

# *Triumph of the Heart*

HEAVEN  
IS OUR TRUE HOMELAND

*Family of Mary*  
*2019 (V)/No. 90*

*“With His Cross... He opened the door for us  
to enter where we will contemplate God.”*

*Pope Francis, November 2, 2016*

## *So that Where I Am You Also May Be*

*Dear friends and benefactors, the very title of this issue of the Triumph of the Heart indicates that it deals with Heaven. The goal is to bring us all to a more vibrant Faith in it and strengthen our belief that it really exists. Heaven is a concrete place where the saints and our sanctified ancestors and relatives are in beatitude with God and where we too will be one day in God's glory.*

*The existential questions, “Who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going?” move believers and non-believers alike. Even if someone suppresses the question of death and “beyond” during their lifetime, they will be unavoidably confronted with it, at the very latest, on their deathbed. “Does the other side exist, is there life after death? If yes, who or what is awaiting me?”*

Unfortunately, what Cardinal Faulhaber, the former Archbishop of Munich and Freising, Germany, once said can be sustained today more than ever, *“It is just unbelievable, what non-believers all believe!”* In our time, a shuttering number of people have no Christian belief in the Resurrection in their hearts. For some, death is *“the absolute end, everything's over!”* Others are completely serious when they think that their loved ones are waving to them from a star, and

a considerable number are expecting to be born again as an animal!

Such ideas show in an alarming way how important it is to deepen our knowledge of faith in Heaven. Honestly, who really wants to go to a place after their death which they cannot describe better than, *“there will surely be something”?*

Perhaps we never really noticed what we solemnly pray each time at the end of the Creed: *“I believe in the resurrection of the dead and life everlasting. Amen.”* Our Christian Creed is not something we lightheartedly rhymed together at our own discretion. Christianity is a religion of revelation, that means that God shares and reveals the truth to us. Leading the way is Jesus, the Son whom the Father sent to us from Heaven, who as the highest authority introduces us to the truth of Heaven with deep and simple words so that any child can joyfully understand it.

*I*n the most beautiful part of the Gospel about Heaven, Jesus makes a glorious promise and with that a unique consolation for the dying as well as for those left behind.

*“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be.”* (Jn. 14: 1-3)

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## *Our life is like a blink of the eye*

*A*long with Jesus’ teaching, which has been immortalized for us in the Holy Scriptures, it is naturally the saints who, first and foremost, tell us in God’s light about Heaven. We can believe them! Therefore, we often let them speak in this edition.

Perhaps some of you, dear friends, because of your family, job or other circumstances, have been present when a dying person radiantly “goes home”, in the truest sense. Again and again, relatives have reported how they astonishingly witnessed that before their very

eyes the dying were obviously “picked up” and “accompanied” to another world which, although very impressive and nearly tangible for everybody present, nevertheless remained invisible. It was often the case, as well, that such a beautiful homecoming was also the hour of conversion for relatives.

Besides the many people who, in the course of an accident, an operation or some other dramatic situation in their life, have a personal near-death experience, the saints are the ones who are given a grace for a moment or a certain length of time to be in a state and in a very real place which we call Heaven. They saw it, experienced it and, when they returned to earth, were able to precisely describe it—in order to help us believe!

In the early Church, after Jesus ascended into Heaven before the eyes of His mother and His apostles, it was the protomartyr Stephen who, filled with the Holy Spirit, before being stoned exclaimed, “*Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.*” And nobody less than St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that he “*was caught up into paradise*”.

An event from St. Philip Neri’s life is also something to consider. With humor and yet seri-

ousness, the “Apostle of Rome” showed a young man, with whom we may surely identify, that there is something other than the storage sheds of earth. When the young man told Philip Neri that he was studying and hoped to soon graduate, the saint asked him, “*And then?*”

“*Then I will be a lawyer.*”

“*And then?*”

“*Then I will earn a lot of money and make a name for myself.*”

“*And then?*”

“*Then I’ll marry and start a family.*”

“*And then?*”

The answers came slower and more stuttered because at some point it all comes to an end. The saint gently drew the student closer and asked with a smile, barely audible, “*And then?*”

This “*and then?*” is also directed to us because earthly life is just a blink of the eye compared to eternity. Everybody can give their own answer to the question, “Are you excited for Heaven, where joy increases continuously? Where the saints recognize God in His love and greatness and continue to discover it anew and more deeply? Where with each new understanding the love for Him grows, and with the love also the beauty? Are you excited to be there with Jesus and Our Lady?”

Dear benefactors, even if what you are reading now about Heaven is interesting, it nevertheless remains an indescribable mystery.

A great saint of our day, St. Faustina, recognized this too. “*Today I was in Heaven, in spirit, and I saw its inconceivable beauties and the happiness that awaits us after death. ... I saw how great is happiness in God, ... always new, gushing forth happiness for all creatures.*”

God’s glory is so great, she would not even try to describe it because she felt unable and thought the souls would think she had described it all.

“*Now I understand Saint Paul, who said, ‘Eye has not seen, nor has ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love Him.’*” He did not want to describe it either.

