

Triumph of the Heart

BORN OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Family of Mary

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*“In Jesus was revealed the grace the mercy
and the tender love of the Father:
Jesus is Love incarnate.”*

Pope Francis, April 28, 2013

Veneration of the Child Jesus

Dear Reader, the feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ's birth is at the door.

*This Christmas we wish each one of you peace
and a profound encounter with the Divine Child.*

*Despite your sincere love for the Lord, some of you
might have a hard time venerating Baby Jesus or think,*

“That is something for children, but not for me.”

*The latter is not true, because God revealed himself as a child
to many mystics and explained to them the necessity of honoring him
not only as the one crucified and risen, but also as a child.*

ne of these mystics is St. Angela of Foligno (1248-1309) who, due to her deep spiritual knowledge, has been given the title “Teacher of Theologians”. She was born to noble parents close to Assisi just twenty-two years after the

death of St. Francis. She was very beautiful and had such a becoming demeanor that, at a very early age, she was surrounded by suitors and was soon married to an aristocrat. Although she had several children, she was not a good example of

what a mother should be. She spent all of her time and most of her money on herself—her appearance, her clothing, social events and extravagant entertainment. God intervened in a most unexpected way by suddenly infusing such disdain for her vain lifestyle, that the 37-year-old's conscience plagued her. She admits in her autobiography, *"I began to be ashamed of my sins, but this shame also inhibited me from making a full confession. It happened that I often received Holy Communion without having gone to confession, and so I received the Lord's Body in a state of serious sin. Now, however, my conscience weighed on me night and day."*

An experienced Franciscan confessor, Fr. Arnaldo of Foligno, recognized the state of her soul, helped her to make a good confession for

her past life and became her spiritual director. A short time after the grace of conversion, one by one, her husband and all of her children died. The tragic loss was incredibly painful for her, but her love for God and her repentance for her former sinful life moved her to try to make up for it with extraordinary works of penance and great acts of self-denial.

It is no wonder that Angela felt especially drawn to Christ Crucified, and now dedicated herself and her possessions to the poor and sick. Meditating on the Cross, she was enabled to carry her own suffering and was graced by God with many mystical experiences. One brush with heaven shows how Jesus infused her with a love for his childhood. Let it be a gift for us all this Christmas season.

"You must first know me as a child"

*I*t was the Feast of the Presentation, Candlemas. Angela, who in the meantime had become a third-order Franciscan, went to Holy Mass at the Friars Minor in Foligno. She writes, *"As the candles were being handed out, I heard the words, 'Now is the hour in which the Mother of God came to the temple with her Baby.' I cannot describe the joy I had when I heard this.*

"My soul was raised and I saw the Mother of God at the moment in which she entered the temple. I went toward her with great reverence and awe. She filled my soul with great courage and security.

"Then she handed her Infant to me and said, 'Take him, you who have fallen in love with my son!' She stretched out her arms and laid the Infant in my arms; his eyes were closed like he was sleeping and he wore diapers and was wrapped in cloths.

"Afterwards, the Mother of God sat down, as if she was tired from the long walk. Every one of her movements was so tender and

graceful that it was a delight to watch her.

"Suddenly the Baby in my arms was naked. He opened his eyes and focused on me. Marveling at these eyes, I overcome by an immense love for Baby Jesus. I leaned down until I was cheek to cheek with him. I was penetrated as if by fire and an indescribably beatitude radiated from this Baby and his eyes. I am not even capable of describing what I savored in this moment.

"All at once, the immeasurable majesty of this Infant revealed itself to me and said, 'To know me as a man, you must first know me as a child. I have come to give myself to you, give yourself as well!'

"I then gave myself to him in an unspeakably beautiful way, fully and completely. And I also gave him without reservation all my spiritual sons, whom I mentioned by name. My soul saw and recognized that God accepted my complete offering with elation. I was penetrated by such delight that I cannot express it in words."

The fruit of littleness is unity

Shortly before her death, she wrote a letter as her last will and testament to her spiritual children. We are sure that she would like to say it today to each of you, dear readers, for Christmas, “My wish for all of you is that you are one heart and one soul and that there is no fighting among you. I wish for your souls that which reconciles and unites everybody—namely to be very little. If somebody is very little, he pays no attention to his training or natural abilities, rather he sees his own faults and

failures and strives to improve. Someone who is very little is not a threat to anybody, he is not a burden to anybody and does not speak boastfully even when his example provokes those who do not want to be little.

“This is what I wish for you, my children, that your humble life brings forth harmony and unity—even without words. How I would be consoled if I heard that through your littleness you are all one soul and therefore truly pleasing to God.”

Translated from: Ferdinand Holböck, Warum ist Gott ein Kind geworden? Salzburg 1977

An Extraordinary Christmas Grace

A relatively unknown Vietnamese Redemptorist, Br. Marcel Van (1928-1959), was chosen by God to continue the mission of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus. Guided by her, he learned how love can even transform suffering into joy.

This important grace was given to him at Christmas in 1940.

Although at first glance small, may this, in reality, great grace be granted to all you, dear readers, on this coming Christmas solemnity.

