

Triumph of the Heart

CONSOLE AND BE CONSOLED

Family of Mary

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*“He not only pardons his executioners
but he addresses the Father directly,
interceding for them. He therefore postulates
ignorance, ‘not knowing’, as a reason
for his request for the Father’s forgiveness,
because it leaves the door open to conversion....
It remains a source of comfort for all times
and for all people.”*

Pope Benedict XVI

*Audience on
February 15, 2012*

Console and Be Consoled

Dear reader, in times of sorrow everybody wishes to be consoled through a thoughtful word, a loving look or a gesture of compassion. Yet in the decisive moments, we often receive only a “cheap consolation” because the others are unsure what to say or do. True and healing consolation always comes from God, from the Consoler, the Holy Spirit. Although consoling grace is often transmitted through people, it is always God who gives the strength to accept suffering with surrender and to endure it with patience.

To be consoled by God

St. Paul, Apostle to the gentiles, experienced in his tiring mission how much God was his father and was capable of consoling him in times of great need and even in life-threatening danger. He wrote in his letter to the Corinthians: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God of all encouragement, who encourages us in our every affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God.” 2 Cor 1:3-4

St. Paul even goes so far as to tell his spiritual children in Corinth that God makes use of his distress and suffering as an Apostle in order to send them consolation and salvation: “If we are afflicted, it is for your encouragement and salvation; if we are encouraged, it is for your encouragement, which enables you to endure the same sufferings that we suffer. ... We know that as you share in the sufferings, you also share in the encouragement.” 2 Cor 1:6-7

St. Edith Stein powerfully experienced this reality before her conversion when her teacher, Professor Adolf Reinach, fell on the western front in November 1917. As his wife Anne asked her to put his affairs in order following his death, she was

more than ready, but she was afraid of actually meeting her in her great sorrow. How should she console this young widow, a convert from Judaism like her husband? During her visit in Holy Week 1918, she was astounded that she did not find a broken, desperate widow but rather a woman who, through her Faith, carried her unfathomable pain with peace and submission and was wonderfully consoled besides. Anne Reinach’s testimony to the Faith struck the very talented Edith Stein to the core and played a decisive role in her conversion. “This was my first encounter with the Cross and the divine power it gives to those who carry it. I saw before me for the first time very clearly the victory of the Church, born from the redeeming suffering of Christ, over the sting of death. It was the moment in which my lack of belief collapsed, Judaism faded and Christ radiated in the mystery of the Cross.”

Unspeakable consolation and strength is given to the soul when in its pain it looks away from itself and to the suffering Lord. St. Faustina experienced this when, during Holy Mass, she had a vision of the suffering Lord who, as if dying, explained, “My daughter, meditate frequently on the sufferings which I have undergone for your sake, and then nothing of what you suffer

for Me will seem great to you. ... Join your little sufferings to My Sorrowful Passion, so that they may have infinite value before My Majesty.” Divine Mercy in My Soul 1512

*N*obody can help us better with this than the coredeeming Mother of Sorrows. Therefore Bl. Euthymia from Germany wrote in her last notes,

*“Blessed are you
when *M*ary accompanies
you in this life! In Jesus you will find strength,
in *M*ary consolation.
Here you will be raised up
and experience a consolation
which you will search for
in vain in the world.”*

Bl. Euthymia Uffing

Consoling with God's consolation

*T*hose who met great expiation souls like Therese Neumann or Marthe Robin in their suffering returned home completely transformed. This shows us that people who suffer and yet are deeply united with God can transmit tremendous consolation.

They pass on what they have received, just like St. Paul wrote, *“who encourages us in our every affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God.”* 2 Cor 1:4

Nevertheless, Bl. Mother Teresa of Calcutta emphasized to her sisters again and again, that making an offering of themselves in their care for the poor consoles not only people but even Jesus himself because the Lord tells us in the Gospel, *“Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.”* Mt 25:40 She liked to meditate on this and shared with her spiritual daughters her desire: *“As Jesus was suffering in the Garden of Olives, he was looking for somebody to console him but he could not find anybody. I want to be the one who consoles him.”*

Consoling God

How much we all would like to have been Veronica; the courageous and loving disciple of Jesus who handed him her veil on the Way of the Cross, or Simon of Cyrene who was able to help Jesus carry the Cross of our redemption in such a unique way!

From the writings of a number of mystics we know that it is also possible for us today to personally and directly console Jesus. Yes, God infinitely desires our love. We satisfy his thirst above all when we give him time in prayer. In November 1934, Jesus invited Bl. Alexandrina da Costa, *“Visit my tabernacle in order to console me! ... I am so alone, abandoned and offended in tabernacles. Strive to console me, to atone for me, to repair my great abandonment.”*

Jesus assured St. Faustina during an hour of adoration that the love we sincerely show him today strengthened and consoled him in his agony and passion: *“My daughter, know that your ardent love and the compassion you have for Me were*

a consolation to Me in the Garden of Olives.”
Divine Mercy in My Soul 1664

Pope Pius XI (1922 – 1939) wrote specifically about this in his Sacred Heart Encyclical in 1928: *“But how can these rites of expiation bring solace now, when Christ is already reigning in the beatitude of Heaven? ... Now if, because of our sins also which were as yet in the future, but were foreseen, the soul of Christ became sorrowful unto death, it cannot be doubted that then, too, already He derived somewhat of solace from our reparation, which was likewise foreseen, when ‘there appeared to Him an angel from heaven’, in order that His Heart, oppressed with weariness and anguish, might find consolation. ... We can and ought to console that Most Sacred Heart which is continually wounded by the sins of thankless men.”*

“I Want to Console Jesus”

In 1916, one year before the apparitions of the Queen of the Rosary in Fatima, the Angel of Portugal came three times to the shepherd children Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta to prepare them for their mission, which would be for the whole world. He taught them to pray and make sacrifices for others as expiation for sins and for the conversion of sinners. During the third apparition, he brought the children Holy Communion and said to them, *“Receive the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, who is so terribly offended by people’s ingratitude. Expiate their sins and console your God.”*

However, since eight-year-old Francisco only saw the angel but could not hear him—as later with Our Lady—he could hardly wait until his sister Jacinta, two years younger than him, or his cousin Lucia finally told him what they had heard. The angel’s words, *“console your God”* deeply touched Francisco. From that moment, he had but one thought, one desire: to console God and Our Lady.

