

Triumph of the Heart

AND THEY TURNED TO THE LORD

Family of Mary
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*“Contemplating the life of Jesus...
we feel the need of a profound conversion
and the urgency to rekindle faith in him.”*

*Pope Francis
October 10, 2016*

A Costly Conversion

Dear readers, friends and benefactors, this issue of Triumph of the Heart is about conversion, a theme which is relevant to us all, because true conversion is a daily conversion! Anyone who sincerely tries to put Jesus' Good News into practice feels that.

Our “normal” way of conversion consists, above all, of falling and getting up again every day. It is rarely a spectacular event of grace in which one is turned upside down and radically changed—even if there are “Damascus” conversions from time to time in which a particularly “hard nut” is cracked and his or her eyes are opened to the wonderful and joyful world of Faith. One thing is certain, however: Jesus, united with the Mother of Sorrows, gave his life for each conversion. When we follow Christ and are united with him, we are called to cooperate in the conversion of sinners and non-believers through prayer and sacrifice. That is precisely what the Queen of the Rosary taught the three visionary children in Fatima, who became very creative in making sacrifices. The stories of conversion which you are about to read, show in very different ways how we are responsible for one another and how we can help each other to find Christ and his love.

A great man of prayer and martyr of the Baptist Church, Ivan Moiseyev (1952-1972), whom we wrote about in Triumph of the Heart #4, was a radiant example in his lifetime. He came from Volantirovka in the Moldavian region of the USSR.

During his two years in the Red Army, the power of prayer helped him miraculously survive the tortures and re-indoctrination attempts, and this became a proof of God for his non-believing

comrades. Since Vanya, as his friends called him, was not willing to give up his faith at any price, the KGB murdered him at the age of twenty.

Ivan was eighteen years old and had just become a believer two years earlier before joining the Red Army in November 1970. The upright young Christian was aware, *“The Lord wants me to proclaim him wherever I am and not keep silent.”* During his first months in the military, Vanya led a very deep life of prayer; and from

this, he felt a great inner transformation. He was astounded to experience an always deeper presence of God in his soul and a new, burning love, like a candle burning silently before an icon. No interrogation, no injustice, no threat could cause him to waver uneasily.

One spring day, an officer was late for teaching political science class about atheism, so the twenty soldiers in the classroom pulled out their cigarettes and started a discussion with Vanya.

“So, Moiseyev, who is your God?”

“My God is almighty.”

Sergeant Prochorov, an Armenian from Erivan, impatiently stomped his foot and shouted angry and provocative, *“Wait a minute! You mean he can do anything?”*

“Yes, he can do anything!”

“Then if your God lives and is almighty, prove it!” the sergeant challenged him. *“If your God can really do anything, then he should send me home on vacation tomorrow. Then I will believe in him.”* Everybody in the classroom knew that vacation during the first month of training was absurd and, therefore, impossible.

Now the other comrades interjected excitedly, *“Ivan, it seems that everything you are telling us is just a fairy tale, but if your God gives Piotr Alexandrovitch Prochorov leave, then we will believe that there is a God in the universe! Have at it, your God should prove his existence. Then we will believe in him.”*

They watched Ivan and saw the inner struggle reflected in his facial expression. He looked at the anxious men, and since he did not know whether or not it was good to challenge God in this way, he prayed for clarity. *“Is it right what they are asking, Lord?”*

Then, unmistakably the words sunk into his heart, *“Tell them, I will do what they ask.”*

With a newfound calm and certainty which made everybody listen, he turned to the sergeant and said aloud, *“Tomorrow you will go home on vacation, but now throw away your cigarettes!”* The sergeant obeyed. *“Take the pack out of your pocket! From now on, you*

will not smoke anymore.” Prochorov pulled out his pack of cigarettes and dropped them on the stove where they immediately caught on fire.

Only now did Vanya realize that the whole company, one hundred and fifty soldiers, were pressing against the two classroom doors and along the walls. There was dead silence in the room which was not broken until the officer came in, out of breath, and started teaching class.

That evening, Prochorov lay sleepless on his cot as Vanya whispered to him, *“I have to talk to you about many things, comrade; tomorrow you will become a believer since God is giving you vacation.”*

“You’re crazy, Moiseyev!” the sergeant mumbled uneasily.

“But you said that you would believe if God gives you leave tomorrow morning!”

“Of course, many of us said that!”

“Precisely! That’s why I have to talk to you. You have to know what you are going to believe.”

Agitated, but curiously interested nevertheless, Prochorov started listening to his comrade who, wrapped up in a wool blanket, presented him with great conviction the truths of the faith, the whole night through. Is it possible that the emptiness he felt inside and had resignedly accepted, was deep down a desire for God, as Moiseyev said?

“There is surely a house of prayer in your hometown,” Vanya said.

“You mean for old ladies? I don’t think so,” the sergeant responded amused.

“Yes, of course. And many men and young people go there too. They will help you.”

“In my city?”

“Certainly! They will rejoice when you tell them what the Lord has done. How they will praise him and welcome you!”

“Oh Moiseyev, my head is spinning from so many thoughts... but thank you, comrade!”

They had only two hours left to sleep and it was Vanya’s daily duty to pick up bread for the barracks first thing in the morning.

That morning, when he returned to the barracks with bread from the nearby city of Kerch, Prochorov was already gone. Ivan’s comrades

surrounded him with enthusiasm and shared the exciting news—a general from headquarters in Odessa had called and ordered Prochorov to be sent home for vacation, effective immediately. In less than ten minutes, the sergeant was on his way. He ran about like a crazy man and jumped on a mail truck heading for the train station.

One of the soldiers grabbed Vanya by the arm and told him joyfully, *“One of the officers came out when they heard us laughing and screaming. So, we told them what had taken place the night before during our political science lecture. You should have seen their faces when we told them that everything came to pass as you had said. Major Gidenko quickly sent some people to the train to bring Prochorov back, but at the station, they only saw the end of the train fading in the distance. Prochorov was gone!”*

The officers had to admit, “Moiseyev is always punctual, sober and proper in every way, a model chauffeur. On top of that, everybody loves him, and he looks good with an orderly haircut and clear, calm eyes. As far as the law goes, nobody can accuse this Baptist of anything.” Since Ivan would not bend in his Faith, the KGB was finally called to the barracks. With brutal gruesomeness, they took care of their business. After terrible beatings, they dragged him to a nearby beach, wrapped up in a blanket and bleeding from deep wounds. They intended to disguise Vanya’s martyrdom as a fatal swimming accident in the Black Sea. Before Ivan’s quiet moans and prayers fell silent forever, the murderers had to hear his last words, “God loves all sinners.”

To ensure that Moiseyev’s ideas about faith would not be contagious, unit W 1968 T was dissolved after Vanya’s death. The young soldiers were dispersed across the Soviet Union; no two were left together. Yet they took their new faith in Christ with them anyways!