# *A Glance into Paradise*

*Don Bosco simply called his numerous visions, which gave him much consolation and deep insight, “dreams”. A very special one which the apostle of the youth had on December 6, 1876, was much more an intense, highly revealing conversation with St. Dominic Savio, his deceased spiritual son, about the place of beatitude. In the oratory, everybody awaited with great anticipation the story which also reveals to us a lot about the “other world”. The following are excerpts of this vision.*

*D*uring the night hours while I was in my room—whether reading or pacing back and forth or resting in my bed, I am not sure—I began dreaming. It suddenly seemed to me that I was standing on a small hill, on the rim of a broad plain that stretched away into the unseen distance. Broad, imposing avenues divided the plain into grand gardens of indescribable beauty, each broken up by thickets, lawns, and flower beds of varied shapes and colors. Each species and each single plant sparkled with a brilliance of its own. Scattered throughout those gardens and spread over the entire plain I could see countless buildings whose architecture, magnificence, harmony,

grandeur and size were so unique that one could say all the treasures of earth could not suffice to build a single one. If only my boys had one such house, I said to myself, how they would love it, how happy they would be, and how much they would enjoy being there! As I stood there basking in the splendor of those gardens, I suddenly heard sweet music. A hundred thousand instruments played, each with its own sound, uniquely different from all others, and every possible sound set the air alive with its resonant waves. Blended with them were the songs of choristers. In those gardens I looked upon a multitude of people enjoying themselves happily, some singing, others playing.

*I* saw an endless multitude of boys approaching me. I recognized many of them as they drew closer and they were headed by Dominic Savio. I did not know whether I was awake or dreaming; I clapped my hands together and felt my arms and chest in the endeavor to see how real was what I was seeing. There was a flash of light far brighter than before, the music stopped, and a hushed silence fell over all. A most radiant joy encompassed all the boys and sparkled in their eyes, their countenances aglow with happiness. They looked and smiled at me very pleasantly.

Dominic Savio stepped forward until he stood close beside me. The white tunic which reached to his feet was interwoven with golden

threads and sparkling jewels. Around his waist he had a broad red sash, also interwoven with precious stones of every color, which sparkled and glittered in a thousand lights. Around his neck there was a necklace of wild flowers, but the flowers were made of precious stones and the light they reflected lit up further still the beauty and dignity of Dominic’s face. His hair, which was crowned with roses, hung down to his shoulders and completed the quite indescribable effect of his total appearance. The others were dressed in varying degrees of splendor, all of which had their own symbolic meaning. I didn’t know where I was, and shaking with reverence I didn’t dare go any closer.

*At last Dominic Savio spoke. "Are you not the one who once feared nothing, holding your ground against slander, persecution, hostility, hardships and dangers of all sorts? Where is your courage? Say something!"*

Summoning my courage, I replied, *"I am shaking because I don't know where I am."*

*"You are in the abode of happiness,"* Savio answered, *"where one experiences every joy, every delight."*

*"Is this the reward of the just?"*

*"Not even close! Here we do not enjoy supernatural happiness but only a natural one."*

*"All this is natural then?"*

*"Yes, whatever is here is of the earth, although improved beyond conception by the power of God."*

*"It seems to me that this must be paradise!"* I cried out.

*"No living person can ever see or imagine the wonders of eternity."*

*"And the music?"* I continued, *"are these the harmonies you rejoice over in Heaven?"*

*"Not at all, they are natural, but perfect by God's almightiness."*

*"And this light brighter than the sun, is it perhaps supernatural, the light of paradise?"*

*"It is natural light, yet vivified and perfected by God's almightiness."*

Then I asked, *"May one see a little of the supernatural light?"*

*"No one can see it until he has come to see God as He is. The faintest ray of that light would instantly strike one dead."*

*"Is there a natural light more beautiful than this one?"*

*"If you only knew! If you saw just one ray of natural light which is one degree stronger than this one, you would be beside yourself."*

*"Tell me what was your greatest consolation when you were dying."*

*"What do you think?"* he answered.

I had several attempts at trying to say what

*"Would it be possible to see just a ray of it?"*

*"Yes, you may! Open your eyes!"*

Unexpectedly, a light appeared in the heavens at an endless distance, hair-thin like a thread, but so blazing bright that my eyes couldn't handle it. I closed them and yelled so loud that I woke up Fr. Lemoyne who was sleeping next door. This strip of light was much brighter than the sun and its shine was enough to light up the whole created universe. *"Is that a ray of divine light?"*

Savio responded, *"It is not a supernatural light, even though it is much brighter than any earthly light. Even when an immensely large beam of light, like that strip in the distance, would cover the earth, it still could not give you any idea of the glory of Paradise."*

*"And all of you, what makes you so happy in Paradise?"* I asked.

*"That is impossible to answer. No mortal can understand life in Paradise as long as he is alive and not with his Creator. The joy of Paradise is God. That says it all."*

*"Hurry and ask me what you want to know! The time granted to me to speak with you may expire,"* he said.

*"Then tell me something about my congregation,"* I replied. *"Have I done what I am supposed to do?"*

Savio responded, *"Do you see the countless boys down there?"*

*"I see them, so many! And how happy they are!"*

*"They were all Salesians, saved by you,"* he continued. *"Count them if you can! But they would have been many, many more had you greater Faith and more trust in the Lord."*

I sighed and moaned. I did not know how to respond to this reproach and made the resolution, from now on I will try to have this Faith and trust.

I thought it might be, such as having lived a pure life, having heaped up so much treasure in Heaven by all his good works, and so on, but to all he shook his head with a smile.

“Tell me, then,” I said, quite crestfallen at my failure; “what was it?”

“What helped the most and gave me greatest joy when I was dying,” replied Dominic,

“was the loving care and help of the great Mother of God. Tell your sons not to fail to keep close to her while they are alive. But hurry—the time is almost up.”