Joachim Nguyen Tan Van was born on March 15, 1928, in Ngam Giao, a little village between Hanoi and Haiphon in Vietnam. The sensitive and talented boy had a wonderful childhood because of his mother’s faith and love. His childlike piety was particularly evident. When he received his First Holy Communion at the

age of six, he described being “overcome by an extraordinary joy. In an instant, I have become like a drop of water lost in the vast ocean. Now nothing remains, only Jesus; and I am Jesus’ little nothing.”

From that day forward, only one desire burned in his heart, “I longed to become a priest, so as

to bring the Good News to non-Christians.” Providence appeared to be on his side, when his mother entrusted little Van to Fr. Joseph Nha in another village for his religious education since her son’s health could no longer handle the strict treatment at the school near his home. Unfortunately, the years spent there turned into the most sorrowful in this pure, tender child’s life.

*A*t first, Van was enthusiastic about his new surroundings. He was a brilliant student and had exemplary behavior. However, his virtuous nature provoked Vinh, one of the catechists. After Vinh tried unsuccessfully to molest him, he physically abused him so much that Van could no longer hide the traces of blood in his laundry. When the pastor found out about all this, he tried

to protect Van. Nonetheless the jealousy of the other catechists brought about new tortures, this time of a more psychological and emotional nature. The immoral atmosphere in the house weighed heavily on Van. When he finished his time there at the age of twelve, they told him he would not be able to continue his studies in the coming school year.

How would he become a priest? That is why he studied there in the first place! In his pain, Van ran away and started living and begging on the street. When he finally returned home, his mother took him in against her will, treating him like a wayward son. He wrote about this period of his life, *“I sealed the doors of my heart. I did not dare to direct a sincere word to her anymore, and I cried through the long nights. I even considered myself a despicable creature.”*

Transforming suffering into joy

*I*t is hard to imagine the dejection and despair of this twelve-year-old child who, although completely innocent, was rejected by everybody. In this great suffering, God intervened. It was Christmas 1940. Van described what he experienced later in his autobiography:

“That year, as Christmas drew near, I no longer thought of the presents I received at the time of my childhood. I understood that, this time, my Christmas present had been prepared by the tears and sufferings of the months I had just lived through.

“Midnight Mass begins. My heart prepares itself carefully to receive Jesus. In my soul it is dark and cold as in the depths of a winter’s night. I no longer know where to look for a little light and a little love to warm up the empty dwelling-place of my heart. At that moment, Jesus, alone, is my only hope. I long for his coming.”

*T*he time finally came, and Van received Jesus in Holy Communion. *“A great joy has*

taken possession of my entire soul ... as if I had found the most precious treasure I have ever met in my life. ... Why do my sufferings appear so beautiful at this moment? ... My soul has been totally transformed in one moment. I feared suffering no longer. ... God has given me a mission, that of changing suffering into happiness. ... My life from now on, in drawing its strength from Love, will be only a source of happiness.

“I do not know if, on that day, Saint Thérèse had intervened in any way. The favor I received that blessed night differed in no respect from the one that, formerly, Saint Thérèse had received.”

In a very similar way, in fact, on Christmas Eve 1886 the fourteen-year-old future Carmelite of Lisieux received a great and liberating grace which enabled her to forget herself and be content with joy or with suffering.

While still at Midnight Mass, Van experienced that he had become a different person. Afterwards, he wanted to say a prayer out of one

of the prayer books following the thanksgiving. It was too dark in the church, however, and a privileged group, to which he did not belong, was standing near the only lit candle.

Once they had left the church, Van finally found a place where there was enough light to read. He had just opened his prayer book when one of his relatives came over, blew out the candle and brought to his attention that he did not belong to the chosen ones who were allowed to use that place. Van wrote:

“Formerly I would not have been slow in grumbling but, that particular night, something had changed. I closed my book

calmly and went to sit close to a pillar. There I offered to God my tears and my victory.

“There you have my first battle over self; quite trifling and which does not deserve to be compared with the bitterness of many other trials; but for once I had known how to suffer joyfully for love of Jesus. I then went to the crib to offer to Jesus the present I had just received.

“Upon my return to the house I met the person who had extinguished the candle near me and I wished the latter a Merry Christmas as if nothing had happened. From the time of this victory, each time that an opportunity to be humiliated presents itself, I will usually emerge the victor.”

Apostle of the Love of God

*T*here were countless painful and humiliating situations in little Van’s life, both interiorly and exteriorly. One of his most sorrowful moments was when St. Thérèse, who had spoken to his soul on a number of occasions, brought him in God’s name the following message:

“Van, my little brother, I have something important to tell you... But it will make you very sad... God has made it known to me that you will not be a priest. ... While not being a priest, you have nevertheless the soul of a priest.”

Van’s world collapsed because, ever since his childhood, he offered up everything for this, and now Thérèse brought him such an earth shattering message!

“It is to introduce you to a hidden life where you will be an apostle by prayer and sacrifice, as I used to be. ... Be happy at having been placed among the number of the ‘Apostles of the Love of God’.”