*L*ater, Vanya testified himself to the truth before the company colonel who was shaking with scorn, *“God wanted to prove his existence with this vacation, and he held his word. All glory be to him!”*

When the sergeant returned radiant from his vacation, he embraced Ivan many times and called him “his brother”, laughing with joy.

The superiors tried to trivialize what had happened, Prochorov courageously attested before the whole unit, *“What power was at work here? I now believe that God exists because, although you wanted to prevent me from going on vacation, God worked a miracle which was obvious to everybody.”*

As a result, many other comrades came to believe that God truly exists.

With a Brush on the Trail of Jesus

*Touched by grace at the high point of his artistic creativity,
the brilliant French painter James Joseph Tissot (1836-1902)
went from an easygoing squanderer
to the “painting herald” of the life of Jesus.*

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the talented twenty-three-year-old Tissot rose to fame as a celebrated upper-class portrait painter in the French capital following his first exposition in the famous Paris Salon. After a few successful years in London, as well, where Tissot lived just as scandalous a life as a luxurious one, the forty-six-year-old returned to Paris in 1882, after his Irish lover, the divorced Kathleen Newton, died of tuberculosis.

In 1885, trying once again to make a name for himself there, the painter was working on a series of paintings about the world of women in Paris when, looking for a concluding motif, he entered the church of St. Sulpice. Tissot, who was not particularly interested in the faith, was unexpectedly and inexplicably captivated by the Holy Mass being celebrated there. When the priest held up the consecrated Host, the painter had an inner vision which, after a few sleepless nights, he captured on canvas.

“Inward Voices” was the name he gave to the painting depicting two ragged, broken men sitting in the midst of ruins. The Savior crowned with thorns, tortured, yet in a precious, priestly robe, holds out his bleeding hands to them and shows them the sense of expiatory suffering. In his consoling presence, they receive courage to take up their travel sacks anew and, following the “inward voices”, to start a new life.

This was the moment of his radical new beginning as an artist and as a person. Even if they

formerly had said of him he is, “a Catholic more by courtesy than by conviction,” the painter returned to the living Faith of his youth—skeptically observed by his famous painter colleagues. Even his longtime friend, the great impressionist Edgar Degas, noted curtly, “Now he’s got religion. He says he experiences inconceivable joy in his faith.” Vincent van Gogh’s marveling opinion shows how respected Tissot was among the meaningful artists of his time: “There is something of the human soul in his work and that is why he is great, immense, infinite...”

Nevertheless, Tissot, in his newfound love for Christ, immediately went to work on a monumental project, one that would take him a decade to complete: *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, a series of three hundred fifty water colors which illustrate Jesus’ earthly life from his Birth to his Ascension.

For it, the artist, only one year after his conversion, headed to Egypt, Syria and Palestine. He withdrew, like a monk, for one and a half years, and he meticulously studied the Gospels as well as the landscape, the people, the oriental culture, their customs and their clothing. In a wealth of drawings, sketches and photographs, Tissot sought to capture the Holy Land, which he mistakenly believed to have remained nearly unchanged since the birth of Christ.

Upon his return, the “*Pilgrim of the Holy Land*”, as he called himself, visited his father,

an upright Christian and successful textile dealer, and showed him his works. When he saw his son's paintings, so extremely faithful to nature and detail, he exclaimed, "*It seems I have got*

to change all my preconceived ideas about things." The pious eighty-year-old Catholic was the first of many who "converted" through his son's paintings.

Pictorial contemplation

*I*n the watercolor paintings which Tissot produced from his records, he placed great emphasis on immersing the viewer in Jesus' time through the conscious historical accuracy of venues and clothing.

On top of that, God gave the artistic genius an extraordinarily rich imagination so that in Tissot's spiritual eyes, the scenes and people came alive and he "saw" the faces, colors, materials and all the relevant details. The artist often painfully sighed, "*The things that I have seen in the life of Christ, but could not remember! They were too splendid to keep.*"

Tissot called his portrayal of Christ's life,

picture by picture, a "contemplation". When he started displaying his New Testament series in Paris, London and New York in 1894, the enthusiastic public stood before his paintings with reverent astonishment, often moved to the point of tears. In 1896, the sixty-year-old departed once again for Palestine and worked restlessly on a series of paintings about the Old Testament, of which he was able to complete ninety-five watercolors before he died.

Through his untiring research and painting until the end of his life, Tissot fulfilled his vocation to become like Christ, and doing art became his special way of imitating him.

Source: *James Tissot: The Life of Christ. The Complete Set of 350 Watercolors*, edited by Judith F. Dolkart, Brooklyn Museum, Merrel, London, New York

The book of three hundred fifty illustrations became an international best seller. Early on, Tissot intended to publish in several volumes his "pictorial contemplation" of the New Testament which he "wrote" with brush and watercolor using texts from the four Gospels. As a matter of fact, people soon spoke of it as the "Tissot Bible".

With the "Portrait of the Pilgrim", which depicts him at his funeral amidst liturgical objects, Tissot concluded this work and he asked for the prayers of whoever contemplates and "reads" his pictures: "You who have read these volumes written for your benefit and have perhaps been moved by what they contain, as ye close them, say this prayer for their author:

*Oh God, have mercy on the soul of him who wrote this book,
cause Thy light to shine upon him and grant to him eternal rest. Amen."*

Alessandra di Rudini-Carlotti

1876 - 1931

On October 5, 1876, Alessandra di Rudini was born close to Naples, Italy into an aristocratic Sicilian family. Her father, Marquis di Rudini, became the mayor of Palermo at the early age of twenty-five. Later, he was vested in Rome with the office of president for several terms.

Sandra, as she was called, had a strong will and untamable character from her childhood. For health reasons, her mother was no longer able to care for her daughter, so the ten-year-old girl was brought to the Sacred Heart Sisters' boarding school in Rome in the hope that this would help reign in her unruly temper.

Sandra, however, rebelliously contrived a thousand pranks and lured in the other school children. As a result, she was asked not to return at the end of the school year.

One can imagine how her soul really longed for love when reading what she wrote at her First Holy Communion: *"In the moment of my encounter with the Lord, I received a grace which impressed a unique and indelible memory in me. I experienced very deeply the presence of God and was fully aware that he alone could fulfill me and that one day I would belong completely to him. In this moment, and*

even earlier, I heard the word 'Carmel' in my soul and I was sure that I would enter the Carmel without having the faintest idea back then what a Carmel is."

In a more liberally run school in Florence, where the director allowed her every freedom to follow her unquenchable thirst for reading, Sandra quickly developed into an outstanding student. Yet it was following this path, that brought her into a deep spiritual crisis.

First, a non-believing teacher provoked the first doubts about the faith of the intelligent thirteen-year-old Sandra, and then, reading the Life of Jesus by Renan, who denied Jesus' divinity, was disastrous for her maturing faith. She wrote that the day which she finished the book was one of the saddest days of her life:

"In that moment, I felt how my life lost its meaning. It seemed like everything around me collapsed, and I sought in despair to grab hold of something outside of myself. I remember nights full of fear and indescribable torment. There is no worse pain than the spirit searching for the truth and unable to attain it."