Many times while they were herding the sheep he withdrew from the other two children behind a pile of rocks to pray in hiddenness.

When somebody called him he answered, *“I prefer to be alone, to pray and to console Jesus who is so sad because of all the sins.”* Francisco felt as though the Blessed Mother confirmed his “mission”. When Lucia asked him once, *“What do you prefer, to console Our Lord or to convert sinners so that they do not go to Hell?”* he answered, *“I would rather console Jesus. Did you not notice how Our Lady became sad in the last month when she desired that people should stop offending God because he had already been offended so often? I want to console Our Lord...”*

The child passed whole days without eating, sometimes even without drinking, just for love of God and with the deep desire to convert sinners through prayer and sacrifice to make Jesus happy.

Francisco showed his heroic love especially during the six painful months he spent in bed. Lucia, who frequently visited him, said that he never complained. He accepted without resistance anything they gave to him.

She asked him once, *“Francisco, do you have much to suffer?”*

He calmly answered, *“I have a terrible headache! But I want to bear it to console Jesus! I love God so much.”*

The village children and many of the adults as well visited Francisco while he was sick. They often remained for hours because of the peace and the grace they felt in his presence; they said, *“One feels so good here!”*

Translated from: Schwester Lucia spricht über Fatima, Fatima 1987; Francisco von Fatima, Fatima 1980.

In his homily at the beatification of Francisco and Jacinta on May 13, 2000, Pope John Paul II said, “A transformation takes place in [Francisco’s] life, one we could call radical: a transformation certainly uncommon for children of his age ... and attains a true form of mystical union with the Lord. ... Francisco bore without complaining the great sufferings caused by the illness from which he died. It all seemed to him so little to console Jesus: he died with a smile on his lips. ... Devoting themselves with total generosity to the direction of such a good teacher (Our Lady), Jacinta and Francisco soon reached the heights of perfection.”

I Do Not Expect Heroic Deeds

Sr. Consolata Betrone (1903 – 1946), who was as spirited as she was loving, went the same “little way of love” as St. Therese of Lisieux—even if in a different form. Jesus taught the Capuchin from Italy a simple act of love: “Jesus, Mary, I love you, save souls.”

She learned to pray this act of love continuously and thereby won back to a life of grace countless souls suffering because of their sins.

Sr. Consolata’s name itself expresses the young sister’s life-long goal. *“You will be everyone’s consoler,”* Jesus explained to her, *“for a child as for an elder, for the innocent as for the sinner— Consolata for everyone.”* How, though,

should a cloistered sister, cut off from the world, achieve such a great vocation? She succeeded by doing the most ordinary daily tasks with the greatest possible love. Jesus explained this “little way of love” to her: *“Consolata, I do not expect*

heroic deeds from you, just little things that you offer me, however, with all your love! This should also be a consolation for all the souls who are not called to great deeds and spend their life fulfilling modest daily obligations, unseen and unnoticed by the world.”

As a matter of fact, daily life in the convent, as in the world, can be very monotonous and seemingly meaningless if we do not do the little things out of love for God.

Sr. Consolata shared with most of us an inconspicuous life devoid of anything extraordinary. Such a life, however, can be extremely fruitful for the Kingdom of God when we learn to do everything out of love for God. The Lord encouraged her again and again, *“Do not waste any time. Every act of love saves a soul! Jesus, Mary, I love you, save souls.”*

This is a consoling promise, especially for those who through illness or frailty are unable to do much good exteriorly but who are people of prayer! The words which Sr. Consolata felt in her soul also apply to them: *“You will be the consoler of the heart of Jesus because of the brothers whom you lead back to my love.”*

*A*s a young girl, she fostered a special compassion for those suffering in prisons, often in inhumane conditions. Then as a nun in the convent, where it was impossible for her to leave and visit the prisoners, she prayed the act of love repeatedly for those who had been sentenced to being just a number. She asked the Lord to bring them happiness. And the Lord listened to her not only during her lifetime, but he even promised her, *“After your death, I will let you go to the pris-*

ons to console those who are suffering there.”

Sr. Consolata was called to console not only prisoners, but her sisters as well. It cost the lively Italian sister self-control and willpower to show them all the same kindness and thereby console them. She noted a resolution in her diary, *“Be good to everybody, especially to those who have a great desire for our goodness: to deal with them in a way that they feel understood and strengthened in their bodily and mental needs.”*

Yet, in spite of her sincere effort, Sr. Consolata experienced failure time and again which often saddened her. She was consoled, however, by the following little incident.

*S*he was resting on a bench in the garden when some chicks came over to her. She put one of them on her lap and wanted to caress it, but the little thing was scared and started shaking. *“I wanted to calm it down so I held it close to my heart until it stopped quivering. It liked this and became very calm.”*

When she returned to adoration in the chapel, she thought to herself, *“If I had compassion with this poor chick because it was afraid and pressed it to my heart to calm it down, how much more must Jesus have compassion with my poor soul and feel the need to hold me close to his divine heart!”*

Encouraged by the thought, she no longer looked at her failures but turned full of trust to the Heart of Jesus. The Lord confirmed, *“Yes, always trust in me! Give me the consolation of trusting me even in dark hours!”*

Translated from: P. Lorenzo Sales,
Schwester Consolata Betrone, *Leben und Lehre*,
Kanisiusverlag - Freiburg/CH, 1961

Mother Macaria

1926-1993

A great intercessor for Russia, Mother Macaria shows through the most pitiful conditions how she—despite being illiterate, severely handicapped and enduring great torments—went a way of sanctity. Helpless and miserable, curled up on her bed, she patiently carried not only her cross but, because she carried everything out of love for God, became a consolation for thousands of souls who came to her looking for help or advice.

The lamp that lights on its own

The Artemevs, a simple couple from the Russian village Karpovo west of Moscow, brought their newborn to the church for baptism on June 13, 1926. She was given the name Theodosia, “a gift of God”. Later, as a Russian Orthodox nun, she was named Macaria. As the priest and monk Basil lifted the child from the baptismal font he spoke prophetically, “A good girl. She will live, but she won’t be able to walk.”