Step by step, Van learned to love his mission. *“O my little Jesus, I offer you all joy and sweetness. I accept also the suffering which you send me and give it to you as a bouquet to console you, to bring to your heart and, at the same time, to let you forget the blows inflicted by sinners which bring you to tears.”*

In 1955, Br. Marcel Van voluntarily went with the Redemptorists to North Vietnam: *“I am going so that somebody is there among the Communists who loves God.”* Since he stood up publicly for the truth, he was soon arrested by the Communists and sentenced to fifteen years in a work camp. After long torments and sickness in isolation, weakened by tuberculosis and malnutrition, he took his last breath on July 10, 1959, at the age of thirty-one. He had fulfilled his mission, to lead souls, especially those of the priests, to God through “suffering out of love”.

Source: Marcel Van, Autobiography, Gracewing Publishing 2006

The 25th Hour

If God gave us just one more hour a day during Advent, would it put an end to our franticness? Perhaps this was the question that motivated Bishop Andreas Laun from Salzburg, Austria to write the following story which is food for thought for us all.

One day, the angels went very concerned to the Creator and reported that humans had almost stopped praying altogether. As a result, the heavenly council decided to have a regiment of angels investigate the cause. They reported that people know they are not praying enough and they complain about it. Despite their good will, they simply do not have time to pray.

They were amazed and relieved in heaven—instead of the feared apostasies, it was merely an issue of lack of time. The heavenly council debated back and forth about what should be done. Some thought that measures should be taken to eliminate the modern, hectic lifestyle. One group even proposed a punishment for mankind: *“It will work,”* they claimed, making reference to the Great Flood in time of Noah. The best, most simple solution was proposed by a young angel. God should make the day longer. To everyone’s surprise, God agreed and created the 25th hour. Joy broke out in heaven. *“That’s just how God is,”* one said, *“he understands his creatures.”*

The people on earth were astounded when they began to realize that the days lasted an hour longer, and when they found out the reason, they were filled with thankfulness. The first reactions were very promising. It would take some time to adapt, informed sources reported, but then the plan would work. Following a period of careful discretion, bishops taught that the 25th hour would be “God’s hour” in people’s lives.

Yet in heaven the initial joy quickly yielded to sobriety. Against all expectations, the number of prayers reaching heaven did not increase, and so envoys were sent again to earth. They reported

that shop owners told them that the 25th hour—something for which everybody was supposed to be grateful—nevertheless caused new organizational expenses which, in turn, triggered price increases. They apologized for these unfortunate changes.

Another angel went to a union meeting. They were surprised to see him, but they listened respectfully. Then they explained to him that the new hour meets a long overdue demand of the union. In the interest of the employees, it must be kept free for rest and relaxation.

In intellectual circles, the new hour was heavily discussed. On a highly-rated TV talk show it was made very clear that nobody has the right to tell competent citizens what to do with this hour. The idea of bishops imposing “God’s Hour” on people’s consciences must be rejected as authoritarian. Besides, investigations into how this new hour of time came about had been, as of yet, inconclusive. Under no circumstances were people to accept naive religious explanations.

The angel who had been sent to the church groups was informed that people pray as before. They said that heaven’s intervention must be seen merely as a viable option, a building block in a personal decision of conscience.

Others went further and said from the point of view of the Church, the whole thing had to be seen with a critical eye. Obliging the 25th hour to be associated with prayer was narrow minded and could not have been decreed “from above”, at least not without the respective opinion “from below”. Some priests emphasized how thankful they were for the extra time which they needed so desperately for their pastoral work.

And so just about everybody had a reason why the additional hour each day could not be used for prayer. However, a few angels did report people who accepted the extra time as a gift from the hand of God, just like all the other hours of their lives. They used it to fulfill their responsibilities, to serve others, to attend Holy Mass and for prayer, which they found more time for now than before.

The heavenly council realized that prayer is a question of love. Having more time in the day will not necessarily increase how much we pray. In fact, only those who love the Lord really have time for prayer.

Therefore, it was decided to ask God take away the 25th hour and erase the memory of it from minds of the people. And so it was.

An Unforgettable Holy Night

by Fr. Anton Trauner, a Korean missionary

In 1959, I was made the pastor of the poorest parish in the large port city Pusan in South Korea. The terror of the Korean War was still weighing on the city, now overflowing with refugees. Although many of the faithful in my congregation had been able to flee from North Korea, they had to leave everything behind. They found a new home here in Pusan, but unfortunately mostly in make-shift shanties.

Witnessing all this, I decided to use every means I had to make that Christmas a beautiful celebration. I had received a wonderful, nearly life-size statue of Baby Jesus from my home parish back in Germany. "*Mary walking with the tiny Jesus in her arms should enliven Christmas Eve,*" I thought. At least that was my plan.

In the middle of the Christmas preparations, just a few hours before the evening celebration, I was called out of the confessional. Two altar servers were standing outside, feeling terribly guilty, crying with a broken Baby Jesus in their hands. One of these young Korean boys, carry-

ing the statue, tripped and fell down the rectory stairs on his way over to the church. Nothing had happened to him, but Baby Jesus was "seriously injured". "*Heaven help us!*" I gasped. How would we do the solemn entrance now?

Then I remembered that a few days earlier a baby boy had been born in our neighborhood. I sent somebody over right away to ask if the mother would be willing to play the part of Our Lady with her infant as the Child Jesus. The young Korean mother agreed; she actually considered it an honor. That worked out great; now I only needed an older woman who could play the part of Eve and carry the broken Jesus.