Sources: Fr. J. Bacchiarello, S.D.B., *Forty Dreams of St. John Bosco*, TAN Books, Charlotte, N.C., 2014; and a translation found at various websites.

## My Task from Heaven

*The saints show us more than anybody else that life in full is waiting for us after death. They really become active after their passing from the Church Militant to the Church Triumphant.*

*Not only the saints, but our relatives, spouses and children who have entered into God’s glory desire nothing more earnestly than to help and protect their own particular family.*

*In this way, Heaven draws close to earth.*

Towards the end of her life, Little Thérèse was in such an expiatory spiritual darkness, that she often asked herself if there really is a Heaven.

Once in a while, God gave her a ray of light which inspired her to say, “I realized that Heaven does indeed exist, and that this Heaven has souls who cherish me as their child.”

Strengthened anew, she courageously endured, gathered her sufferings like rose petals and promised, “After my death, I will let a shower of roses fall. ... I feel that my mission is about to begin—my mission to make others love God as I love Him ... to teach souls my little way. I will spend my time in Heaven doing good upon earth.”

One of the most recently canonized saints, the French Carmelite **Elizabeth of the Holy Trinity**, consciously chose to have her Lourdes statue brought from home for the last months of her life. As the “*Gate of Heaven*”, Our Lady should accompany her on the “*serious passage*”. The last words which Elizabeth’s sisters were still able to understand were, “*I am going to Light, to Life, to Love.*” Since then, this true teacher of the interior life has kept the promise which she wrote in pencil with a shaking hand a few days before her

death. “*In Heaven my mission will be to draw souls towards an inner recollection, helping them to abandon themselves and to cling to God in a simple and loving movement.*”

**St. Maximilian Kolbe**, inflamed by his total surrender to Mary, completed the most extraordinary works. Yet, he liked to tell his brothers, “*Here on earth we can only work with one hand because with the other we have to hold tight to the Immaculata so that we do not fall. In Heaven it will be different! There is*

*no danger of slipping and falling. Then we will be able to work much more, namely, with both hands!”*

**St. Josephine Bakhita**, a former slave and the patron saint of the Catholic Church in Sudan, came to love in Italy the God whom she had already suspected existed when she was a child in Africa. *“When I saw the sun, moon and stars, I often said to myself, ‘Who is the owner of all these glorious things?’”*

Indescribable suffering did not make Bakhita bitter and cold, but rather kind and gentle. As a Canossian, she was always friendly; and in her agony, she repeatedly begged the nurse, *“Loosen my chains, they are so heavy!”*

In spirit, she relived the horrible slavery of her childhood. Shortly before her death however, she humorously spoke about her path to Heaven. *“I go slowly toward eternity, one step at a time, because I have two suitcases: one full*

*A*nother radiant Italian priest of the 20th century was **Fr. Dolindo Ruotolo**, a friend of Padre Pio who once blessed Fr. Dolindo with the words, *“All of Paradise is in your soul. It was always there, it is there now and it will be there for all eternity.”* Padre Pio often spoke to the pilgrims from Naples, *“Why are you coming here? You have Dolindo in Naples! Go to him; he is a saint!”* This advice has been faithfully followed to this day, evident not only from the stacks of prayer intentions but thank you notes as well. Dolindo’s 92-year-old niece, Grazia Ruotolo, told us a couple of years ago that numerous foreign pilgrims, from Poland for example, also surprisingly find their prayers quickly answered when they knock on the marble tomb of her holy uncle. They all know about the spiritual testament which the 88-year-old left behind, *“When I’m dead, come knock on my grave ... I will answer you! Trust in God!”*

**Moher Teresa** was once asked, *“Are you afraid to die?”* She silently looked into the eyes of the interrogator for a few moments, and then laughed saying, *“No, not at all! Dying means returning home. Are you afraid of returning home to your loved ones? I wait with great*

*of my sins, the other, much heavier, full of the infinite merits of Jesus. At God’s judgment, I will cover my ugly suitcase with the merits of Our Lady; then I will open the other one and present Jesus’ merits and say to the Eternal Father, ‘Judge yourself!’ Oh, I am sure I will not be turned down! Then I will turn to St. Peter and say, ‘You may close the gate to Heaven now, because I am staying!’”*

In August 1968, **St. Padre Pio** told Luigina Sinapi, his spiritual daughter, *“I will die in one month. Don’t tell anybody though!”*

*“But what shall we do when you are no longer with us?”* she asked dismayed.

*“You will go to the tabernacle. You will find me in Jesus,”* St. Padre Pio replied. Luigina saw the homecoming of her spiritual father in a vision. A vast flock of souls hurried toward him from Heaven saying joyously, *“We were saved through you.”*

*desire for the moment of death. Up there, I will meet Jesus and all the people to whom I tried to show love to in this lifetime. I will meet all the children whom I tried to save and who, dying in my arms, looked at me as their mother. I will meet all the poor whom I stood by, the dying who breathed their last in the house I established for them in Calcutta. In short, I will see all the people whom I loved and were precious to me here on earth. It will be a wonderful meeting.”*

She smiled from ear to ear, even though for the final 50 years of her life she lived in a state of painful darkness. Perhaps it was this suffering which allowed her to say, *“If I ever become a saint, it will surely be the ‘saint of darkness’ . I will be continually absent in Heaven in order to inflame a light for those living in darkness on earth.”*

We could really go on and on presenting saints and their unique “Heavenly missions”. Yet, we will contend ourselves by concluding with **St. Clelia Barbeiri** who “checks in from above” in a very unique way. Despite her young age, all the villagers of Budrie, Italy called her Mother.