The Artemev house was very tight quarters with twenty relatives living under one roof. Theodosia was laid in a wooden cradle hung from the ceiling by four cords. She developed normally, but they soon noticed that a lamp over her crib inexplicably

ignited at midday and burned until three in the afternoon—as if to indicate that she had been chosen. “Look!” her sister-in-laws would marvel, “the lamp is burning again! Something special is going to happen with this child.”

She started walking early; but one day when the 18-month-old child awoke she was suddenly unable to stretch out her legs. She had great pain when she tried to take a step and, with time, she was no longer able to stand upright. She could only move around by crawling. Looking back, Mother Macaria recounted, “From the age of three I could not walk an inch, and I just became a burden for my family.”

A desolate existence under the bed

No doctor was able to help, and so Theodosia spent most days and nights of her second and third year under an old bed. Deprived of affection, unwashed and uncombed, barely dressed and barefoot, the neglected child searched for bread crumbs under the table. “They had no pity on me and they did not want to feed me, in hopes that I would die. They starved me so badly

that I was barely able to crawl. I don’t know how I stayed alive. ‘Oh if God would just take you to himself,’ I had to hear often from my mother, siblings and relatives who often hurt me with other remarks as well. I was afraid of everybody.”

Theodosia’s only exterior consolation was her father placing her on his lap when he read

the Holy Scripture aloud. Even though her childlike heart did not understand all the words about the good God, they deeply penetrated her. The inner, spiritual world, the familiar association with the angels and saints, which nobody else even suspected, soon became her only joy. When she was five years old, the Blessed Mother

taught her a prayer to her guardian angel, and since the sick child could not go to school to learn to read and write, she asked Our Lady in tears, *“Heavenly Mother, I am sick and will never learn to read and write. Please teach me and enlighten me!”*

In Heaven

One morning, eight-year-old Theodosia did not wake up; she was cold and lifeless. Her father rushed her to the hospital, and after examining her, the doctor explained, *“If she does not wake up in fourteen days, then she has truly died.”* While her body already lay in the morgue, guardian angels showed heaven to her soul. Nearly 60 years later, Mother Macaria still remembered all the details of how, for fourteen days, she experienced the warmth, the overflowing joy and the brightness of paradise and how she met numerous angels and saints, all radiantly young and festively dressed in colorful, ornate clothes. Additionally, she saw the glorious nature with both familiar and unknown flowers, trees, animals and birds.

“I was also shown a huge, transparent, golden church. ‘Why aren’t there any icons in this church?’ I asked. The saints answered, ‘Icons for what? We are all alive here!’ The most beautiful of all was the Blessed Mother. I cried to her begging, ‘Please, heal my legs or let me stay here.’ Yet the heavenly Queen responded, ‘You cannot remain here yet because you will be useful on earth,’ she assured me.”

Then Our Lady gave her the charisma to heal. Theodosia’s body warmed up again and when she awoke on the fourteenth day, she crawled with great difficulty out of the morgue. Everybody was struck with horror at her reappearance.

First healings

When the adults were gone, Theodosia took care of the children and helped around the house with spinning and knitting. *“I was very thin and nimble. I often tied the samovar to my back and crawled down to the creek to clean it.”* Until she was twelve years old, this girl with thick brown hair and blue eyes dreamt of the saints who instructed her and taught her special prayers to bless water and oil for healing people. Amazingly, Theodosia had just turned twelve when Our Lady permitted her to receive people with sufferings of body and soul. Mary herself appeared to the suffering people in dreams and led them to ask for healing in the Artemev house. One day a lady came from the neighboring village

Novikova with her blind rooster. *“Where is the babushka (grandmother) who can heal?”* she asked father Artemev.

“There is no babushka here, just a girl!” he responded curtly.

The lady eyed skeptically *“that thin little thing”* and prayed sheepishly with Macaria until she sprinkled the rooster with holy water. It was able to see immediately and the news of this event spread like wildfire. In short time, farmers came from near and far also seeking healing for their sick animals. When asked if she could also heal people, Theodosia gave the petitioner holy water and a list of prayers which were to be said at home. The sick person became healthy!

With 36 little children

*I*n the 1930's, the Communists blew up or closed almost all the orthodox churches; bishops, priests, monks and the faithful were dragged to concentration camps.

During World War II, Germany occupied Karpovo in August 1941. All the members of the Artemev family were sent to the front or had fled to safety. The handicapped 15-year-old Theodosia was left behind alone to die, without help and without food. Then, on top of that, the desperate villagers left Theodosia all their little children whom they could not take with them on their flight through the woods. There were 36 of them. What did she do? *"I lit seven lamps and twelve candles, took one of the infants in my arms and prayed on my knees to God."*

When one of the German officers heard that a girl with prophetic gifts lived in one of the houses, he sought her out and asked her with the help of a

translator, *"Tell me, girl, where is my wife and how is she doing?"*

"She is having great struggles," Theodosia responded.

"How can she be helped?" the officer continued. *"She will endure it all, and when you return it will bring her great relief,"* she answered.

"We have never seen anybody praying to God like you do," marveled the officer. He posted a letter on her window so that Theodosia and her children would not be further bothered or threatened.

*W*hen the German soldiers withdrew and people returned to the village, most of them found houses occupied by other families. Strangers also came into the Artemev's house and mercilessly ordered Theodosia, *"Crawl to the neighboring village and ask them for shelter!"*

Living outside for 700 days

*T*here was nobody in Zagolovka who would take in the crippled girl with the torn clothes and bloody legs. *"So crying, I dragged myself into a barn and lay down on the hay. In the winter, sometimes, I dug a hole in the snow and climbed into it to sleep like an animal. I drank dirty water, ate handfuls of snow and birch fibers or, in the summertime, berries, herbs and flowers since it was rare that anybody would give me a bit of bread to eat. In every situation I prayed incessantly to God."*

She miraculously survived these 23 months because the Lord wanted her to participate in his redemptive suffering which had also meant, from time to time, homelessness for the Son of God: *"Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head."*

God gave Theodosia every strength and consolation that she needed. In 1943, Our Lady said to her, *"You have lived long enough on the street. Now you shall have a home. You will meet somebody today."*

As a matter of fact, a 72-year-old nun Natalia, who had been driven away from her convent by the Communists, took her into her home in Temkino that very day.

It was ideal for Theodosia and she lived there for more than 30 years until Mother Natalia's death. In the prayerful atmosphere of this house, she finally found the way to her ultimate vocation. For fear of the communist government, however, she secretly professed her vows to consecrated life and later, as an orthodox nun, took the name Macaria.