And so Midnight Mass began with a somewhat unusual entrance. Leading the procession was Eve, the mother of mankind, with the broken Baby Jesus, followed by Our Lady with the living "Korean Baby Jesus". At the altar, Eve gave me the broken baby first, whom I showed to the astonished congregation. While doing so, I tried to explain as vividly as possible, as a young mis-

sionary in broken Korean, to my keen audience how our good Father in heaven wants to share his life with us and therefore created Adam and Eve in his image. What a glorious couple so similar to the infinite God! Yet the sly tempter brought Adam and Eve, our first parents, to fall, and out of pride and disobedience they betrayed their wonderful Creator. That broke their communion with God, expelling them from paradise.

*H*owever, God remained faithful to his plan, I continued. He had pity on mankind and sent his only begotten Son. Through the “Yes” of Mary, God became a little, helpless child. Indeed,

in this way, he wanted to become our Savior and Redeemer. To emphasize my point, I referred to the young Korean mother with the baby in her arms standing next to me. I carefully took the newborn from her and held the fragile little child so full of life and warmth, high in the air, showing him to everybody.

Seeing this “Korean Baby Jesus” caused the whole parish community to break into cheers. They all enthusiastically clapped their hands, and surprised at such a response, I too rejoiced with all my heart. It was a success beyond all expectations. Despite the original mishap, Jesus was born anew in my poor Korean parish.

A Modern Christmas Story

*It was anything but a fairytale
which Fr. Thomas Rein, from the Diocese of Augsburg, Germany,
told two of his former parishioners, our Sr. Anna and her sister Sr. Maria Bernadette,
when they visited him at his rectory.*

*He could recall in great detail the profound, personal experience
he had seven years ago, a serious—actually dramatic—reality,
as it sometimes takes place in life.*

*I*t was December 2, 2008, a Tuesday in the first week of Advent. After lunch I thought to myself, “*Maybe I’ll pray part of my breviary at home today since it is so cold in the church.*” Thank God, though, I went over, as I usually do, to our parish church, Sts. Peter and Paul, to finish the Liturgy of the Hours. But that afternoon I never actually finished my prayers, because as soon as I entered the church I noticed that there was a little red carpet in our manger at the front of the sanctuary. As always in Advent, a simple wooden crib was set up in front of the altar with a basket of straw next to it. Just two days earlier, I had encouraged the children during Holy Mass,

“Now each time you visit the church, you can place another piece of straw in the manger for Baby Jesus’ bed.” Surprised, I wondered, *“What is that red carpet doing in there?”* It was one of the felt pads normally used by the altar servers for kneeling on the steps at the altar. I was curious, so I walked up the aisle to get a better look.

I honestly do not remember what happened next, whether I saw the baby in the manger or heard his quiet whimpers, since he no longer had the strength to cry. I could not believe my eyes. *“No, that’s impossible,”* I reasoned. But sure enough, there was a newborn baby laying

in our empty manger, just like Baby Jesus!

This unforgettable moment was no Christmas ecstasy however. It was only 50° F in the church, according to the police report, and the poor little newborn was lying before me, wrapped only in something like a t-shirt. It was a boy, only a few hours old, and wearing dirty diapers.

I had never seen such a small baby before, and he was already blue from the cold. *“I do not want to think about what would have been, had I come over to the church just before the evening Mass,”* I thought, *“a newborn, here,*

abandoned, without warmth or human closeness!” I could not look away and dared to hope, *“Just cry little one! Then I know at least that you are alive.”*

People often asked me later, *“So what did you do next?”* Now there was not much to consider. I did what anybody would have done; it was nothing special. I carefully picked up the whimpering baby, carried it to the warm rectory, called the paramedics and a short time later they brought the newborn to the children’s hospital with an ambulance.

A mother’s worry and trouble

*T*hat’s when I asked myself, *“Who does something like that? It breaks my heart to think of what dreadful trouble a woman must be in to do this.”* The police came since it was a case of a child being abandoned. That same afternoon they were able to locate the child’s mother. It was not a difficult case for them to solve, based on what they found. The child was in the church, so it must be a religious woman, possibly someone from Eastern Europe. Who employs Eastern Europeans close by? Did anybody there call in sick today?

And so they found the child’s mother: a 38-year-old Romanian working the harvest. She already had three children who were growing up with their grandparents in Romania, while the young woman often went to Germany to earn money. She had been working in the field up to the very last day. When she went into labor, she stayed home and gave birth to the child alone. Immediately afterwards, with the newborn in a handbag, she walked almost a mile to our church. She laid the little boy in the manger just as he was, covered him with the little felt carpet and walked back again.

I found the newborn about twenty minutes later.

I do not know what drove the woman not to keep her baby and why she did not trust anybody to help her. Yet obviously this Romanian Orthodox did not want to abort her child, but rather bring him into the world and put him in God’s hands by bringing him to the church with the hope that somebody would find and help him. The state was of the same opinion, and so charges were never filed.