With merely three companions, the 21-year-



old founded the congregation “Little Sisters of the Mother of Sorrows” and is recognized as the youngest founder of a religious order in the history of the Church. Two years later, as she was dying, she whispered in the ear of her first companion, Ursula, “*I am going, but I will never leave you!*” On the day of her funeral, eleven girls

from the village decided to join the community. To this very day, sisters in the various houses in Europe, Africa and Asia often distinctively hear Clelia’s voice which prays or sings. Her prophecy on her deathbed holds true, “*Be in good spirits because I will go to Heaven, but nevertheless be always with you!*”

## *Take Us to Heaven with You!*

*Jesus says blessed are those who do not see and still believe.  
We, dear readers, undoubtedly belong to this group of people.  
The holy shepherd children from Fatima, Jacinta and Francisco,  
had however the grace to see Our Lady, and therefore the existence of  
Heaven was something quite natural for them.  
Let us strengthen our Faith with their testimony.*

“*Where are you from?*”, Lucia asked the beautiful woman during the first apparition in Fatima on May 13, 1917.

“*I come from Heaven.*”

“*And what do you want of me?*”, the shepherdess wanted to know.

“*I came to ask you to come here for six consecutive months, on the thirteenth day, at this same hour. I will tell you later who I am and what I want.*”

Lucia wrote, “*The apparitions of Our Lady directed our attention to the supernatural.*” Therefore, she immediately asked the most important question burning in her heart: “*And shall I go to Heaven?*”

“*Yes, you will.*”

When the Queen of the Rosary appeared again on June 13, at the agreed hour, she promised that she would soon take Jacinta and Francisco to her in Heaven. This promise made a deep impression on the souls of these children and

“*And Jacinta?*”

“*She will go too.*”

“*And Francisco?*”

“*Francisco, too, my dear, but he will first have many Rosaries to say.*”

Yes, the beautiful lady from Heaven came to the three shepherd children here on earth to ask them to faithfully pray the Rosary every day. In doing so, they would obtain an end to the First World War. Furthermore, she came to ask them in the name of God if they were willing to carry all of their sufferings as expiation for the sins by which God is offended and for the conversion of sinners. It was an unbelievably demanding message for children ages seven, eight and ten!

left them with a great, supernatural joy because if it was already so unspeakably beautiful to see Our Lady here on earth, how much more beautiful must it be in Heaven!

One month later, on July 13, 1917, God

showed the three children a vision of Hell. Lucia wrote in her memoirs, *“The demons could be distinguished by their terrifying and repellent likeness to frightful and unknown animals,”* and the souls were plunged into a great sea of fire *“in human form, like transparent burning embers, all blackened or burnished bronze.”* The visionary testified further, *“This vision lasted but an instant. How can we ever be grateful enough to our kind Heavenly Mother, who had already prepared us by promising to take us to Heaven in the first apparition. Otherwise, I think we would have died of fear and terror. ... The vision of Hell filled Jacinta with horror to such a degree, that every penance and mortification was as nothing in her eyes, if it could only prevent souls from going there.”*

The certainty of going to Heaven gave the children an enviable inner freedom which even liberated them from the fear of death. Not even the sheriff’s threat to throw them alive into boiling oil could bring them to betray the secret that had been revealed to them. When Artur Santos, the province administrator and a freethinking Church-hater, kidnapped them under false pretenses and locked

them in prison on August 13, 1917, all three of them, independent of one another, were prepared for martyrdom. They preferred to die rather than betray the secret which Our Lady had entrusted to them and thereby be unfaithful to their sending.

The shepherd children encouraged each other to make sacrifices. Especially Jacinta was extremely ingenious because, since she had seen Hell, she was willing to do anything to convert sinners and save them from eternal doom. They gave their sandwiches for lunch to the poor, renounced their beloved dancing, favorite games and much more. There was nothing more important here on earth for them than winning souls for Heaven. When Francisco and Jacinta fell ill with the Spanish Flu, they recognized it as their vocation to accept and to offer God without complaining all the pains in body and soul in a spirit of expiation. What admirable souls!

During the illness, which would lead to the death of both Francisco and Jacinta, she told her cousin Lucia, *“Our Lady came to see us. She told us she would come to take Francisco to Heaven very soon, and she asked me if I still wanted to convert more sinners. I said I did.”*

## *Francisco’s longing for Heaven*

Generally, thinking about death usually scares people at first—especially children. For the visionary children of Fatima, however, it was completely different. For them, death was the desired trip home to Heaven. Francisco always expressed his wish to go to Our Lady. When he was told that he will surely become healthy again, he always answered with a smile, “No”; this deeply impressed everybody. His tranquility and always loving demeanor attracted many visitors. The village children passed in and out of his hospital room like they were at home, or they greeted him friendly at the window when walking by. Adults too, from the village and from abroad, sat for a long time at his bed. *“I don’t know what it is about Francisco, but it feels so good to be here!”* the visitors said. *“When we go into*

*Francisco’s room, we feel just as we do when we go into a church.”*

Lucia reports to us about her conversations with her cousin who was always joyful despite his pain. *“Are you suffering a lot, Francisco?”*

*“Quite a lot, but never mind! I am suffering to console Our Lord, and afterwards, within a short time, I am going to Heaven!”*