An early marriage

Sandra fell into a deep darkness. Trying to distract herself, she mingled with the most exquisite society—she took a cruise on the private

yacht of the German Emperor, Wilhelm II, and had a close relationship with Queen Margherita of Italy. At the age of eighteen, she surprised those

who knew her by marrying Marquis Marcello Carlotti, ten years her elder and an atheist. The young newlyweds moved onto the magnificent Carlotti property on Lake Garda, Italy, and Alessandra gave birth to two sons, Antonio and Andreas. Not long thereafter, Marcello contracted tuberculosis. By the beginning of 1900, he knew that he would not recover. His wife, who cared for him so selflessly, wrote in this time, *“Marcello does his best to appear composed, I would even say indifferent. Nevertheless, I am certain that it is merely a show and that the poor man suffers twice as much, because he does not want to admit that he suffers.”*

Alessandra, who still bore the roots of her Christian faith, did not want her beloved husband to die without the Sacraments and therefore turned to a priest in Verona, Prelate Serenelli. However, he could only express his compassion for the family in this difficult trial because the marquis turned down any form of spiritual assistance. He passed away on April 29, 1900, without the slightest indication of opening up to the Divine Truth.

At the age of twenty-four, Alessandra was left behind as a widow with two children. In

November 1901, she wrote to Prelate Serenelli, *“I feel profoundly the lack of an ideal; it is an emptiness in my life that nothing can fill, no amusement, no folly, no occupation. What difference does it make if I have health, a large fortune, or a name, if I am hateful to myself?”*

In complete despair, Sandra turned to God, *“I prayed sometimes and pleaded with God for a ray of grace and, above all, for the gift of Faith.”* She invested all the strength she still had to raise her two sons, but she suffered unspeakably over the loss of her husband, whom she had loved with her whole heart.

Her greatest consolation was horseback riding. Already as a teenager, she had fourteen thoroughbreds in the stable; she called each one by name and rode them regularly.

The fishermen always turned their heads in amazement when she galloped along the beach of the Tyrrhenian Sea with her racing horse. She frequently stopped somewhere along the way to visit one of the little farmhouses where she consoled a grieving mother or left a couple of coins to supplement the monthly budget. They knew the rider, and they loved her.

Seduced by passion

*A*t her brother's wedding on November 12, 1903, Gabriele D'Annunzio, who was considered to be the most important contemporary Italian poet, was there as a witness. Alessandra admitted that she fell in love with him “on the spot”. They met up several times, and Sandra succumbed to the magic of the seducer. She tried to let go of him because she was not the poet's first love. She even considered withdrawing to a convent recommended to her by Prelate Serenelli. But she never did; she simply could not resist the temptation. Despite all of her family's reproaches, Alessandra moved in with the poet, who was sixteen years older than her. For nearly four years she lived with Gabriele at his villa close to Pisa. It was a passionate relationship, using even drugs, something which was much more unusual than it is today. She joined in the poet's vices, became dependent on morphine and ne-

glected her two sons. She caused her father, a once well-respected marquis, to become a public scandal since, as Prime Minister, his name was known by every Italian. The aristocratic families condemned her behavior, but that did not impress Alessandra in the least and she continued on her way.

At the age of twenty-nine, Sandra fell gravely ill and underwent three surgeries. Although she was afraid that she would die during the operations, she did not have the courage to break away from D'Annunzio in order to receive the Sacraments. She left the clinic healthy again, but her beauty was somewhat faded. She soon recognized that the poet had distanced himself from her having a new conquest in sight. At the end of 1906, he let her know that she was no longer welcome in his house. It was a terrible pain for the young thirty-year-old Alessandra.

The way to God

Returning to her villa in Garda, Alessandra wanted to contact Prelate Serenelli so that she could go to Confession. She wrote to him, “I know that my prayer is too unworthy to ascend to God. Yet I will dare to say, with King David, ‘Have pity on me Lord; heal my soul, for I have sinned against You...’ Help me to find the path to lead me to God, for I suffer greatly in being away from Him, and this is the unique subject of my thoughts.”

A priest named Fr. Gorel advised Sandra to take a trip to Lourdes. She agreed, though not without skepticism; and, on August 5, 1910, she was providentially at the office of medical investigations during the most remarkable miraculous cure of the year, a paralytic who had had an incurable myelitis. Seeing this miracle was decisive for Alessandra and with a great inner recollection, she confessed to Fr. Gorel. It was not her first Confession, but this time it brought about a radical change in her life.

She wrote to a friend of hers who was a priest, “When I think about what I was and what I am

now, I do not recognize myself anymore. All the ideas I dragged along, all my judgments have suddenly disappeared. The miracle of my conversion was greater than the most obvious healings at this privileged site. One of my greatest errors was that I believed you could find your way back to the faith with natural means, with your own reasoning, with your own judgment and your own studies. I have to admit that all that does not suffice and is ineffective. Divine grace alone can transmit Faith to the human heart and bring about birth to a new life. ... I deeply regret the years I spent following my passions, where in a sort of despair, I sought total satisfaction but experienced that all the human joys are just fleeting and bitter.”

After that, she could not shake the idea of joining a convent. She offered herself as a sacrifice to God and asked him for clarity. Just as her soul had felt at her First Holy Communion, he drew her to the Carmelites, “*which is an order of penance and expiation for myself and for others.*”

Reaching a safe port

In July 1911, the thirty-five-year-old aristocrat made her way to the Carmelites in Paray-le-Monial. She chose France because she was too well known in Italy. Right after she arrived in the convent, she heard in her heart, “*Here you will rest.*” The encounter with the superior, who was so united with God, was a particular grace for her. From the first moment, Alessandra felt that this mother’s heart profoundly understood her. The convert, who received the name Sr. Mary of Jesus, mastered all of her difficulties thanks to the caring formation of her extraordinary superior. The two of them became so one in heart that the young nun was soon entrusted with the direction of the novices. Just six years after joining the convent, Sr. Mary of Jesus was elected prioress.

With the same passionate nature with which she once rode her horse, she now lived for Jesus. “*Love repairs and rebuilds,*” she used to say. She was filled with the desire to obtain the grace of conversion for people in the world through prayer and sacrifice. She thought particularly about the many souls who, like she once was, are searching for the light. Priests, bishops, intellectuals and even the Cardinal of Paris came to the convent seeking her counsel.