News of what had happened spread quickly, of course. It was Advent, and everybody was visibly touched by the event and relieved that the child had survived. At the evening Mass, some people were even saying, *“In our parish, it is already Christmas.”*

*E*ven the reporters who showed up seemed to have come for more than just a great lead story. A reporter from a well-known liberal newspaper even quoted the Gospel of Luke, something that does not happen too often in modern day Germany: *“And she bore a son, her first-born. She wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger.”*

The headlines of this event reached so far that a couple packages of clothing arrived from England.

A new family, a new home

*T*hat very Tuesday afternoon, a children's nurse heard about the orphan on the radio while she was in the car. She told me later that she knew immediately, *"That is a child for me!"*

When she arrived at her house, there was a message from the child protective services on her answering machine asking whether she would be willing to take care of the baby. This woman from our area lovingly took the little infant into her family. She accepted him even more when the doctors diagnosed him with a severe disability which, incidentally, had nothing to do with being abandoned.

I was so relieved that the baby's foster mother took such good care of him. I was soon able to meet her in person; I appreciated what she was doing. From the beginning she showed immense patience and love, and the baby boy was immediately very attached to her.

The following summer, I went to Romania and visited his real family. In a remote village out in the country, I saw with my own eyes in what poor conditions they lived. The severely

handicapped newborn would not have had medical attention or any other help close by. And so I dare to say, *"For 'our Christ Child' it was the best solution—providence—that everything happened as it did."* I am so happy and grateful that Christian's foster family cares for him and he feels so secure there.

Every year on December 2, Christian's memorable birthday, I pay a visit to Christian and celebrate with his foster family, where he will remain. One sees that this little guy is happy even though his serious genetic disorder means he is blind, cannot walk, often wakes up during the night and needs help eating. I marvel at his foster mother who dedicates herself to her little son twenty-four hours a day and tries with so much love to help him in any way possible: toddler swimming, riding therapy, physical therapy, early intervention for the blind, speech therapy and a special kindergarten. *"Christian will not become a professor,"* his mother smiles, *"but maybe he will be able to stand on his own two feet and help later in a workshop."*

My orphan

*N*aturally, I also have a very special relationship to our "manger child". Somehow he has still remained *"my orphan"*, even if I did not take care of the boy myself. I never forget him in prayer, and if something ever happened to him, I would be there immediately, because I also feel responsible that Christian develops and that things go well for him. I'm definitely keep-

ing an eye on him! His biological mother, who comes to Germany every so often for work and whose other children are older, has not forgotten her youngest.

Even though she is not able to raise him, she often calls the foster family to find out how he is doing and to thank them because she knows he has all he needs.

*A*t the children's hospital, the nurses first named the baby Peter, after the place where he was found, the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul. The Romanian Orthodox mother then decided to baptize him with the name Christian. She agreed that I baptize her son in the Catholic Church, to the joy of our parish community. The foster mother, who was there with her family, gave him the second name Paul, our church's other patron. Even people from the child protective services office came to participate.

Our Bethlehem

I have to admit that since Advent 2008, after such a “find” in our church, I pray the third joyful mystery of the Rosary “*The Nativity*” very differently. Christian’s poverty in the manger seven years ago is especially memorable for me during the Christmas season, and, for me, it will be always associated with the mystery of Christ’s own birth.

I have nothing against celebrating Christmas in a festive atmosphere with presents. Yet I think that, for many other people as well, Christian has become, in a certain sense, a “*child of grace*” because people were very touched by his story and that of his mother; it made them think and it

changed something in them. Bethlehem, the real mystery of Christmas, which is often lost a little in all the bustle, became concrete to our parishioners’ minds through the baby in the manger.

How astounding it really is that God became such a small, poor child, born of Mary in a stall, “*because there was no room for them in the inn,*” that he came into the world needy and that also today he comes to us in our need, even in our affluent country. Think of it like this: Christian became a gift for our parish that has moved people much more than all my Christmas homilies put together!

The Baby Jesus of Lublin

Throughout his life, the Protestant minister and famous preacher Rudolf Irmeler (1907-1999) remained deeply tied to Lublin, Poland where he was born.

More than just being the city of his birth, he attributed his affection to an event with the Christ Child, which he describes in his book “Baby Jesus Flies to Wroclaw”.

His parish church is cathedral-like, Gothic construction from the Fourteenth Century which contained, among other treasures, three intricately carved altars from the school of Veit Stoss. The oldest, a three-panel Christmas altar, dates back to 1483.

*L*ittle Rudolf was baptized and confirmed in this church. Following his studies and time as vicar, he worked for eight successful years as a minister in Brazil. Tragically, after a visit to his homeland in 1939, the outbreak of World War

II hindered him from returning to the mission in South America. In 1945, as the Red Army approached, he fled with the rest of his congregation. At the request of the Wroclaw’s church leaders, he came back by himself to be the last

minister and superintendent for the few Germans who were left behind. He wrote in his book:

When I returned to my homeland in 1945, after my adventurous migration, my path led me back to the church where I had preached for the first time. Oh, the state that it was in! The doors were open, the massive windows broken, the whole sanctuary in disarray! I immediately looked to the carved altars. Thanks be to God, all three of them were still in place. There was, however, a gaping hole in the Christmas altar, on the third panel, where Our Lady holds Baby Jesus to be adored by the Three Wise Men.

Baby Jesus was missing! I asked the members of the congregation where the Infant Jesus was. One of the soldiers marching through surely knocked him out of Mary's hands. That answer was not good enough for me. I searched the entire church, but in vain.