Shortly before his death he confided to Lucia, *“I am very ill; it won’t be long now before I go to Heaven.”*

Lucia, who knew she still had a task to fulfill on earth, asked the little one, *“When you’re there, don’t forget to pray a great deal for sinners, for the Holy Father, for me and for Jacinta.”*

Yet Francisco was not sure if he would be able to faithfully fulfill this request, *“Yes, I’ll*

*pray. But look, you'd better ask Jacinta to pray for these things instead, because I'm afraid I'll forget when I see Our Lord. And then, more than anything else I want to console Him."*

Francisco was suffering a lot the day before he died. Jacinta and Lucia spent nearly the whole day at his bedside. Since he could no longer pray himself, he asked them to pray the Rosary for him. Then he said to his cousin Lucia,

*"I am sure I shall miss you terribly in Heaven. If only Our Lady would bring you there soon, too!"*

*"If you go to Heaven tonight, don't forget me when you get there, do you hear me?"*

*"No, I won't forget. Be sure of that,"* he answered

and grabbed Lucia's right hand, squeezed it tightly for a while and looked at her with tears in his eyes.

*"Until we meet in Heaven, goodbye!"*

The next day, Friday, April 4, 1919, Francisco called for his mother.

*"What do you want, Francisco?"*

*"Nothing! But look, Mother, at the beautiful light by the door! What a beautiful light!"* Francisco repeated. A few minutes later he said, *"Now I don't see it anymore."*

His mother could not see the light, but she witnessed how her ten-year-old son passed into eternal life with a transfigured smile and without the throes of death. It was 10:00 p.m.

## *Jacinta's going home to Heaven*

One can only thank God with astonishment for what he worked in the souls of these children. Lucia testified about Jacinta, *"She was a child only in years. As to the rest, she already knew how to be virtuous, and to show God and the most holy Virgin her love through sacrifice. It is amazing how she made her own the spirit of prayer and sacrifice which Our Lady so urgently encouraged! As to her sanctity, I hold her in great esteem."*

Even a Pope, John Paul II, thanked this little girl in his homily at the beatification of the two children on May 13, 2000. He was convinced that she heard him from Heaven, *"I also express my gratitude to Bl. Jacinta for the sacrifices and prayers offered for the Holy Father, whom she saw suffering greatly."*

On the same day that Francisco fell ill, Jacinta also contracted the Spanish Flu. This resulted in infected pleurisy which is the reason why she was brought to the Vila Nova de Ourém hospital. A large wound had formed on her chest and the dressings had to be changed every day.

Despite her increasing pain, she often spoke with Lucia about her interior life. *"Oh, how much I love to suffer for love of Our Lord and Our Lady, just to give Them pleasure! They greatly*

*love those who suffer for the conversion of sinners."* She was able to get out of bed again after a few weeks, but she was still very weak. She did not speak about anything other than the Rosary and making sacrifices for sinners.

One day she said to Lucia, *"Our Lady told me that I am going to Lisbon to another hospital; that I will not see you again, nor my parents either, and after suffering a great deal, I shall die alone. But she said I must not be afraid, since she herself is coming to take me to Heaven."*

On January 21, 1920, Mrs. Marto brought her daughter to Lisbon. *"It was a heartrending farewell,"* Lucia described. *"For a long time, she clung to me with her arms around my neck, and sobbed: 'We shall never see each other again! Pray a lot for me, until I go to Heaven. Then I will pray a lot for you.'"*

Jacinta was only nine years old and was to end her life here on earth in great pain, alone in a hospital. She wanted to accept everything with love, even the greatest sacrifice of dying without the encouraging presence of her earthly mother.

Yet, strengthened by grace, she consoled all those who came to her, even her deeply saddened mother who, following the death of Francisco, was

about to lose Jacinta, her second child. Jacinta wanted to convince her that her homecoming was not a loss: “*Mommy, don’t cry, I’m going to Heaven, and I will pray a lot for you there.*”

Since she was now suffering completely alone, Our Lady visited her child one last time on February 17, and revealed the day and hour of her death. Jacinta explained, “*She promised to come for me soon, and she took away my pain.*” On Friday, February 20, 1920, Jacinta fell asleep very peacefully without any throes of death. Her death confirmed what Lucia explained in a talk with Fr. Augustin Fuentes, “*The devil does all in his power to distract us and to take away from us*

*the love for prayer ... The most ardent wish of Our Lady, however, is that we help her to save souls through praying the Rosary every day. Through that, we not only have Mary’s special protection for body and soul but also an hour of death in which we, without a bitter struggle, calmly pass into eternal glory holding her motherly hand. For that reason alone, it is worth praying the Rosary every day.*”

The remains of Jacinta and Francisco were placed in the newly erected Basilica of Fatima on May 1, 1951. Jacinta has remained incorrupt to this day; from Francisco we have the wooden Rosary which was placed in the grave with him.

## Heavenly aid

No sooner were the children in Heaven, they were already helping here on earth. The most recent miracle recognized by the Church is the one accepted for the canonization of the two shepherd children on May 13, 2017, regarding the healing of Lucas Maeda de Oliveira from the Diocese of Campo Mourão in the city of Paraná, Brazil.

While he was playing, the five-year-old fell twenty feet from the window of his grandfather’s house. Lucas suffered severe head injuries. Some of his brain tissue was outside of the skull, and there was no hope of saving the child through surgery. Unconscious and in acute danger of dying, he was brought to the hospital where they operated on him immediately. The father, who had rushed to help, called for the intercession of the two beatified visionaries of Fatima. That same night, family members and a community

of cloistered Carmelites who were entrusted with this prayer intention prayed for the intervention of the shepherd children from Fatima for Lucas who was fighting for his life.