“I ask Our Lady to take the pain from you and give it to me.”

Gennady Durasov, one of her close spiritual sons, reported:

“When I came to visit for the first time in 1989, and walked into her little room, it was like walking into a church. Oil lamps were burning everywhere in front of small and large icons, and in one corner Mother Macaria was lying huddled over and silent on an old bed. I could just feel the peace that radiated from her. I knelt down and remained silent for a long time because I was afraid of disturbing her concentrated prayer. ‘Who has come?’ she finally asked. I told her my name and the health issue for which I had come. Unexpectedly, however, she began talking about things which only God and I could know. The strange thing was, I was so comfortable with Mother Macaria that it was like we had already seen each other many times. She said, ‘You may come to me like a son to his mother.’”

By the year 2002, nearly 5000 signatures requesting her canonization from 208 Russian towns had been gathered and turned in to the responsible diocese, Smolensk. As Mother Macaria had prophesized, her spiritual children built a nice wooden church which was consecrated on June 18, 2002, and a small museum which has held Mother Macaria’s personal belongings since 2003. The little house still contains her bed and the little wooden bench on which the “Queen of Heaven” sat whenever she came.

They are all my children

*A*lthough in the early years people only came occasionally to Theodosia for help, there was a never-ending stream of visitors in the later years. Russians, Ukrainians, Tartars and Gypsies came by car, bus and train. Orthodox metropolitans sought her help as did simple believers, Jews, atheists and even the possessed. People also came who were trapped in witchcraft and magic, which was as widely spread back then as it is today. This brought great and unsuspected suffering to Macaria. Young and old, everybody wanted help for the body or soul from this weak woman, who lay doubled over in bed like a little heap of misery. From there, she faithfully fulfilled her vocation for nearly 50 years until her death.

*O*ur Lady often appeared to Macaria who once asked her, “*Mother, why did you choose a cripple like me?*”

She answered, “*I looked all over and I could not find anyone better than you. You are the chosen one.*”

“*But, why choose me? I spend my whole life in bed!*”

“*Yes, you are my perfect one.*”

“*I don’t know what you mean by ‘perfect’,*” Macaria responded as she bowed reverently towards Our Lady, “*but I gladly accept the suffering. Suffer, that I can do.*”

One of her spiritual sons said, “*She embraced all of Russia with her suffering.*”

Macaria entrusted to him, *“God created such a useless person as me to suffer. We should not offend him. I have known nothing other than him and my bed. I will still lay here a long time, look to him and suffer for everybody; one could pass a hundred years like this.”*

Macaria was sick many times in the course of her life. By the age of 20 she had lost all her teeth. When she was 31, she had to spend five months in the hospital with a kidney infection. The doctors and nurses, as well as the other patients, gladly came to Macaria in their spiritual hunger. One after the next, they wanted her to teach them how to pray, and they all secretly wrote down the prayers from her prayer book, which, because of the Communist persecution, was strictly forbidden and therefore very dangerous.

*W*hen the sick or suffering approached Mother Macaria’s bed, the ascetic knew more about the visitor than the visitors themselves through the gift of reading hearts. Above all, she prayed with those seeking help or advice and she encouraged them to trust in the Lord and his Mother before any healings took place. *“I bring everybody to Christ, who will certainly say to me one day, ‘Macaria, you have brought me every possible person: these robbed you, others offended you and still others took advantage of you.’ I will only ask, ‘Lord, have mercy on them all!’”*

She often said in all simplicity, *“Macaria, Little Mother will pray; yes, I will pray and things*

will go better for you. Everything hurts in me, but I will ask Our Lady to take the suffering away from you and give it to me. I have so much compassion for you! You are all my children.”

One day, a lady with unkind thoughts kissed Macaria’s hand which swelled up immediately. Some of her spiritual children protested, *“Little Mother, you know what people have in mind when they come to you. If it is not for the good why let them in?”*

The patient sufferer answered in her goodness, *“It’s not right not to let them in. We must have mercy on everyone!”*

*M*other Macaria prayed continuously even in the silent nighttime hours; and her face would become radiant. *“I have no idea what it is like to sleep at night! I simply have no time for it.”*

*S*he consoled many suffering people in their dreams, and for others, she gave answers to their seemingly unsolvable problems. During the night she also blessed the oil and water which the visitors took the next day and through which many miracles were worked. And when she looked exhausted during the day and was told, *“Macaria, go rest a little,”* she just responded quietly, *“And who will suffer? I will suffer, that is my task. I am always okay. It is only those who take care of themselves who will have a hard time.”*

Yuri Gagarin

*A*mong Macaria’s visitors was the world-famous cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, the first man to orbit the earth. His spectacular flight in the spaceship Vostok 1 lasted just 106 minutes according to official reports and made Gagarin the “Hero of the Soviet Union”. The town of Gzhatsk where he grew up was renamed Gagarin. The so-

called Gagarinites often came to visit Macaria in Temkino, 50 miles away. Even the cosmonaut’s mother Anne, a milkmaid, was frequently with them. She had told her son that this holy ascetic woman could not live from the stipend she was given by the state. *“Gagarin came several times,”* Macaria told. *“The last time he came*

was the beginning of March, 1968. We talked with one another for a long time. He said, 'I will apply for a pension for you because it is not right that you receive so little.' He was a simple man, good and simple as a child. I told

him back then, 'Yuri, don't fly anymore! You must not fly!' He did not obey me and soon met his death."

On March 27, 1968, Gagarin died in an airplane crash at the age of 34.

The volunteers

Following Mother Natalia's death, ladies from the area voluntarily took over Macaria's care, the housekeeping and attending to the visitors. With few exceptions, they were all a torment for Macaria with their rough and arrogant manner. Although the women were well-paid, they were displeased and stole money and food which visitors had brought. They scolded and yelled at the defenseless saint, purposely leaving her hungry and thirsty and not responding to the calls for help from this woman who nearly went blind toward the end of her life. Some of them even practiced black magic so that, for example, all the oil lamps suddenly went out—symbolic of the spiritual fight against the vocation of the enlightened Macaria, whose demise her "helpers" impatiently awaited so that they could take over her house.