Sr. Mary of Jesus founded three new Carmels: the Carmel of Valenciennes, the one on the Montmartre in Paris and the empty Carthusian “Le Reposoir” in Haute-Savoie which she changed into a Carmel. That is where she spent the last months of her life. Very ill, she received the Last

Rites on January 2, 1931, at the young age of fifty-five. She died with the words of Jesus, “*Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.*”

Although the thought of death had previously filled her with fear and anxiety, now, a few days before her death, she peacefully said,

*“I felt something that I have never felt at the approach of death—
a drawing towards God, a thirst for God—
and I understood how easy and good it is to go to Him...
Although physically I’ve had the most agonizing suffering,
my soul has been at peace, in an indescribable happiness,
through this presence that fills all things.”*

Translated from: Mario Nantelli, *Aufstieg zum Berg Karmel*,
Leben der Marchese Alessandra di Rudini Carlotti, Stein am Rhein 1978

Eve and Mary Today

The conversion story of Wilson López from Manizales, Columbia takes us to an area that, in general, we are seldom confronted with—Satanism. Today, Wilson speaks very publicly about his conversion. He sees it as his task to testify to the power of prayer, especially the Rosary, and the Holy Eucharist. *“Jesus, the Son of God, was also tempted by Satan; how much more are we, who are weak, in danger. We must be aware that he exists and that, alone, we will never win the fight against him. I have the mercy of God to thank that I was saved through Mary and before that, kept from becoming a satanic priest.”*

Although Wilson had been a shy teenager, he fell head over heels for a beautiful girl named Erika. He watched her from the window, saw how his buddies enthusiastically went along with her suggestions and was fascinated by her beauty. One day, he mustered up his courage and rang at her door. She welcomed him joyfully, and they immediately became friends.

Some time later, she invited him to a party. Ecstatic, the seventeen-year-old prepared for the long-awaited night out dancing with the girl he’d fallen in love with. However, Erika first led him to a large house. There was no light on, and at the end of the hallway, each person put on a black hooded cloak. Wilson thought to himself, *“There’s something wrong here.”* But since he was in love, he followed Erika into the dining room where a heavy, antique wooden table was elegantly set for twelve: twelve plates, twelve glasses, twelve candles, and the like. When all the seats had been occupied, a man entered the room and began to speak in a strange language. Erika whispered to her date, *“Stay calm, nothing is going to happen.”*

Everyone present answered in the same incomprehensible language. *“Somebody must have given me marijuana to smoke, because I feel a little out of my mind,”* Wilson thought.

He became visibly uncomfortable. As they were speaking, the new guy noticed that there were satanic symbols painted with blood on the table. Suddenly the table started spinning counterclockwise and the glasses and candles levitated in the air about four inches above the tabletop. *“I was spooked,”* Wilson remembers to this day. He looked under the table to see if there was some sort of mechanism which made this movement possible, but he did not see anything.

Panicking, he stood up and wanted to flee, but then he heard a deep voice behind him, *“If you run away, I will kill you.”* Wilson froze in his tracks. There was no turning back!

That evening left more than just a deep impression on him. *“When I saw how they made the glasses and candles levitate, I felt the urge to be able to do that too, the desire for power.”*

Wilson acquired all sorts of books about Satanism and witchcraft because he wanted to understand what he had experienced. When the satanic priest found out, he brought his student the so-called Satanic Bible, which Wilson studied with great interest. Wilson opened up so much to this new world that, after only three months, Satan gave him the ability to speak fluent Italian, Hebrew, Aramaic and many extinct languages. And that was not all.

He received power over people’s thoughts. For example, he knew what they were thinking and with magic he could control the other person and influence them in such a way that they did what he wanted. *“I felt like superman and was eager to receive more. I had an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and was so dedicated that I soon became the leader of the sect. The only thing I didn’t have was the elevation to a satanic priest—a nice career for a young man just twenty years old.”*

Wilson passed the prescribed initiation with flying colors: perpetual satanic prayer until the

demons became visible to him, animal sacrifices, desecration of consecrated Hosts, a subsequent satanic baptism and much more which, out of respect for you, dear reader, we do not want to relate here. His greed for power enabled him to do all this, and Satan continually granted him new powers. The only thing he needed to become a satanic priest for the sect “Los Doce del Zodiaco”, “The Twelve of the Zodiac”, and to found his own group with twelve “disciples”, was to make

a human sacrifice. The seductive, beautiful Erika encouraged him, “*Make the sacrifice, then you will be our leader.*”

Wilson hesitated however, “*I was shocked to the core the first time that I witnessed such a ceremony, even if we were all under the influence of drugs. At the same time, the obsession for power in me was so great that only a miraculous intervention of God prevented me from making a human sacrifice.*”

A daughter of Mary saved him

This “miracle” took place thanks to the prayer and sacrifice of another young woman, who today is a missionary with the Visitation Sisters in Japan. Wilson recounts: “Precisely at the time when I could no longer put off the human sacrifice, I fell in love with another girl because, after two years, Erika had become ‘boring’. To win over Angela, I exerted all my magical powers, yet without any success. I tried to influence her thoughts so that she too would fall in love with me, but I had no access to her. Therefore, I asked a satanic priest for help. His witchcraft was unable to steer her toward me either. In my time of need, I asked a satanic bishop for advice.”

“Watch what she likes to do the most, and do it with her. Try to do what would please her,” was his response.

“That made sense to me and I started studying her life.”

Every morning Angela started her day at six o’clock with the Rosary and went to Holy Mass

afterwards at seven. She prayed another Rosary at seven in the evening. “*I said to myself: Good, if that means so much to her, I will do it too. All that matters is that I get her.*”

After they had met, Angela promptly invited Wilson to Holy Mass. He followed her—not without resistance—because she had the habit of sitting in the first pew, in front of the tabernacle. Wilson had barely sat down as he was overcome with terrible pain. It was as if somebody was constantly sticking needles in all his pores. He could not stand it. He faked a stomachache and left the church. When, from outside the church, he heard the priest lovingly speak the words, “*This is my body*” and hold up the consecrated Host, he felt such an aversion that he thought his heart was going to explode.

He took off, more flying than running. When the Satanist met his great love Angela again, she promised him, “*I’ll pray for the salvation of your soul.*” She kept her word; and Satan handed Wilson the bill.

A mighty battle ensued

The devil had given him a lot of power, but he had not yet made a human sacrifice. To try to force him, he made his unfaithful “candidate” feel what it was like to no longer be in full possession of the magical abilities he had given him.

A strong spiritual fight followed.

Wilson recounts: “*I heard voices which told me, ‘Take your life! We’re going to kill you! Sacrifice yourself!’ If I crossed a bridge, I heard the mocking words, ‘Throw yourself*

over!' This possession led me to despair. One day, when I wanted to do what the voices told me, I went the wrong way and found myself at the house of a devout, Marian teacher from my school who took me to Fr. Hector Ochoa, a well-known exorcist." After hours of exorcism prayers, three strong demons left Wilson and peace and calm entered his soul.

It was still a long, hard path, though, before Wilson was aware that he is truly a child of God. This path required his total dedication: to reveal the truth to his parents, to go frequently to Confession and, as penance, to ask forgiveness from everyone whom he had hurt with magic, curses and other demonic practices.