His injuries were so serious that the doctors, in the best-case scenario, counted on a long-term coma, permanent serious damage and sensory disorder. In reality, however, the boy fully recovered in a matter of days and was released from the hospital without requiring any further treatment and without any damage. The medical advisory council for the Congregation for Causes of Saints unanimously confirmed in its final vote on February 2, 2017, that the healing could not be explained by medicine. Francisco and Jacinta had helped from Heaven as they had often done on earth when they were asked for something. So, they are with us!

Source: Fatima, In Lucia’s Own Words, Portugal, 16<sup>th</sup> edition, July 2007

# Only Guests on Earth

*How true it is, we cannot take anything with us on our final journey. Even the slightest attachments to people or things, which tie us to the earth like invisible threads, have to be dissolved before God can give us His full glory. The young Spanish Trappist Rafael Arnáiz Barón (1911-1938) shows us how free and wonderfully calm we become when we accept and begin the challenging way of letting go already in this life.*

Rafael could have gone a long way “in the world”. His fine humor as well as the joyful and yet attentive demeanor of this noble young man attracted everybody. The architecture student’s brilliant artistic talents prophesied a lustrous career.

What one would not guess from his refined manner was that Rafael’s interior life was driven by such a deep desire for God. He used his positive influence to direct the attention of fellow soldiers as well as his own deeply pious family toward God. “*It was obvious how much we all enjoyed listening to him,*” his brother Luis Fernando testified. “*He never annoyed us even though he always talked about the same thing—God.*”

Following his visit to the Trappist abbey San Isidro de Dueñas when he was nineteen, there was only one thing he desired—to become a Trappist! There, under the gaze of the Heavenly Mistress and among the silence of the monks, he found his earthly paradise, a place where you do not have to speak to love and understand one another.

His aristocratic friends and acquaintances marveled at Rafael’s heroic decision to join a

Trappist monastery, trading all the comforts of his wealthy family for the poverty of one of the strictest religious orders and forfeiting a promising future. Nevertheless, he was aware, “*God gives us everything; and we, when we give Him a little, we immediately call it a sacrifice. ... The real sacrifice would be to still be bound to the world.*”

What was much more difficult for his social, joyful nature was to surrender “*the true affection of many people*”, above all, that of his wonderful parents.

The valiant Rafael said however, “*Christians don’t say goodbye. God is their goal, and with Him we will all meet again for all of eternity. What are a few years compared to that? Nothing! It seems like a long time to us because we are so impatient.*”

So, the Trappist monastery, which the 23-year-old entered in 1934, became a place of joy for his soul, yet for his nature “*a purgatory on earth, where I can be purified and sanctified.*” Upon receiving the white habit, he also received the name Br. Maria Rafael.

## *Four requests for acceptance in four years*

The way which God now led him is unique and, for those who do not understand how grace works in a soul who loves God, may seem contradictory. Yet for Rafael, his many painful experiences of “homelessness” were in a certain

way necessary in order for him to mature to an astonishing sanctity in just four years.

So, God permitted that the young man, after scarcely four months in his beloved monastery, contract serious diabetes and, to the deep pain of

everyone, have to leave. *“I thought I would die of grief.”* In great darkness, and yet willingly, Rafael surrendered himself into God’s hands. *“Man asks, ‘Lord, why are you doing this?’ And Jesus seems to say, ‘Trust Me! You are my children. In order to reach the kingdom of My Father, you can neither go alone nor show others the way; I will guide you. Follow Me, even when it contradicts your plans!’”* After a sorrowful year and a half in the world, the 25-year-old, as soon as his health permitted, asked to be accepted anew in the monastery.

Six months later, in the summer of 1936, the

*R*afael’s personal cross, which would soon lead him to eternity, was his illness. It constantly progressed, accompanied by serious bouts of weakness; and in February 1937, he had to leave the monastery again so that he could be better cared for at home. *“On this third occasion of removing my habit and dressing in worldly attire ... I saw God’s hand so clearly that it was one and the same for me. Now I am aware that God neither abandons me nor tests me, rather He loves me.”*

After ten months with his family, Rafael finally requested acceptance for the fourth time into San Isidro, knowing well that the loneliness of the infirmary awaited him there. He consciously offered this for Spain which was in the midst of a bloody civil war.

On Easter Sunday 1938, the abbot handed him the Trappist habit as an expression of his appreciation. The 27-year-old Rafael wrote his brother Leopoldo a letter in which he described a little painting he had done and included with a

Spanish Civil War broke out. Rafael was drafted by the military and had to leave the abbey a second time.