Weeks later, I found him in a pile of rubble in the corner, a little figure with red cheeks. Our Lady's broken off hands were still holding on to him. I took the Baby Jesus with me intending to return him to the altar later.

But that never happened, because all three altars suddenly disappeared from the church. The mayor simply responded, "*Wszystko jedno – who cares*". I understood that he did not understand the value of the altars. So Baby Jesus remained with me. I guarded him for two years, the whole time I was serving in the extensive area of Polish occupation, and brought him with me through all the border controls when we were kicked out of the country. He accompanied me to Saxony, Germany, where I worked for five years as a prison pastor. With his joyful face, the Baby Jesus consoled us in sorrowful situations, when the dependents of political prisoners came to me looking for help in those difficult times.

When I had to flee to West Germany in 1953, I brought him with me as my most valuable treasure. And so he arrived at Marktheidenfeld in Bavaria, at the motherhouse of the Lehmgrubener Sisters, who fell in love with the little Child.

He lay here in my glass vitrine and was admired by many guests. I would always tell them the story of my 500-year-old Baby Jesus from Lublin.

*I*n the meantime, twenty-seven years had passed since I found this precious piece in a pile of rubble. Then one day, something surprising took place. In a West-German magazine, a picture of the famous Veit Stoss altar was published with the caption that the Christmas altar was in the Wroclaw museum, but without the Divine Child.

When the Polish museum director found out that I had the missing figure, he let me know how happy they would be if the Baby Jesus would be put back into the altar. The work of art should be displayed in its entirety to the many museum visitors. And that in a communist country! I asked my sisters at the motherhouse what I should do, and they answered unanimously, "*The Baby Jesus belongs to his mother Mary.*" I had to agree with them.

So the hour came when we had to say goodbye to our guest. I told the story of the figure to the sisters and a few friends. Then the Baby Jesus passed through the pews, from one hand to the next. Some caressed him, others pressed him to their hearts and at the end one of the sisters laid him on the altar as we sang the Silesian song, "*Most beautiful Lord Jesus, Ruler of all ends, God and Mary's son; I will love you, I will honor you, you friend and crown of my soul.*" It was a very moving goodbye.

*W*hen I arrived in Wroclaw with my wife, after overcoming many obstacles, the museum directors were waiting for us. I unpacked the Baby Jesus and laid him in the middle of the table. Nobody said a word. The little figure with Mary's hacked off hands spoke through his presence. Visibly touched, everybody stared at him. "*I saved this baby twenty-seven years ago, and you brought the altars of my church in Lublin to safety. Now the two of them are back together—the Baby and the rescued altars!*"

A perfect fit

“*A wonderful meeting,*” the museum director said quietly. “*Yes, a little piece of reconciliation between us and our nations at the level of art and faith. Baby Jesus also came into the world to reconcile God and man,*” I answered. “*If it could only always be this way,*” expressed one of the women at the round table. It was a special moment.

Now I was finally standing before the altar I believed to have been stolen. Mary with the Three Wise Men from the orient looking into space because the Baby was missing. I took Baby Jesus

and put him in his rightful place. It fit so precisely in the hole that I could no longer pull it out. Mary did not want to give him back.

Then something happened to which everybody there can attest. The whole image began to glow. Why? Nobody could explain it. It was certainly because the central part of the altar was in place again, the piece to which the artist oriented the other figures—Christ, the center! We stood a long time before the radiant altar. One of my companions whispered in my ear, “*Now it will be easier for me to believe in Jesus again!*”

I Finally Found Him!

*M*y name is Beth Burr and I come from a small river town in Iowa called Muscatine. I lived on a farm all my life so my neighbors were fields of corn and soybeans! When my parents married, my mother was Catholic and my father was Methodist. So from the day of my baptism until I was about ten years old, I, with my sister Ellen and my brother John, went to Sunday Service at our small country Methodist church.

However, when I was ten years old, a change took place. It started with my dad. At the time he was struggling with bouts of depression and was searching in every book from A to Z for an answer to the meaning of life. One day my grandma, his mother, gave him a small booklet that contained a Protestant version of the Act of Contrition and an Act of Faith that Jesus is everyone’s “*personal Lord and Savior*”. My dad decided to give it a try, unaware that God was ready to change his life!

Thank God, he had a very deep and sincere conversion. I clearly remember this time in my

childhood when my dad seemed to change from one day to the next. Suddenly he was happy, he was at peace, and a deep desire and longing for God made his heart ache. Actually the whole family noticed the change, and we could scarcely believe it! God had worked a miracle!

*A*lthough I was only ten years old, it was nevertheless a turning point in my relationship with God. I was a real “daddy’s girl”; everything my dad did, I did too. And everywhere he went, I went too. Soon I began to look inside my heart and I found that something was missing, I had a hole in my heart! And thanks to my dad, I knew that “hole” is where God should be. So, with renewed vigor, we went to our Methodist service more faithfully, eager to find God and eager to get to know Him. Yet, it was not long before it felt like the hole in my heart was getting bigger. I wanted to find God but Sunday Service was not enough, something was missing.