When the other members of the satanic sect found out about his turning to God, they attacked Wilson's family with spiritism. Then in 2004, the satanic priest appeared at the door of a prayer meeting. He reminded Wilson that his "offense" was punishable by death, and he spoke terrible curses over him. A mighty battle ensued. The prayer group prayed unceasingly. "As this spiritual fight reached its climax and I felt completely drained, I suddenly heard a voice praying the 'Hail Mary' and it grew always stronger," Wilson testified. "I felt how a beau-

tiful, white, radiant hand came from behind me holding a Rosary, and it placed it around the satanic priest who was still standing in the doorway. That was too much for him. He disappeared and never returned. I thank the Mother of God and all those who, through their prayers, preserved me from the damnation into which I had fallen."

Dear reader, with Wilson's testimony, we would like to encourage you to trust in the power of the Holy Eucharist and the Rosary, and you will experience the truth of Jesus' words, "Nothing will harm you." (Lk. 10:19)

For Satanists, November 1, the Feast of All Saints, is the beginning of the New Year for the time of darkness and, "the most important feast in the Satanic sects," as clarified by Anton LaVey (1930-1997), the founder of the Church of Satan. The Satanists prepare for this feast, Halloween, for five weeks with various rites. Today, Wilson warns parents around the world about dressing up in seemingly harmless costumes. Even if the children do not have any bad intention, it is harmful to them nevertheless. "Promise your children an extra Christmas present, but do not let them participate in Halloween," he tells them.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LKftiTuZdUU>

Today, thirty-nine-year-old Wilson is happily married, a member of the community "Llamas de Maria", "Flames of Mary" and works for the archdiocese at a Catholic television station in Manizales. He told us that he tries to pray with his wife and two children every day and to go to Holy Mass. Erika was also able to liberate herself from the sect and lives a Christian marriage. Of the twelve members of the sect, everyone except Erika and the satanic priest has taken his life. Wilson is praying for his conversion and asks for support.

An Unusual Couple

*Mutsuko Clare Gokan and Julio Bardi were an unusual couple who, thanks to their sincerity and love, helped each other to convert to a living Faith in Christ. Today, Clare is able to say,
“In our marriage, Faith and singing were the only things that mattered.
We lived for them.”*

Mutsuko was born to Japanese parents in the Manchuria region of China in 1940. Her two siblings died when they were little, and so the seven-year-old returned alone with her parents to Japan. Her father, a passionate music teacher, ignited in his daughter a love, not only for music, but also for singing.

Although her parents did not practice any form of religion, little Mutsuko loved to pray in front of a Shinto shrine in the garden. At the age of ten, she learned about Jesus and the Gospel through a Protestant pastor, but her father forbade her to have any contact with him. He was happy that when adolescence began, the faith of her childhood faded away.

Mutsuko did not have to think long about her future. It was clear to her—she wanted to sing professionally, even if she was small in stature and did not possess a particularly stellar voice. Following her fundamental musical training in Tokyo, she was drawn to Europe, because the elegant style of the Italian singers which attracted her was not taught in Japan.

With a heavy heart, her father let the twenty-one-year-old go; but when she gave her first concerts in Okayama and Tokyo after being away for six years, he was very proud of her. In Rome, her highly praised teacher, pianist Maria Cascioli, trained her voice brilliantly.

While she was in Italy, Mutsuko's fiancée tragically took his life because of issues in his family. Buddhists believe that a person like

that goes to “Hell”. Mutsuko, wanting to do anything to save his soul, withdrew to the silence of a convent, prayed a lot and seriously considered becoming a Buddhist nun. A Buddhist monk advised her, however, after making such an effort and intense training, to remain a singer and to lead an ascetic life in the world, “because to sing, one also has to give everything and to renounce a lot.” As a result, Mutsuko returned to Rome, where she worked as a translator and continued her voice training.

“One evening after the opera,” she told us, “one of the singers, a certain Julio, brought me home because he lived nearby. He had an outstanding voice, received the main roles and yet acted very reserved and modest. Therefore, I graciously accepted an invitation to a Sunday lunch with his mother. It was touching how Mama Delia, a true Italian, took such good care of me from that day forward. We met up every Sunday, and yet I never considered having a more personal relationship with Julio. He was, nevertheless, an Italian, and a Christian besides; my father never would allow such a combination.”

Mutsuko was very surprised that Julio was Christian and considered himself a believer, and yet he did not own a Bible and never went to church. “If you love your father, do you not visit him at home? The church is the house of your God, is it not? When I go to Japan, the first place I visit is always the temple.”

Julio was struck. He had never considered it that way. He had not been to church in thirty years, just like his father. The following Sunday, Mutsuko stood before him with a gift—a Bible—and invited him to go to the Lateran Basilica with her. *“A Holy Mass was being celebrated at that moment. The ceremony meant nothing to me, but Julio was completely changed following the liturgy. He told me that the priest’s words had purified his soul.”*

*F*rom that day forward, Julio never missed another Sunday Mass. He soon related to his Japanese friend that he now stops in to greet the Mother of God every day in St. Mary Major on his way to the opera. *“Something had changed in Julio,”* Mutsuko noticed. *“He had always been a good person; but since he started visiting his God at church, he began to forgive people with whom he had been fighting for years, like the butcher downstairs. He wanted to live in peace with everybody.”*

In the meantime, Julio’s mother passed away, and, according to her wish, Mutsuko cooked every day for her son who was now alone. They had known each other for six years when Julio discretely asked her to marry him. The thought that she might have to give up singing shocked her and she distanced herself from him. Yet, some time later, Julio proposed, for practical reasons, that she move in with him. It was clear to her: I would do that only as his wife. And so she said yes to a renewed request for her hand in marriage.

It was not easy for Julio that Mutsuko did not share the Catholic Faith with him, but his respect and esteem for her forbid him to express this pain. Therefore, they married in Japan on September 18, 1983 with a Shinto ritual. Mutsuko was forty-three years old and Julio fifty-two. They then celebrated their civil wedding in Rome. They were a joy-filled couple who could share their great passion for singing. They spent most of their life at the opera, and began performing together.

*J*ust one thing concerned Mutsuko: *“I knelt down in the evening before my statue of Buddha, while Julio knelt before the Cross.”* One day she asked her beloved husband, *“Julio,*

some day when you die, do you want to go to Jesus?”

“Of course,” he answered.

“And I will go to Buddha; that means, we will be separated in paradise. That’s impossible!”

Five years passed like this until one Sunday Mutsuko accompanied Julio to Holy Mass and noticed that he did not go to Communion. *“But Julio, why don’t you go to Communion?”*

Somewhat hesitant, he answered, *“I’m living in mortal sin.”*

Mutsuko was speechless. Her so loving husband was living in mortal sin? *“What did you do? Did you cheat on me?”*

Julio did not answer.

“Go to a priest for Confession, then you can go to Communion.”

This did not convince Julio either. *“That’s not enough.”*

“What do you mean that is not enough? What have you done?”