Declared unfit for service, he soon returned to his monastery after tearing himself away anew from his dear family. He understood even better, *“What’s the difference if we are first or last when the place we take on earth is the one which God has chosen for us? Let us readily accept it! Let us love our place on earth because it is God’s will! ... It is fleeting; it has no meaning for eternity which is our true fatherland, eternity with God.”*

letter. *“It depicts a monk who contemplates the world atop a high rock. And since he thirsts for Divine Love and he has a longing for Heaven, he can do nothing other than call out, ‘I am a stranger and a pilgrim here on earth.’ Dearest Leopoldo, we are truly pilgrims, whether we want to be or not. Why should we build our dwelling here? Let us consider this earth on which the foolish set their hope, on which they wage their wars and in which they greedily stash their perishable and miserable treasures, like the little monk in the painting! Blessed is he, dear brother, who truly considers himself a foreigner in this world and dreams only of God and of his true fatherland! His life will pass in peaceful tranquility because there is peace only in a heart that is detached from everything.”*

It would be the last letter to his family; Rafael had reached his goal. *“Don’t delay Lord, Your servant Rafael is in a hurry to be with You, to see Mary!”*

*“Lord I ask You for nothing because I have everything, and that is You!”*

“In the monastery, we Trappists have a consolation which is very unknown to the world. Here, in God’s house and far from the clamor of man, one experiences in a tangible way how brief everything is that takes place in the course of time. ... The Trappist monk no longer worries about what was ... what is the end for the world is the beginning for a monk. Everything comes, everything goes ... only God is eternal.” The young monk Br. Maria Rafael from Castile entered his longed-for “Land of Rest” with a smile on his lips on April 26, 1938, nine days after Easter. He was canonized on October 11, 2009 by Pope Benedict XVI.

Translated from: *Nur Gast auf Erden?* Rafael Arnáiz Barón.  
Mystiker und Mönch, Erstmögliche deutsche Gesamtausgabe seiner Schriften, Bernardus-Verlag, Langwaden

# Were You Ever Mistaken?

*We have all been asked the question, “Does Heaven really exist?” be it with the dying, be it in a conversation with colleagues or with neighbors.*

*In our society, in which Christianity is increasingly losing strength, doubts are raised about the belief in life after death and the reality of Heaven.*

*Fr. Richard Puhlinger painfully experienced this when he was called to a dying man in Bavaria, Germany back in 1982.*

*He tells us about it.*

*I* had gone to visit one of my students at the hospital and was just on the way out the door when a sister ran after me and asked if I still had a minute to administer the Anointing of the Sick. According to the doctor’s prognosis, an 80-year-old man would not survive the night; the patient’s daughter therefore had asked to call for a priest. The sister added that the man wanted to have nothing to do with God, the Church or the Faith and would possibly send me away.

“Would you go to him anyway?” she hesitantly asked me.

“Yes, why not, what can happen to me? All he can do is send me away.”

When I entered the room and the dying man recognized me as a priest, his first reaction was,

*I*n my heart, I pleaded with the Holy Spirit, Our Lady and the Guardian Angels to help me so that I would not have to leave the room before things were put in order. After my long, unsuccessful efforts, I put one last question to the dying man, “In your lifetime, have you ever made a mistake?”

At least he was honest, “Oh yes, many times!”

“What if you are making a mistake now, in this decisive hour? You claim there is no God, but what if there is? You say there is no Heaven, and what if there is? No Purgatory, no Hell—but what if they do exist? I’ll make you an offer. I will listen to your confession, administer the Anointing of the Sick, give you

“Has the time come already?”

How should I answer him? I just said, “God alone knows if the time has come.”

“I don’t believe in Him anyway. When it’s over, it’s over!”

I politely answered him, “That’s the difference between the two of us. I believe in God and that death is not the end of life. Life continues elsewhere, there is a Heaven, a Purgatory and there is also a Hell.”

For nearly an hour, I tried in angelic tongues to bring the patient closer to the truth and the beauty of our Faith.

The result? He did not budge an inch from his convictions. “There is no God and with death, it is all over!”

*the plenary indulgence and bring you Holy Communion. If there is really nothing after death, you have not lost a thing. If there is something, however, you’ve won it all.”*

The old man started to cry and said, “I don’t know how to confess anymore. My last confession was at my Confirmation.”

Then, with my help, he made a general confession, received the Anointing of the Sick, the plenary indulgence and the Savior Himself.

Following Holy Communion, he took my hand and asked, “Father, would you pray something with me?”

“Of course. Do you know the Our Father?”

“No!”

*“The Hail Mary?”*

*“No.”*

Then he suddenly started to pray, *“Jesus Child, come to me, make a good boy of me. My heart is small, no one at all can come in but You, my dearest Jesus Child. My mother*

*always prayed that prayer with us children!”*

Then he shared with me that his mother had prayed for his conversion her whole life. Her dying wish was that her son reconcile with God and the Church. And the Lord answered her prayer. That night the newly converted left this earth.

Fr. Richard Puhinger is a Missionary of the Precious Blood and is currently living in Kufstein, Austria where he gives retreats and leads pilgrimages.

## *I Draw the Veils Aside for You*

*St. Faustina, the herald of God’s merciful love, wrote in her diary about Heaven—which she often called her “home”—many wonderful words of Jesus and a deep, enlightened understanding.*

*No wonder these “Heavenly insights” broaden the spiritual horizon of countless readers!*

*A*t the beginning of her life in the convent, Faustina described a dream in which Heaven was promised to her. *“I was still a novice at the time and was going through some difficulties which I did not know how to overcome. ... I made novenas to various saints, but the situation grew more and more difficult.”* Then she had the idea to pray to St. Thérèse of Lisieux, to whom she had a great devotion before entering the convent.