"The Devil made use of them scolding and cursing me," she observed without a grudge. "I just sit on my bed or pull the blanket over my head. I lay there and don't say a word. I have to be silent. I only pray because I am such a meaningless person. I never defend myself; instead I stay quiet and pray. I try not to offend the

heavenly protectors. I submit to everybody."

Once, when one of her spiritual sons asked, "Little Mother, why are you crying so hard?" she responded meekly, "I am crying about all of you. I have spent my whole life in prayer and tears. I know nothing else."

Turning to one of her helpers, she asked, "Where is that little pitcher?"

"What little pitcher?" she responded indignantly. "The beautiful golden one in which a voice told me all my tears were being gathered."

Near the end of her life, these malicious women even slept in Macaria's room and forbid pilgrims and her spiritual children from coming to her. Rarely was someone allowed to speak with her or help her. Like a defenseless child, the saint was at the mercy of their mood: "I am weak and they torment me. I don't harbor any ill will though; I just pray, 'Blessed Mother, forgive everybody who tortures me.'"

Increasingly isolated in her own home, one of her earlier predictions came to pass: "I will be very alone, abandoned by everyone."

The Queen of Heaven

One of the most extraordinary things in Mother Macaria's life was her familiar relationship with Our Lady. At times, Mary appeared to her every day, surrounded by the scent of fine blossoms. She would sit on a little wooden bench next to

the bed and lovingly console the sick Macaria. St. Seraphim of Sarov appeared to her in 1982, also took his place on the bench and cautioned her with fatherly affection, "You have to sleep more, six hours, otherwise you will be too weak!"

With each “visit” Our Lady gave “her suffering one” new confidence and strength, and afterwards Macaria was always radiant and cheerful. Mary gave her daughter the exact words of consolation and advice for those seeking help, and she showed her what was going on in the world. “*She guided all my words and actions.*”

When asked if she understood the language Mary spoke, Macaria answered with childlikeness, “*Why not? Our Lady is a Russian and speaks like us; sometimes, however, she is a little bit quiet. She also asks us: ‘Live more silently!’*”

In the final years when many sick still came, she could no longer manage the throngs of people. “*I don’t have the strength to endure the weight of all the sick people, the drinkers and*

the enemies,’ I often complained to Our Lady. She always gently ran her hand over my head and said, ‘Tolerate it a little longer. You haven’t quite fulfilled your task and therefore I haven’t taken you yet to myself. I would have come for you a long time ago, but I haven’t found anybody who is ready to take your place. Put up with it a little longer.’ And since it isn’t just anybody who is asking, but the heavenly Queen, I carry on. She gives me the strength to wait.”

Sometimes Mary cried too, and Macaria, full of compassion, wanted to console her. “*How grieved I was and how much it hurt me to see all the big tears Our Lady cried in the last times as she came in the night. How I wished to catch them all!*”

Mother Macaria lived her convent life in her humble little house. According to Russian Orthodox monastic tradition, she wore, as an expression of the highest grade of consecration and strict asceticism, a black scapular richly stitched with crosses and Christian symbols called the great Schema.

Divine columns

Through inner enlightenment Mother Macaria knew about holy souls living in Russia. “*There are, completely hidden from the eyes of man, many ‘columns’ who intercede before God,*” she said. “*They often live secluded in the mountains or in little huts with just a table and an icon on the wall. They are truly ‘columns’ that reach up from earth to heaven. These ‘divine columns’ pray for us.*”

Macaria never would have considered herself among these “divine columns”, and yet there is no doubt she was one of them. The year she died,

many of those close to her had dreams in which they saw the little mother, young and festively dressed, in the palace of a king. When they told her about it, she said after some reflection, “*I hope one day to go to heaven, even if it is the very outskirts. Macaria doesn’t need a lot of space. After my death I will be able to help very many people. I will say to Our Lady, ‘These are all my children, accept them!’*” When 67-year-old Macaria died on June 18, 1993, her final words were, “*Pray and fast, therein lies salvation!*”

The Gift of the Priesthood

Once again we had the great joy that two of our deacons we ordained to the priesthood through the imposition of hands of the Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy, Cardinal Mauro Piacenza, at the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome:

*Joseph Nicklas Maria Nietzel from Muscatine, Iowa
and Jan Svorad Bartik from Unatin, Slovakia.*

The solemn liturgy, for which family and friends traveled from America and Slovakia, took place on June 30th before the most important Marian icon in Rome, “Salus Populi Romani”. Everybody was deeply touched by the Cardinal’s homily in which you could feel he spoke from his heart to the candidates about a priest’s vocation.

God has a plan for everyone

by Fr. Nicklas Maria Nietzel

“*T*he path to my priestly vocation was not a direct one, but looking back on it now, I see that it was the perfect one for me. It was a day of celebration and rejoicing, as I was ordained to the priesthood after many years of reflection, prayer, and study. I was finally able to give my final ‘Yes’ to God by consecrating myself completely to Him who created me and infinitely loves me.

I was born and raised in Muscatine, Iowa, the second of seven children in a Catholic family. I have two wonderful parents who surrounded us with love, and raised us to believe that God was important. Growing up I felt like I loved God in my own way and I was very careful about getting to Mass on Sundays and Holy Days, but other than that, I wasn’t really interested in praying or going to religious events. To be completely honest, I never seriously considered the path of the priesthood for myself. My world revolved around football, music, my studies, and my girlfriend!

*D*uring the summer between my sophomore and junior year of high school, I had the op-

portunity to meet Fr. Paul Maria Sigl, today my spiritual father, who was in the area for a day of prayer in honor of the Mother of All Nations. I of course wanted nothing to do with him at first, but through the gentle persuasions of my mother, who had always believed in my vocation, I finally decided to go and speak with him. Without ever mentioning the priesthood, he simply encouraged me to take a little more time in my life for daily prayer and to receive the Sacraments more often. I remember thinking to myself at the time, ‘*I don’t want to be a priest, but if I did, I would want to become a priest like him!*’

After I graduated from Muscatine High School, I studied mechanical engineering. Also during these years, little by little the idea kept creeping back into my head: ‘*maybe the Lord is calling me to the priesthood.*’ But again and again, I resisted! I had my own plans, and my own ideas. I was deeply in love with my girlfriend, I was getting ready to graduate with my engineering degree and I already had four job offers from different companies. Even though I loved God,

I thought that I could never be happy in life as a priest. But the Lord continued to offer me this gift of a vocation, never forcing me, but slowly opening my eyes to the fact that there is no greater happiness than doing that for which we are created! I tried to find happiness in my job, in money, in sports, and in relationships, but I was always left feeling empty and never completely happy. I was trying to fill a hole in my heart that in reality, only God could fill!