With great sensitivity Julio explained to her that he does not go to Communion because he is not married in the Church. Once again, Mutsuko was at a loss for words—she was the cause. No, she had to become Catholic and as quickly as possible because she did not want to have him suffering any longer. Then Julio entrusted to her that he told Jesus every Sunday at Mass, *“Wait a little bit longer, I will bring her to you at the altar one day.”*

*H*e had prayed for her for five years, without pressing her, without saying a word and silently offering this sacrifice. Now the moment had come. Following a short, but intense preparation, Mutsuko was baptized, confirmed and received Holy Communion in Rome on February 27, 1989. Julio cried for joy throughout the whole ceremony. *“On this day, it was heaven on earth for us.”* Mutsuko chose Clare for her baptismal name because she wanted to follow Julio like St. Clare followed St. Francis.

On October 22, that same year, the happy couple married for the third time; namely, this time as a Sacrament in the Catholic church in Okayama. Julio’s good example and his polite, peaceful way

made Mutsuko's father reconsider Christianity. He converted to the Catholic faith at the age of ninety-two! Mutsuko's mother remembered that missionaries had baptized her as a schoolchild, but she never practiced the faith. Until their death, this elderly couple regularly received the Sacraments and lived a new, deep unity with their daughter Mutsuko Clare and her husband.

In Rome, Clare grew in her love for Jesus through a Jesuit priest from Spain, Fr. Jose Ignacia Tejon, who worked for many years in the Japanese mission. *"A joy which I had never felt before came into my heart when I sang at Holy Mass or prayed the Rosary. I loved praying at pilgrimage sites, and Julio frequently ac-*

companied me—simply out of love." That is how they ended up in San Giovanni Rotondo in 1995, to visit Padre Pio.

As Julio knelt down at the tomb of this great saint, a grace of conversion overcame him. He cried for a long time, and left the whole weight of his long life at the feet of the Crucified Jesus by making a general Confession. This time around, it was Clare who paved the path for her husband to meet Jesus and Mary more profoundly. From then on, this extraordinary couple could not imagine a day without the Rosary. Julio frequently read the Bible and lived with Clare a lively, sacramental life until the Lord very suddenly called Julio to himself in 1999, during a concert tour in Japan.

Back to my Roots

Anton Overmars from the Netherlands has seriously reflected, more than once, on his moving life: first as a monk, then as a millionaire businessman and then as a priest. With God's help and fitting to his temperament, he made a radical break and a new beginning several times. During a visit to the Dutch Marian shrine Heiloo, the sought-after confessor told us about his life.

I grew up in a simple, traditional Catholic family in Weesp, close to Amsterdam. Our mother was always there for us three boys. On Sundays, I used to love to accompany my father, an auto mechanic, to the solemn Holy Mass with a choir and lots of incense. There, the heavens opened a little for me, and I experienced God and Mary for the first time.

At the end of the 1960's, when I was thirteen years old, I saw a program on the television which was decisive for me. Arnold Bouwmans, from a large, well-known Catholic family, related how he explained to the dismay of his father, a Dutch author, his wish to enter a monastery. His father offered him a deal: *"Here's a thousand guildens,"* a fortune at the time. *"Take your bicycle and ride to Paris; learn a little bit about life. When the money is gone, come home; and if you still want to join a monastery, do it."*

The young man took the thousand guildens, rode toward Paris; and, the first night, asked in the

Dutch monastery Zundert for a place to sleep. The course had been set! Arnold stayed and became a Trappist. I was deeply impressed by this testimony, and I thought to myself, *"I would like a monastic life too!"*

Seven years passed until, at the age of twenty, I quit my job as a caretaker for elderly dementia patients and zealously followed God's call in the Benedictine Abbey Vaals. Apparently, I was not mature enough though. I left the novitiate after six months because I felt like I had been buried alive—no radio, newspaper or television. I felt cut off from the world. *"Hidden and forgotten behind walls; that can't be it for a lifetime,"* was what ran through my head. This half year in Vaals, however, left an indelible impression on me and formed my religious life and my priesthood to this day. After leaving, I returned for another seven years to my old job as a caretaker, even though I knew, *"I won't do this forever!"*

In luxury

As a matter of fact, in the 1980's I started something completely new. I became a salesman and soon the owner of a shop for gifts, interior decorating, and lighting. My life was still pretty simple when I started out, but my career and income rose rapidly: a second store, wholesale for the super-rich, a bigger car, and a huge, luxurious apartment. Although I was not really in it for the money, at work and in my private life, I reached

higher and higher levels. I loved being creative, and I simply had a gift to "compose" beautiful, palatial houses and rooms through precious lamps—nothing under \$2500—extravagant vases, paintings, furniture, rugs and shimmering material. I was constantly traveling around the country to my high society clients or on the lookout for nice, stylish things at international conventions. I was always appropriately dressed, which meant

designer Italian shirts and, according to the color, one of my one hundred and fifty silk ties.

Naturally, I did not have a lot of spare time. Sundays were for sleeping in, a trip to Belgium and a fancy meal with friends or a short trip to Paris. Faith fell by the wayside. There were years, to my disgrace, where I did not go to Holy Mass—not even at Easter or Christmas.

*T*his continued until a significant evening in November 1992. I was sitting alone in my large living room, which could easily hold forty people and was decorated with antique furniture and paintings insured at more than \$500,000.

There was a documentary on television about street children in Bucharest. Once, they had a home, a family and went to school. Now, after the fall of Communism and the subsequent impoverishment and huge corruption in the country, they lived in the sewers and sniffed glue to forget their hunger. I was shocked; these children had had everything and now they had nothing.

“*What would happen,*” I asked myself abruptly, “*if I lost everything tomorrow: shops, wholesale, house, money? What would I mean then for the others, for myself?*” Crushed, I had to admit, “*A nobody!*”

Busy decorating the houses of the super-rich and selling expensive things to millionaires who do not know what to do with their money, was that the purpose of my life? No! That was proved by two big contracts that I had just completed.

The first was a young man in his late twenties who had become unimaginably rich through old iron trade. He put me on the job, “*Anton, decorate my villa for me. You have taste; I don’t.*” Yet, I as a person and even the villa did not actually matter to him.

The second was the director of a multinational company. I had extravagantly decorated his country home years earlier. Now that he was retired, however, he and his wife spent most of their time traveling and on their yacht. They moved into an equally luxurious apartment which I also decorated. But they did not want to take anything from the old house. Everything was just left behind; it was not even sold. Suddenly everything was clear to me:

“*All you have artistically created with much love, effort and money has no value, no meaning whatsoever for these people. Anton, you have to go back to your roots, back to your religious life and to God, to whom you are worth so much that he even called you!*”

My conscious “Yes” to Jesus

*M*onths of searching followed. Although on the surface I continued my usual life as a businessman, I now went to Vespers at St. Paul’s Abbey in Oosterhout four evenings a week to rediscover my roots.