My dad felt the same, so we began to visit a different protestant church every Sunday thinking that our longing would be fulfilled by a differ-

ent pastor. After a whole year of visiting all the protestant churches in our town, we were disappointed. Why couldn't we find God?

Time for something new

One afternoon a letter came in the mail from our Methodist pastor informing me that I should be confirmed in the Methodist Church that year. But I threw the letter in the trash and decided in my heart that no matter what it took, I would keep looking for God. I did not want to just give-in and be an unfulfilled Methodist.

My parents had seen what I had done and once again the topic was brought up, which church should we attend? My mom jokingly said to my dad, "*Why don't you try a Catholic Mass?*"

But my dad, who was willing to try anything, said, "*Alright!*" And being a daddy's girl, I chimed in that they can't go to a Mass without me, although I did not even know what Mass was!

Sometime later, we decided as a family to attend a Saturday evening Mass at the Catholic church. Even my brother and sister were excited! But honestly, we did not know anything about the Catholic Church or even why it was separate from the protestant churches. We only knew that it was the church that has a pope! Despite not knowing anything, I'll never forget the moment that I walked into the church, St. Mathias. As soon as I came in, I was overcome with the warmth and love of GOD. My first thought was, "*God is in this church! I found Him!*"

As an eleven-year-old girl, my heart burned with love and I did not want it to ever stop. I was happy and so full! Yet I still had no idea about the Blessed Sacrament! It was also, in these moments, that I felt my religious vocation for the first time. I remember I thought to myself, "*Isn't this the church that has nuns? I think I want to be one, then I can always be by God!*"

Little did I know that each member of my

family had had a similar experience, and when the Mass was over, there was no more discussion: We were going to join the Catholic Church. This Saturday Mass was the first time that my whole family attended a service together. We found unity, love, and above all God in the Catholic Church.

Since then, every member of my immediate family has become Catholic. After graduating from high school in 2010, although I still felt the call to religious life, I felt that I was not ready to make a final decision and so I decided to study for one year. So I entered a private Catholic university to study microbiology. But the only thing I learned that difficult year was "*I don't belong to the world, I belong to God.*"

So in the summer of 2011, I flew to Slovakia, with Sr. Mary Nichole who also comes from Muscatine, for the first time to visit the Motherhouse. The beginning was very difficult because of the change of culture and language, but despite the differences, God made it very clear in my heart, "*This is where you should be.*" In the last four years, my love to God has grown, especially through daily Mass and Eucharistic adoration.

These two aspects have become the cornerstone of my spiritual life because it is a direct meeting with God. I am so grateful for the gift of being in such a Eucharistic and Marian community. Yet I know that many little and hidden souls are praying for me and their sacrifices carry my vocation.

I know that my vocation was a pure gift and does not belong to me. God not only let me find Him, but He also has given me the great, invaluable gift of belonging to Him as His bride forever.

Sr. Brigid Burr from Muscatine, Iowa

Summer on the Mississippi

*When the Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto reached the Mississippi River in 1541,
he called it Río del Espíritu Santo, River of the Holy Spirit.
In the Seventeenth Century, Jacques Marquette, a French Jesuit,
named it the River of the Immaculate Conception.
When we missionaries from the Family of Mary arrived
in this beautiful part of America this summer,
it was our wish to bring Mary and, with her, the Holy Spirit.*

 We came for our second summer at the kind invitation of Fr. John Joseph DePorres Logan, pastor of Sacred Heart and St. Mary's parishes in Rock Island, Illinois. We felt at home in our mission between these two hearts. It was wonderful to meet numerous families in which the Faith plays a vital role and where there is a sincere desire to discover and live their vocations. It is a small city of people with big hearts!

On Saturday, July 25, 2015, the Feast of St. James the Great, we had our first event—Mothers' Morning. The day started with Eucharistic Adoration which quickly created a beautiful atmosphere. We then spoke about the ongoing battle for the protection of our families and marriages quoting what Sr. Lucia of Fatima wrote to Cardinal Caffara: *"The final battle between the Lord and the reign of Satan will be about marriage and the family. Do not be afraid, because anyone who works for the sanctity of marriage and the family will always be fought against and opposed in every way, because this is the decisive issue. However, Our Lady has already crushed his head."* It was consoling for us all to understand why the Lord allows so much suffering, especially in Christian families. The mothers could sincerely say that they are trying hard—going to Holy Mass every day, praying the Rosary, raising their children in the Faith—and yet they have such crosses!

The same thing could be said for St. Thérèse

of Lisieux's family. Her parents, Zélie and Louis Martin, were canonized this year on October 18. Although they were deep believers, God permitted that Zélie carry four children to the grave and then herself die of cancer at the young age of forty-five—at a time when her daughters still needed her so much. Louis Martin's mental illness was a heavy trial, especially for the now Carmelite sister Thérèse who shed many tears because of it. Often the acceptance of suffering and tears go hand in hand. If, in a Christian family, the meaning of suffering is recognized and it is understood that we are in the midst of a spiritual battle, peace reigns in the depths of their souls.

These mothers told us about their crosses and how they are trying to carry them in faith, be it the sudden death of a child, their husband diagnosed with cancer, sick grandchildren, tragic accidents, serious operations or the inner spiritual suffering which goes entirely unnoticed by the others. When thirty mothers meet, it is incredible how much suffering comes together!