*T*hrough some happy experiences, and difficult sufferings, I came to understand that the Lord was indeed offering me a vocation to the priesthood. I began to seriously consider the possibility and to pray the Rosary deeply for guidance, and after having worked as an engineer for six months, I decided the time was right to give it a try. Of course, many people were quite shocked to hear the news and said, *'You're leaving a great job, your new car, your girlfriend, and your family to go to Europe and study for the priesthood?'* But I knew in my heart that the Lord would take care of everything, and He did. I flew to Rome to visit the Family of Mary, and, after many years of running and hiding, the Lord, in His patient love, let me feel the consolation and joy of accepting His plan for my life, instead of my own, and I have never looked back!

*S*ome know from a very early age what they want, and others take a more indirect route.

I am very thankful for the path which the Lord chose for me, because I experienced many things that will be of great value to me in my priestly life. I know what it's like to study hard, to work hard, to be challenged, to be in love, to be loved, to solve problems, to organize projects, to work with people, to forgive, to be frustrated, and a thousand other things that are and will be extremely useful to me in my priestly life. Some would say that the sacrifices are too great, but those people have never experienced the consolations the Lord gives to those who serve Him, and I wouldn't trade all the money in the world for one single smile of the poor children I am able to help in the missions where I work.

Over the last ten years, as a seminarian and consecrated brother, I have had the joy of working in the Russian missions each summer, bringing God's love and mercy to this spiritually and materially impoverished land. Throughout this time, my desire to dedicate myself to working full time in this country has grown, and so as of October last year I took up permanent residence in our mission station in Alexjeveka near the Ural Mountains, in the central Russian Diocese of Saratov. I have been so blessed on my journey, both by the Lord, but also through the incredible support I have received from all those around me.

I want to thank all of you who have prayed for me over the years, and I know that the Lord will repay each of you a thousand times over!"

Why not become a priest?

by Fr. Jan Svorad Bartik

*W*hen I was born on April 27, 1974, the population of our little village Unatin was about 200. If the village, dear readers, nevertheless sounds familiar it is because it was also the hometown of our beloved late Bishop Paul Maria Hnilica, my brother-in-law's uncle. "During my childhood, the Catholic Faith was

part of our daily life, despite the communist government. My family prayed together in the evening and there was no question about going to Holy Mass on Sunday. It was only later on, when I learned about other countries, that I realized what a gift it was for me to grow up in Catholic surroundings, even if the Faith was not

lived as deeply as now I wish it would have been. My childhood was no different than that of my four older siblings and the other children in our village. When I finished school, somebody suggested becoming a plumber and, since I did not have any other ambitions, I learned this trade. I liked my job until one day I heard a homily at the dedication of a church which gave me a completely new understanding of the vocation to the priesthood.

It became clear to me that God can call anybody just like in the time of Jesus when he chose simple fishermen. I grasped the fact that a priest can come from a normal, modest family and very quietly I asked myself the question, *'Might you have a vocation in the end too?'* Yet I did not think about it again because I thought that it was impossible that God could be calling me to the priesthood. I could have imagined it for anybody else, but not for me because I felt absolutely unqualified.

*T*hat all changed in an instant when I received a very special grace. It was 1995. My mother encouraged me to take part in our parish's pilgrimage to the monthly apparition of Mary in Litmanova, Slovakia. The apparition site has become quite famous in the meantime, and in recent years even the Papal Nuncio to Slovakia and the former secretary of Blessed Pope John Paul II, Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz from Cracow, have made pilgrimages there.

When we arrived, I saw a line of many people waiting on the hillside. I was told that they are all going into the little room where Our Lady appears to the two Slovak children Ivetka and Katka. So I stood in line as well. When I finally reached the room, I venerated a little statue of Our Lady like the people before me had done. At that moment, something took place in me which I cannot describe. In a grace of God's tangible presence, I suddenly understood so much that had been unclear to me, and I had a great desire to know God better.

*B*ack home, my life changed: I did not watch television anymore even though until then I had

spent the majority of my free time in front of it. The exterior things which had been so important to me lost all at once their meaning. God was enough for me. I felt pushed, when possible, to go to daily Holy Mass and pray the Rosary. I felt that God had a plan for me. I felt the call to the priesthood growing ever stronger in me and I finally entrusted all of this to Bishop Paul Maria Hnilica when I met him the next time. He responded, *'If Our Lady is calling you, then I know a community for you.'*

In 1996, I was permitted to participate for the first time in the Family of Mary's retreat in Trencin, Slovakia, and I wanted to learn more about the community. After a four week visit to our mission station in Uzofska Panica, a poor Calvinistic gypsy village, it was clear to me—this is your place! I was allowed to start my novitiate here in Slovakia, which I then finished in Civitella del Tronto in Italy.

*M*y great love for the mission led me for two years to Sherbakty in Kazakhstan. On the one hand, I left the mission with a heavy heart, but on the other I was excited to study philosophy and theology, which I began at the Gregorian University in Rome in 2004. It is a custom of our community to take a spiritual year following our studies to help us prepare more deeply for our priestly service. I spent this time in various houses of our missions—in Sherbakty, Kazakhstan; in Alexejevka, Russia and then in Gratzen, Czech Republic where I am presently stationed as a priest.

It is an indescribable gift that Jesus called me into his service and says through me the words, *'This is my Body'* or *'I absolve you from your sins...'*. Therefore I would like to thank from the bottom of my heart everybody who has helped me through prayer and in many other ways on this path of consecrated life and continue to accompany me in the priesthood."

An Unforgettable Missionary Experience

*Fr. Juan, a young priest from Slovakia,
arrived at our mission in Florida, Uruguay in 2004.
With fresh zeal, he immediately took over the pastoral care
of the country parish “25 de Mayo”, but the little town
soon proved to be “stony ground” as far as missionary work goes.*

“*As* Lent 2005 was drawing to a close with the approaching Easter celebrations, I wanted, naturally, as many of my parishioners as possible—young and old—to go to Holy Confession. I thought it seemed reasonable that the roughly thirty adults and children could be moved to make a good Easter Confession. To my dismay, however, that was not the case!

