Letizia – Mary Grace Joy.”*

Enrico told us why they choose this name: *“We named our daughter Mary because Our Lady taught us that she did not belong to us and we may give her back to God. She should be called Grace because she gave us the grace of understanding that it does not matter how long one lives on earth, but it does matter that one is born. Every day of the pregnancy was a grace because we felt Jesus’ presence with us. And Joy because in the nine months she brought us so much joy in suffering, and in suffering, our love for one another grew a lot, thanks to her.*

“Every person has a mission. Maria Grazia has already fulfilled hers on earth, but it is not finished because she continues to work for us in heaven. There is a mystery in every heart that nobody knows but God. We often want to be the lord of our lives, to

plan everything on our own and flee from the cross that he entrusts to us. But only when you say ‘Yes’ to his way with your life does it shed some light on that mystery. We discovered in our suffering that we really love God.”

Davide Giovanni

*E*nrico and Chiara made a pilgrimage to Medjugorje to ask for another child. And they did not have to wait long. At first the pregnancy seemed to be going well, but then the ultrasound showed that the child did not have any legs.

In the seventh month the doctors discovered, unfortunately, that the intestines had not developed properly, making life impossible. Without hesitating the suffering parents decided once again that they would not terminate the pregnancy under any condition. Dr. Salernitano, Chiara’s gynecologist, was stunned. *“I have never met anybody who felt so loved by God, as if by the best father, as Chiara did. Her reaction confused me when she said yes to this child too, with a smile and absolute certainty. She showed such great thankfulness despite the suffering.”*

The doctor was so touched by the young couple that she wanted to be their friend, *“I am no longer just your doctor, my name is Daniela. You can reach me twenty-four hours a day, whenever you need me.”*

*O*ther friends, however, began to with-

draw. In their great trial, they had to listen to people say they must have genetic problems or that perhaps this suffering was a result of their own personal sins. Despite the loving prayer support of their parents, Chiara and Enrico experienced a great loneliness and darkness.

It was in these painful hours, however, that Chiara understood, *“Davide is exactly the way that God wants him to be. He is not ill; we are ill because we do not want to accept a handicapped child.”*

Davide Giovanni was born on June 24, 2010. He lived on this earth for 38 minutes, was baptized and could then go to heaven.

Enrico testified, *“Eternal life revealed itself to us in a whole new way through Davide. Through him we understood what is really important in life—to be loved and to let yourself be loved. You could not say that this pregnancy was easy for us, but there was a lot of love and prayer.”*

A friend shared an interior experience with Chiara after the birth. *“God is greater than the greatest misfortune that can happen. He gives you a new dimension of life—eternity.”*

Francesco

*I*n spite of all the calls for prudence, Enrico and Chiara wanted to have another baby. They asked for this gift during a pilgrimage on foot to the seven main churches of Rome. And God answered their prayer: Francesco, a new little citizen on earth, announced through the ultrasound

images that he was a healthy baby—they were overflowing with joy!

Then during the fifth month of Chiara’s pregnancy a bad sore on her tongue was diagnosed as carcinoma—a rare, very aggressive and rapidly spreading cancer that had to be treated immedi-

ately. But Chiara and Enrico decided to continue the pregnancy without intervention.

Chiara wrote to their spiritual director Fra Vito, "*Enrico and I are leaving everything to Jesus.*" Although the gynecologist was pushing

to induce the birth in the eighth month so that they could finally start treatment on Chiara, the parents turned it down for the benefit of the child. On May 30, 2011, Francesco, a healthy baby boy, was born.

The sacrifice of Chiara's life

Chiara started on the necessary chemo and radiotherapy immediately. It was too late though. She found out in March 2012 that her cancer was terminal and that there was nothing more they could do. The young parents wanted to entrust their family anew to Our Lady. They flew to Medjugorje with a big group of family and friends. Chiara was not hoping for a miraculous healing. "*I ask only for the grace to live and to suffer in grace.*"

Chiara's mother made a meeting possible with the Ivan Dragicevic. When Ivan, himself a father of three children, sat across from the terminally ill Chiara, there was silence. He did not know how to console this young mother either. Then she asked him a question, "*If you could choose between going to Our Lady today or remaining here with your family, would you go?*"

Without hesitating, Ivan answered, "Yes". That was enough for Chiara to return from Medjugorje in complete peace and to offer herself

in suffering to the will of God.