On Ash Wednesday in February 1993, I took a whole day of silence and prayer to calmly reflect on my life. Finally, I could pray, “*Okay, Lord, if you really need me, here I am! I will do what you ask of me; but make me find the place where you want me to be.*” That was the conclusive moment of self-offering and the conversion of my heart, the surrender of all my own ideas.

In March, one month later, as I was on business with a client in Heeswijk-Dinther and attended the noon Holy Mass in the venerable old

Norbentine Abbey, I was suddenly gripped by the irrefutable certainty, “*This is the place where I belong. It must be here.*” Six months later, I entered.

At the time, I had a lot of business associates and many wealthy friends. After my turnabout, however, I was no longer interesting for them. When one of my largest suppliers heard about my decision to enter the monastery, he said, seemingly regretful, “*Oh how terrible, how will we go on without you!*” Yet, I had no sooner introduced my successor than he turned on his heels, and I was dead to him. In the end, not a single one of my “friends” remained with me.

Nevertheless, renouncing my old life was a conscious choice and, above all, my “Yes” to

Jesus. All of the possessions which I took with me to the monastery easily fit into a little VW van. I never missed a single thing which I sold or gave away.

I was happy in our monastery, even if it was in great need of renovation: white-washed walls made of straw and clay, no heating, no running water, a shower in the hallway. On the other hand, we monks did everything together: worked, prayed, laughed. Of course, the silent life was a big adjustment for me who had been so active until then.

It was also a sacrifice for me when I considered, “*Now you would have visited the convention in Frankfurt, then in Milan and soon in Birmingham and Lisbon.*” When I

was in the city at Christmastime, I even caught myself looking in the display windows of the interior decorators to scout out the new arrivals and compare prices. By the second year, however, I recalled only, “*Oh yeah, the spring convention in Paris is already over.*” I did not waste another thought on it though, because so many new and fulfilling things had taken the place of what I had done with a passion before.

I started studying theology, became a deacon and then in 2001 a priest; finally, I was assigned to the prisons where I give my heart and soul. That, however, is another chapter!

I will tell about it—God willing—in another issue next year.

Carlo the Beggar

Sometimes an encounter or even just a word or a simple question opens a heart and suddenly gives it a whole new outlook. Well, that was the case with Enrico Bernardini, an employee for the Ministry of Economics and Finance in Rome. He tells the story himself.

*E*very morning, I board the train in Aprilia and arrive a half hour later at Termini Station in Rome. I rush across the square in front of the train station and, after a five-minute march, I am already at my office. Three years ago, I was speeding along as usual when a beggar sitting on a wall spoke to me: “*You all hurry, hurry; you’re always in haste. For what are you all running? You, for example,*” he asked, “*do you have any idea how many days of sunshine we had this week?*”

I stopped; this question struck me. I did not know, as a matter of fact, on how many days the sun had shone. Without waiting for my reply, he continued, “*I’ll tell you. We had four days of sun. And what have we done, according to you, to deserve four days of sunshine?*” I was becoming more embarrassed as the beggar went on, “*The sun is one of God’s gifts to us. And what did we do to deserve it? You rushed by; you know nothing other than hurrying about. Your life is a continual haste, and you are no longer able to recognize anything else.*”

I abruptly asked, “*Have you already had something to eat?*”

He responded, “*No, they don’t let me in the cafes. But I don’t want to eat, I want you to listen to me.*”

I countered, “*Okay, but first let’s have some breakfast.*” So, I picked up some croissants and a cappuccino. We sat on the wall, and Carlo, as he was called, told me his story.

He was an engineer who, following health problems, wrong personal decisions and a series of disappointments, including being abandoned

by his family, ended up on the street. In contrast to many destitute, however, Carlo never gave up seeing the good and positive in life.

*A*fter our first encounter, we met every day. I came a little earlier, we spent a bit of time together and had breakfast. This went on for several months, and we became friends. Yet one autumn morning in 2014, he was not there. “*Where’s Carlo?*” I asked another beggar. He informed me, “*Sorry, but Carlo died last night. The funeral is tomorrow morning in the Church of the Sacred Heart.*”

Shocked and dismayed, the next morning I went across the street from the train station to the Basilica of the Sacred Heart which is run by the Salesians. There were very few “normal” people in attendance for Carlo’s funeral, but the church was full of beggars. The circumstances impressed me very much. To this day, I have been deeply touched by what Fr. Stefano, whom I did not know, told in the homily.

Carlo, who was a believer and had often spoken with me about God, visited the Basilica of the Sacred Heart every day and had befriended this Salesian priest. One day, he entrusted to Carlo, “*We need a well in my mission village in Kenya because we don’t have any water. Everybody knows that in Africa, a well means life. We don’t have enough money though.*” Moved, he added with tears in his eyes, “*Carlo may have been meaningless in the eyes of the world, but he was great in God’s eyes because over the course of several months, he was able to convince all the beggars and homeless around*

Termini Station to give a portion of the money they had begged each day for my well project. Carlo himself quietly gave the most, and he brought everything to the church.” Beautiful! What a lesson for life my friend taught me even after his death! Whenever I think about how much he took to heart the need of that African village, I am so touched. It also made me realize that when Carlo held me up with his “sun question” back

then, he certainly had been observing me for a long time before he taught me to pay attention to the little things in life which really count.

*A*nnna and I have been happily married now for thirty-two years. Jesus has a central place in our family, and in some difficult situations, I also ask my friend Carlo in heaven for help and advice.

A Hindu Kisses the Cross

Gaurav Shroff, from India, is an impressive example of someone who knew nothing about the living and true God, but through the beauty of sacral music was led to the spiritual beauty of Christian truths. Today, he is a Catholic priest in the USA.

*T*he forty-four-year-old priest in a parish close to Atlanta, Georgia was born in Holy Family Hospital in New Delhi. If his parents, who still live in India, remind him of this, then he likes to joke with them that it, “*should have been a clue to my future.*” His parents were well-off, and they made a priority of raising Gaurav and his brother with Indian traditions. Yet when the priest thinks back, “*it was from my grandmother that I learned the ancient stories of the Hindu religion.*” His parents had more worldly, humanistic values than religious ones. The child inherited from his father a special love for all things beautiful and good, and for music.

Although Gaurav actually spent the first months of his life in a ritzy suburb of Washington D.C., where his father worked for the World Bank, his family soon moved back to India. In the northern Indian city Ahmedabad, with seven million inhabitants, the boy attended a renowned private school run by the Jesuits, even though Christians there make up less than one percent of the population. He knew nothing about Christianity, in reality, other than the Christians in his school buried their dead in the earth instead of burning them as the Hindus usually do.

That impressed young Gaurav. The musically inclined Hindu, who received classical Northern Indian music lessons at home, joined the school choir and, for the first time, came in contact with works of Christian sacral music. Their beauty captivated him as he started studying geology at St. Xavier’s College in Bombay, another Jesuit school. Already during his first year, something crucial took place. On August 15, 1990, the Feast of the Assumption and Indian Independence Day, the seventeen-year-old attended in the first Holy Mass of his life.