This troubled me, and so I began to pray in this intention. Again and again I spoke about the Sacrament of Reconciliation during the homily and tried to convince my little flock that there is nothing more joyful and consoling for the soul than the peaceful, inner certainty after absolution that *‘Now everything is forgiven, and my friendship with God is restored.’* Although a few found their way to the confessional, by Easter Sunday the vast majority of them were not well prepared to receive Holy Communion.

I continued praying about how I could help the rest of the faithful to make a good confession. Suddenly, it dawned on me—we are preparing for the Sunday of Divine Mercy. I could speak to everybody about God’s mercy. I remembered Jesus’ beautiful promise about priests to St. Faustina Kowalska: *‘My daughter... tell My priests that hardened sinners will repent on hearing their words when they speak about My unfathomable mercy, about the compassion I have for them in My Heart. To priests who proclaim and extol My mercy, I will give wondrous power; I*

will anoint their words and touch the hearts of those to whom they will speak.’ Divine Mercy in My Soul 1521

This encouraged me to call the faithful with simple words to a great trust in Divine Mercy. At the next Holy Mass I simply began telling them about Jesus’ unique promise as regards the upcoming Feast of Divine Mercy:

‘I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and shelter for all souls, and especially for poor sinners. On that day the very depths of My tender mercy are open. I pour out a whole ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the fount of My mercy. The soul that will go to Confession and receive Holy Communion shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment. On that day all the divine floodgates through which grace flow are opened. Let no soul fear to draw near to Me, even though its sins be as scarlet.’ Divine Mercy in My Soul 699

And the unbelievable occurred! To my joyful astonishment and my great consolation, I have to admit, one by one they came to the sacristy after Holy Mass asking for confession. This experience made me even more aware as a missionary that Jesus really keeps his promises.”

Through the celebration of the First Fridays dedicated to the Sacred Heart that we do in the towns and through the monthly youth meetings, with set confession times, now especially the children and

the youth have become accustomed to going to confession once a month. This is impressive considering the lack of moral and religious support they have at home.

In Light of Jesus' Suffering

Beatrix Tuntomo, a native of Indonesia, first came to the Chapel of the Lady of All Nations in the fall of 2010. As a result, she rediscovered the Faith of her childhood and she and her son Daniel experienced great help.

“In God’s goodness, he showed us the way to the grace-filled chapel very close to our apartment. Daniel and I were drawn like a magnet to frequently visit the peaceful shrine of Our Lady where the sisters taught us how to pray the Rosary which I had forgotten over the course of the years.”

Mother and son suffered physically and spiritually from problems in the family, and Beatrix often came to the chapel and said with tears in her eyes, “I am here again to ‘unload’ everything to my Mother.”

Usually accompanied by Daniel, she sat silently with the Rosary in her hand and prayed for a long time in front of the image of the Mother of All Nations.

In such hours of prayer, the kind lady always received two great graces: to be able to forgive and an enduring love which, despite repeated disappointments, was not smothered. “When I looked at the image Our Lady, I was pushed each time to pray not for myself but for the one who humiliated and hurt me. It was as if the Lady of All Nations encouraged me, ‘Child, forgive again!’, and I begged ‘Help me, Mother! I want to but I cannot do it alone.’ And then I would be so touched that I cried inside because I really received the strength to

forgive anew. What an incredible consolation it is to experience this—very clearly a grace, something that did not come from myself. This consoling grace and peace remained when I was at home too, even when my gestures of forgiveness and reconciliation were unaccepted or unanswered.”

Beatrix and Daniel took the pilgrim image of the Mother of All Nations for ten days to their apartment. “During the novena, we prayed every night before the image. In the morning, while my boy was at school, I prayed there by myself; and several times the grace inundated me so much that it seemed to me that slowly a deep wound in my soul was being healed.” Daniel, on the other hand, was so overburdened by the difficult situation in the family that in the fall of 2011 he became sick and could no longer go to school or to catechism class for three months. In this trying time, however, he was greatly supported by Gabriella and Tya, with whom he had begun preparing for First Holy Communion in English with the sisters. For several weeks the two girls prayed for their friend at every catechism class in the chapel and every evening at home. “The fact that they didn’t forget me and even prayed for me; that built me up again.”

What helped Daniel in his dejection the most, along with prayer, was looking to the suffering of Jesus. Although it was right before Christmas, the sisters showed the sick boy pictures of the Stations of the Cross. “Look Daniel,” they said, “with your illness you are also somebody who now carries the cross. You suffer together with him.”

A completely new world opened up for the 13-year-old: sickness and suffering are precious and valuable; one can even carry them with Jesus. This fascinated the boy and he soon found Job as a model in the Old Testament, “because this severely tried man did not doubt God’s love although Satan wanted him to.”

Beatrix also did not tire of looking at the pictures of the Passion which she received as a gift for her home. “When I carefully meditated in silence the Stations of the Cross for the first time, I became shamefully aware, ‘What are my problems in comparison to this suffering!’ Yes, I suffer,” she told the sisters one time in tears, “but the strange thing is, whenever I look at the indescribable torment of Jesus, I imagine: he suffered all that for me. Then I know that I am so loved and I am full of gratitude! In this way, his suffering consoles me; it even strengthens me. You have to experience this yourself, though, in order to believe it.” Beatrix, who gave us permission to publish her testimony, asked that the readers include Daniel and her in their prayers.

It All Started with a Dollar

Jean Luc Bourgois, a French flower wholesaler, discovered the Messages of the Lady of All Nations in a bookstore in October 2006. Touched by their relevance he wanted to find out more as soon as possible. Since his job as a successful entrepreneur brings him every week to Aalsmeer, the world’s largest flower market close to Amsterdam, Jean Luc came to the chapel for the first time a few days later. Since then, the father of eight appears regularly, in the course of his flower purchases, and has consistently prayed before the image of the Lady of All Nations to whom he generously brings the most beautiful bunch of fresh flowers every time. With some gentle pleading, we finally convinced our florist friend to tell us one day what the cause of his generosity might be.