The Sorrowful Mother is always a consolation for the soul in these situations. She said in Amsterdam, *"I will give consolation. Nations, your Mother knows life, your Mother knows sorrow, your Mother knows the Cross. Everything you go through in this life is a passage that your Mother, the Lady of All Nations, went before you."* (Messages of Amsterdam, May 31, 1955)

It was the Mother of All Nations whom we wanted to bring through her image to all the people we met over our four week mission. One Sunday afternoon, pilgrims not only from Rock Island a but from other towns and even from out of state, gathered to honor Mary under this title.

Fr. Gabriele Maria, one of our American priests, spoke about Our Lady's importance and why she is the one we need in this time. Over the last year, the situation in the Church and world has become visibly more difficult. We need a divine solution more than ever before!

Kids' camps

More than eighty kids came to two separate, three day long camps. We began at 9 a.m. with Holy Mass, which most parents attended as well. After Mass, we spent most of the rest of the day outside or in Schroeder Hall, a former parish school, where we prepared a special program for them. They were so excited, for example, about a video about creation. Luckily, the video had music but no narration, because the children were commenting and discussing it the whole time.

Afterwards, Sr. Martina spoke about the love of God the Father. She asked the children, "Do you think that God loves everybody?"

A five-year-old blurted out, "No, not the ones who aren't Catholic!" We were able to straightened things out though during their short catechism!

Fr. Gabriele spoke in one of his homilies about little Jacov from Medjugorje. During one of the apparitions, Our Lady spoke about the power of ejaculatory prayers and asked the children to say a brief prayer often throughout the day. Jacov remembered this on the way to a soccer game; and although he was in a hurry, he stopped and said a short prayer. That evening, Our Lady showed him the effect his simple prayer had—the conversion of a dying man in China. So at the children's camp, they also had the opportunity to ring a bell at which point everybody would stop and say a prayer for the conversion of sinners. They loved it!

One mother who was helping us during the camp liked the idea so much that she also started

doing it with her family at home. Several times a day, they stop for a moment and say a prayer for the souls who need it most. She explained to us that, as a result, she remains more united with God during the day as well as being beneficial to others.

With the help of Dr. Jacob Bancks, a professional musician, composer and father of four children, we recorded songs, bible passages and decades of the Rosary, even with the young children. There is more information about the *Children of Light* CD on page 38.

We would like to thank the youth, parents and benefactors for all their help and support for the children's camps. Thanks to a dear woman from Coralville, Iowa, who gave us a large amount of art supplies, the children were able to do all sorts of crafts: frames with the image of Divine Mercy or the Lady of All Nations, decorating a printed image of a tabernacle or making Rosaries...

The children prepared a simple play for their parents at the end of each camp. The older kids performed the life of St. Patrick, the younger ones portrayed the children of Fatima. Although most people knew the story of Fatima, it gave the children and their parents new enthusiasm to pray the Rosary. On Sunday, two days after the camp, a mother asked her five-year-old Bailey following Holy Mass, "What did you like most about the camp?" She replied, "Everything. And I tried to pray the Rosary yesterday, but I forgot to bring it today."

Families that pray together, stay together

*D*uring our summer mission, we had the opportunity to visit many families, and we noticed one thing: the beauty of these families lies especially in their daily prayer, attending Holy Mass and receiving the Sacraments. The children and youth know Jesus and have learned to love him since they were toddlers. It is completely natural, even for the very young children, to be in the church for Eucharistic adoration or Holy Mass.

One might ask then what need is there for missionaries? The answer is very simple, to encourage them, bring them hope and, above all, bring them together so that they can support one another along their faith journey amidst trials and opposition. The good in these families has to be united in order to make it stronger. Then it is much easier to be a witness to others and fight for the truth about the family, life, Christian values and morality.

The famous quote of the Servant of God, Fr. Patrick Payton, "*The family that prays together stays together,*" could also have a plural form: The families that pray together stay together and help and support one another!

*A*ugust 16, was Family Day; we planned an afternoon in the park. It was one of the hottest days of the summer, and we thought that not many people would participate. During Holy Mass that morning, we prayed for a cool wind, for God's air conditioning! Slowly Velie Park filled with folding chairs, blankets, coolers, games and, naturally, children, youth and their parents. The large trees provided shade and the breeze that everybody desired and for which we

prayed gradually blew in. A couple who lives close by provided us all with cold water.

We prayed the Chaplet of Divine Mercy together and then the children went off to play. The adults spoke together and prepared a picnic dinner. The high point was when Fr. Patrick, our priest from Ireland, carried out the Blessed Sacrament and we adored Jesus on a worthily prepared altar in the middle of the park. We prayed in the name of all families.

Youth Nights were a time specifically for teenagers and young adults. It was a great chance for them to have fun together, to learn more about each other and our community, but above all to spend time together in Eucharistic adoration, which they loved. You could feel their openness to the will of God and that they want to find the path which God has prepared for each of them.

When we are victorious in the first battle of taking time to pray, then we win all the other battles as well!

*Lo, how a rose e'er blooming
from tender stem hath sprung.*

*... It came
a flow'ret bright
amid the cold of winter,
when half spent was the night*