Through the radiotherapy Chiara's esophagus and windpipe became so infected that she could not swallow. Metastasis spread to her muscles and through this she lost the sight in her right eye. Soon the lungs were attacked and Chiara had difficulty breathing. Then she caught pneumonia.

To escape the heat of Rome, she spent the last months of her life in her family's little country home by the sea. Enrico, Francesco, Fra Vito and her parents were with her. They celebrated Holy Mass every day, held worship services and adored Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament for many hours. All the friends that visited her returned home happier than they had come.

For his first birthday, Chiara wrote Francesco a letter which one could consider her spiritual will:

Dear Franci,

today you turned one and we asked ourselves

what we could give you

that would last through the years.

So we decided to write you a letter.

You were a great gift for our life

because you helped us to grow beyond our human limits.

Through the little bit that I have understood over the last years,

I can only say that love is the center of our lives

because we are born through an act of love.

We live to love and be loved, and we will die to learn the true love of God.

*The goal of our lives is to love and to always be ready
to learn to love our neighbor as only God can teach us.
Love consumes you, but it is nice to be consumed like a candle
which only goes out once it has been completely consumed.
No matter what you do, it makes sense only when you do it in light of eternal life.
When you truly love, you will notice that nothing belongs to you
because everything is a gift. Like St. Francis said:
the opposite of love is wanting to have.
We loved Maria and Davide, and we have loved you,
but at the same time we knew that you do not belong to us.
Nothing that you have belongs to you.
Everything is a gift from God. Never lose courage, my son!
God never takes something away from you.
If he does take something, it is because he wants to give you much more for it....
Thanks to your siblings Maria and Davide
we have fallen in love with eternal life.
We know that you are something special
and have a great task.
The Lord wanted you from all eternity
and he will show you the way you are to go
when you open your heart to him.
Entrust yourself to him, it is worth it.*

Mama Chiara.

Heavenward

A few hours before her death, as Enrico saw his beloved wife suffering so greatly, he thought of Jesus' words, "My yoke is easy, and my burden light." And he asked Chiara, "Dear, is Jesus' cross really as light as he says it is?"

She answered more in a whisper but with her usual smile, "Yes, it is light and very sweet."

It was torture for Enrico to see Chiara suffering like this. He told her over and over again, "If I could, I would give my life for you."

Chiara understood her husband, "I know. It's easy for me; I am going to our two children in heaven."

Fra Vito celebrated the last Holy Mass around noon on June 13, 2012. The 28-year-old wife and mother died a few minutes after receiving Holy Communion, around 12:30. It was an exceptionally peaceful death.

Her husband testified, "We saw Chiara die happily and with a smile on her lips. I cannot

wait to see her in heaven.” For her son, she left the words, “I am going to heaven to take care

of Maria and Davide. You stay with Dad. I will pray for you both there.”

When a journalist asked Enrico what he will tell his son someday about Chiara, he answered:

“I will surely tell Francesco how beautiful it is to let yourself be loved by God. You can do anything when you are loved. That is the most important thing in life—let yourself be loved. That is what your Mom did. Then you can die joyfully.”

Since her childhood, Chiara had a deep, living relationship with Our Lady. Every day she prayed a consecration which a friend of hers who is a religious sister wrote in the spirit of Bl. Pope John Paul II:

*“O Virgin Mary,
you who are my mother and love me so much with divine love,
accept my wish today of consecrating myself to you.
I give you my whole being and my life; I give you my body, my thoughts and feelings;
my deep ability to love and to recognize the truth.
All that is mine is yours and belongs to you.
I give you everything in order to belong completely to Christ who is the life of my life.
With trust and love I repeat:
Morning Star, who brings me to Jesus, Totus Tuus.”*

The references to Medjugorje made in this article are given solely as testimony for personal meditation and do not intend in any way to anticipate the judgment of the Church to which we fully submit.

More than a thousand faithful came to Chiara's funeral on June 16, 2012 in Rome which was presided by Cardinal Vallini. Chiara wanted to be buried in her wedding dress, a bride awaiting the Lord with her Lamp burning. She specifically desired that nobody bring bouquets but rather that potted flowerd be places around her grave so that each family could take one home in remembrance that everything in our life is a gift of God. Those who were present testified with tears in their eyes, "It was a celebration."