“It was the middle of the 70’s. A free spirit, I spent several months on a discovery tour through North America. As a mischievous 23-year-old, I just wanted see and experience everything—countrysides, cities, people, their work and way of living and partying of course. To my regret, a complicated arm fracture forced me to give up my adventures in Canada. On the long trip back across the continent from Vancouver to Montreal, a protestant minister saved

me during an October blizzard before I arrived completely broke in New York—ten days before my return flight. There I was stuck, half-sick in the huge metropolis without money, without friends and without even a roof over my head. A couple of teenagers had pity on me and told me where to find an empty warehouse in southern Manhattan, a place where many homeless people spent the night. Since I did not know where to go and it was already dusk, I looked for the place

they had told me about and crouched down in some dark corner. The whole area was creepy and it seemed to be a bad part of town. Fear began to overcome me and in my misery I started to cry. At that moment an old homeless man lying on the ground some 30 feet away whistled. The old white haired man waved me over and asked frankly, *'What are you sobbing about?'* I roughly described to him my lousy situation although I was certain that this old vagabond was not going to be able to help me. What a mistake on my part! This bum was about to utterly change my life.

After scoping out the surroundings, he swiftly opened a little pouch and pulled out a dollar bill, the only one. Without a word, he slipped me the bill and gave me a sign indicating that there were people who would cut your throat for a dollar. Perplexed, I took the bill and said astounded, *'I will never be able to give this dollar back to you!'* He calmly answered me, *'You will give it back to somebody else.'*

*T*he unexpected gift of a poor person to somebody who was even poorer was at the time an indescribable consolation. His generosity was a lesson for me, and it gave my life a new direction. For over 30 years I have never stopped 'paying back' the saving dollar bill—ten times, hundreds, sometime even thousands of times over. I gladly gave it again and again, and now giving has become a part of my life. And yet to this day I haven't been able to let go of this little dollar. I am always reminded that I am indebted to those who are just as down and out as I was in that Manhattan gutter, where the noble gesture

of a beggar drew me out of my misery. Yes, I am still in the process of giving back that dollar."

*T*his dollar bill has taken on many forms in the course of Jean Luc's life. Every Monday, on his way home from buying flowers at the wholesale market in Holland, he stops his delivery truck several times throughout France and, without calling any attention to himself, beautiful roses, freesias, daffodils and tulips, tender shrubs, ferns and grass find their place of honor by Our Lady in the Lille Cathedral or in the famous Rue du Bac, in Sacre Coeur on Montmartre or in any other church where this gentleman returning home stops for Holy Mass.

Jean Luc, who cannot just walk past a poor person, understood always better that he is giving to Jesus himself. And so it happens that he spontaneously takes somebody who has nothing or is all alone to a praise and worship service at Paray-le-Monial or, as was the case on New Year's 2012, he spent the whole day visiting old and lonely people, cheering them up and praying with them if they permitted it.

*B*ack home, in the thinly settled Department Creuse in the heart of France, where Jean Luc and his Portuguese wife Caroline are quite busy with their mob of grandchildren, the door is open to anybody who knocks. And since for years there has been an acute lack of priests in the area, the thoughtful flower dealer is all the more conscious of maintaining spiritual friendships with the priests and various prayer groups there.

The Joy of All Joys

Sr. Elizabeth of Thuringia remembers as clearly as if it were yesterday a touching encounter which took place in the Ukraine in 1997. She accompanied Sr. Maria Barbara for the “train station mission” which took place every Thursday in the huge Kiev Central Station.

“**O**ur backpacks full of sandwiches and loaded down with thermoses of tea, we did not have to wait long for our 15-20 homeless friends because most of the poor people to whom we gave something to eat and drink already knew us.

On this day, however, I walked over to an old man whom I had never seen before. He gratefully accepted a cup of hot black tea with his scratched hands and curiously took the prayer card of the Lady of All Nations which I handed to him. Not a single poor person here had ever refused the beautiful image. The old man before me on this cold morning also took the prayer card with a slightly noticeable nod of his head. He had hardly taken a look at it before he carefully looked around, discreetly pulled me aside and, without saying anything, indicated that I should follow him behind a dumpster.

He was wearing a tattered backpack which obviously contained everything he owned. Dangling on one side was an old, rusty tin cup and tied to the other side was a portable heater which he surely used to boil water whenever he found

an electrical outlet. He gave me the impression that he wanted to show me something valuable which he was carefully hiding from the others. His eyes shining, he quickly opened his greasy jacket and reached into his shirt pocket where it seemed that his treasure was hidden.

Awkwardly he pulled out a plastic bag and opened it. From it, he fished out another bag, and finally a carefully folded, yellowed paper bundle appeared. I still see his hands stiff with dirt before my eyes and how this homeless man carefully unwrapped the paper. His every movement betrayed how important all this was to him. A little icon of Mary came to light, the ‘Joy of All Joys’, a most venerated icon in Russia.

The old man looked me directly in the eyes and said in a quiet voice, *‘I have nobody in this world. When I find a place to sleep in the evening and I am sad, I always take out my icon and say, “Matushka, little mother, I am all alone. You are the only one I have. You are always with me and you never let me down. And then I am consoled.”*

Our Mother accompanies us always

In the spring of 2011, Sr. Elizabeth made a similarly moving experience when she was invited to a healing service in Switzerland. During

the well-attended service, I thought to myself, *‘So much is said here about healing, and they pray for healing... that is okay because the*

Church always prays for the healing of her sick. However, who explains to the people how we should react to our illnesses or suffering when God does not take them away?’

After the Holy Mass I went over to one of the side altars to look more closely at a beautiful statue of St. Padre Pio and to pray for a few minutes. While I was standing there, a woman in her sixties unexpectedly laid her head on my shoulder and began to cry.

‘Oh you poor lady,’ I thought to myself, ‘you surely hoped that God would give you a special healing or to find a solution to some problem. And now you are very disappointed, because nothing has changed.’

I simply pulled a prayer card of the Lady of All Nations out of my pocket and said, *‘Look, this is the Mother of All Nations who said, “I will give consolation. Nations, your Mother knows life; your mother knows sorrow ... Everything you go through in this life is a passage that your Mother ... went before you.”’*

*T*hen I invited this woman whom I had never met before to pray the prayer of the Mother of All Nations out loud with me. When we had finished, a thin smile came across her face. *‘Thank you, God consoled me now—through his Mother,’* she said quietly and slowly walked away.”