“The sublime music of the Mass undoubtedly assured me of God’s presence; the Gregorian chants elevated my spirits, creating in me a sense of awe for the Sacred. I was instinctively drawn by the aesthetic beauty of the Eucharist and this experience filled my heart with immense joy.”

*I*mpressed by what he had experienced, Gaurav started studying the history of the Church. He wanted to discover, “*what could have inspired the genius of great musicians to compose some of the greatest classical works in honor of the Divine and place their art at the*

service of the liturgy.” Enraptured, the student spent many hours of his free time in the library and learned Latin, as a Hindu, from the missals in order to understand the Gregorian texts and the different parts of the Holy Mass. *“The first prayer that I ever memorized, was the Gloria, in Latin. Eventually, I would end up going to the beautiful college chapel at least once a day, and pray the Gloria. I did not know any other prayers!”*

Enchanted by the choral Masses, Gaurav participated that same year in the Christmas Midnight Mass at the Bombay Cathedral. His father even accompanied him. Since the solemn liturgy increasingly fascinated Gaurav, his Christian friends invited him to join them the following year for the Easter Triduum. They told him that he is not permitted to go to Holy Communion though.

*S*o, the young Hindu went to the Holy Thursday liturgy at Holy Name Cathedral. *“Nothing had prepared me for the ‘Washing of the Feet’. I watched with amazement as the archbishop disrobed and knelt down, washing the feet of twelve men. I had never witnessed such humility in a spiritual leader.”* Gaurav started thinking about the essence of the priesthood, because the idea of a leader that serves like this Catholic bishop was something strange and completely new to him.

The next day, at the Good Friday liturgy—since the only thing his friends had told him was that he is not allowed to receive Holy Communion—the eighteen-year-old stood in line for the Veneration of the Cross. *“As I knelt down and kissed the Cross, I vividly remember the clear voice in my heart saying to me: ‘I died for you,’ and I began to weep unashamedly, and though I did not understand what it meant, I was certain, that the Crucified Christ loved me. Then it wasn’t about music anymore, I wanted to learn more about this Jesus.”*

Gaurav diligently studied the Catechism, read Holy Scriptures and regularly went to Holy Mass on Sunday. In 1993, he participated—still as a Hindu—in a retreat where, praying at night before

the Eucharistic Lord, he was touched anew in the depths of his soul. *“I strongly felt the presence of the Divine, the deep love of God for me, and in the darkness, I was illuminated: My life belonged to Jesus, to know him, to love him and to serve him. This was my mission and vocation. I felt called to be a priest.”*

A very serious conversation with his family followed concerning his decision to be baptized and become Catholic. Gaurav’s father finally agreed: *“As long as you do not sever family ties and do not go aggressively evangelizing, you have our blessings!”* Gaurav received the Sacrament of Baptism at the age of twenty-two. It was August 15, 1994, exactly four years after his first overwhelming encounter with God through sacral music.

*F*or the time being, the newly baptized flew to America two weeks later to continue his geology studies at the University of South Carolina. Through the intellectual, church-critical climate there, the four years before completing his master’s degree turned into a great inner battle. Seeking clarity, Gaurav added another master’s degree in religion. It was, *“a way of saying ‘no’ to the Lord’s call, but even in crises, the calling to the priesthood hauntingly persisted.”* This “no” eventually turned into a, *“not yet Lord!”* Fr. Shroff admits today with humor. *“God was always faithful, and under the protection of His Blessed Mother, I persevered in the Faith.”*

*Y*es, the Mother of God protected his vocation to the priesthood, and she did it through a true mother for priests, Elizabeth. She was the pastor’s mother and also supported him very much spiritually. *“‘I am praying for you’ every time I saw this lady she said this. I knew she meant it. She prayed the Holy Rosary daily.”*

When Gaurav Shroff finally found the strength to accept his vocation to the priesthood and recognized that God was calling him to be a diocesan priest, his path led him to the Archdiocese of Atlanta, for which he was finally ordained a priest in June 2013.

The New Adoration Chapel

“Mary, Mother of Jesus the High Priest”

I heard the call from the Lord when I was age nineteen; this was even before I was baptized into the faith. For many years in the US, I ran away from the Lord’s voice. When I did pay attention, it was a slow journey of discerning just where he was calling me. I have no doubt, Elizabeth’s daily Rosary had a role in meriting this grace. ‘I am praying for your vocation every day,’ she often assured me and also did it.”

On March 9, 2017, the newly renovated chapel at our house of adoration in Civitella del Tronto, Italy, was finally solemnly dedicated. Since the beginning of our international missionary activity, we have always had the wish to one day have a house in which our main mission is Perpetual Adoration. We are convinced graces flow from the Blessed Sacrament to all priests and missions because here in the Holy Eucharist, the fount of all grace, beats the living heart of our God.

We brothers and sisters bring the needs of each one of you, as well as the great intentions of the Church, before the Lord. In the name of all humanity, we give him the time and love which he so deserves. The Poor Clares adored the Eucharistic Jesus and offered their lives for the Church in this convent for more than five hundred years, and we are now able to carry on this vocation.

The Bishop of Teramo-Atri, His Excellency, Michael Seccia, accepted the invitation to preside at the solemn ceremony. Thirteen of our priests concelebrated the Holy Mass. Mother Agnes, the sisters’ superior general, came just for this occasion from Slovakia, as did all the sisters who work in and around Rome. A deep, supernatural atmosphere was tangible in this beautiful new chapel, in which priests, brothers and sisters have invested so much love, energy and artistic ability.

The bishop praised and underlined the importance of prayer and familiar contact with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. *“I entrust to you here, in adoration, the priests of the diocese, because*

the Church can be born anew only from the priests. May this chapel be another flame for our diocese,” he wished.

Sixty-four years ago, his predecessor Bishop Stanislao Battistelli, whose beatification process has been opened, started Perpetual Adoration in Teramo. However, the now elderly sisters can no longer adore there day and night. Bishop Seccia sees it as a sign of love and divine providence that we now continue this task. *“Here, my conviction is affirmed anew that God never holds back his helping hand. I also see how he works in your community.”*

Bishop Seccia greatly values consecrated life because three of his aunts were religious sisters, two in active orders and one aunt with the contemplative Poor Clares. He entrusted to us, *“Often I have turned to her with my intentions, and I have received a lot of help.”*

He experienced himself the value consecrated women have for the spiritual life of the Church when they live their vocation seriously. *“Therefore, the sisters in my diocese are very important to me. I offer a day of retreat for them every month. Consecrated life, especially cloistered sisters or convents of Perpetual Adoration, are the lungs of the Holy Spirit which lend God’s family, the Church, the breath to grow.”*

When we asked Bishop Seccia what he wishes from a house of adoration, he answered without hesitation, *“That it be a place where one intercedes for the whole nation, like Moses before God.”*