*“On the fifth day of the novena, I dreamed of Saint Thérèse, ... she began to comfort me, saying that I should not be worried about this matter, but should trust more in God. ... At that*

*moment, a great joy filled my soul, and I said to her, ‘You are a saint?’*

*“‘Yes,’ she answered, ‘I am a saint. Trust that this matter will be resolved in three days.’*

*“And I said, ‘Dear sweet Thérèse, tell me, shall I go to Heaven?’*

*“And she answered, ‘Yes, you will go to Heaven, Sister.’*

*“‘And will I be a saint?’*

*“... ‘Yes, you will be a saint just as I am, but you must trust in the Lord Jesus.’”* On the third day, all the difficulties disappeared just as Thérèse had said; St. Faustina never forgot this dream!

*S*t. Faustina understood her vocation always more profoundly, *“I will praise God for His infinite goodness, and I will strive to bring other souls to know and glorify the inexpressible and incomprehensible mercy of God.”* She drew strength for this great task from her daily reception of Holy Communion, and the Eucharistic Lord taught her in these moments.

*“See, I have left My Heavenly throne to become united with you. What you see is just a tiny part. ... How amazed will your heart be when you see Me in all My glory. But I want to tell you that eternal life must begin already, here on earth through Holy Communion. Each Holy Communion makes you more capable of communing with God throughout eternity.”*



*At other times, Jesus made her soul aware, “you are not yet in your homeland. ... Remember that the days of your exile will pass quickly, and with them the possibility of earning merit for Heaven. I expect from you, My child, a great number of souls who will glorify My mercy for all eternity.”*

St. Faustina complied with the Lord’s expectations. *“I often communicate with persons who are dying and obtain the divine mercy for them. Oh, how great is the goodness of God, greater than we can understand. There are moments and there are mysteries of the divine mercy over which the Heavens are astounded. Let our judgment of souls cease, for God’s mercy upon them is extraordinary. ... Oh, how astonished I am that some people deceive themselves, saying: There is no eternity!”*

She was astonished because she knew about

the Lord’s great promise, *“No soul that has approached Me has ever gone away unconsoled. All misery gets buried in the depths of My mercy, and every saving and sanctifying grace flows from this fountain. ... Be assured that the grace of eternal salvation for certain souls in their final moment depends on your prayer. ... Sooner would Heaven and earth turn into nothingness than would My mercy not embrace a trusting soul.”*

By corresponding, Faustina compiled a treasure of spiritual graces and may now *“mediate between Heaven and earth,”* as Jesus promised.

*“I feel certain that my mission will not come to an end upon my death, but will begin. O doubting souls, I will draw aside for you the veils of Heaven to convince you of God’s goodness. ... This is my task—here and in eternity.”*

## *I’m Going to a Better Place*

Whether or not Sedley Alley, a murderer who was sentenced to death in Tennessee, USA, ever encountered the writings of St. Faustina in his cell or if she played a role in the Christian passing of this violent criminal, we will only know on the “other side”. One thing is certain, though, the consoling words of Jesus in the diary of St. Faustina also apply to Sedley Alley: *“My mercy is greater than your sins and those of the entire world. Who can measure the extent of my goodness? For you I descended from Heaven*

*to earth; for you I allowed myself to be nailed to the cross. ... Your misery has disappeared in the depths of My mercy. Do not argue with Me about your wretchedness. You will give me pleasure if you hand over to me all your troubles and griefs. I shall heap upon you the treasures of My grace.”*

In Sedley’s life, it was indeed a happy ending. In the truest sense of the word, he was one of those laborers of the final hour, an extreme case in the Lord’s field.

*S*hortly before the Sunday of Divine Mercy in the year 2000, our Sr. Michaela visited five prisoners on Death Row at the high security prison in Nashville, bringing them the prayer card of the *Mother of All Nations*. She was allowed to speak with them personally in a cell, not behind bullet proof glass and with a microphone as rela-

tives usually do.

“Going there, I was immediately struck by two realities. On one side, it was like entering Hell, but at the same time, I could tangibly feel God’s mercy. Sedley, one of the five, heard voices and, on top of that, creepily spoke to himself in six different voices. His violent crime, which thanks

be to God I only heard about after I had met with him, was downright demonic. Yet like a lamb he sat silently before me and could not look me in the eyes. I started praying for him and I never forgot him.

“I had the opportunity to visit my five ‘friends’ again five years later, during Advent 2005. Although you are not allowed to take anything into Death Row, I had the great wish this time to bring the image of *Jesus of Divine Mercy* to the inmates. I trusted in His promise, *‘Not in the beauty of the color, nor of the brush lies the greatness of this image, but in My grace. ... I promise that the soul that will venerate this image will not perish ... especially at the hour of death.’*

“Admittedly, Sedley’s was no voluntary death, but he learned to accept his approaching execution.

When his lawyer offered him a Bible a few months later, Sedley calmly answered, *‘No, I don’t need it. I have the picture that Sister gave to me.’* From the very first moment, he carried the 2” x 5” (4cm x 10cm) image of Jesus of Divine Mercy in his pocket and frequently looked at it. One day he said, *‘He looks at me each time and makes me understand that I should be baptized.’* It is like a miracle that Sedley, a murderer, prepared by the prison chaplain, received the Sacrament of Baptism at Easter 2006. Two months later, after 21 years in prison, the 50-year-old was executed by lethal injection.”

## *Sedley Alley’s final words:*

“I cry not for myself but for those I leave behind. I am going to a much better place where I will find and know true peace. It is the ones I leave behind that I am concerned for. This world is rough and light is dim in it. Where I am going is full of light. The world is tough and there is a lack of compassion and love here. Where I am going there is an abundance of Love, Compassion and Forgiveness. This world has always felt foreign to me. Where I am going is our home, our true home.

“I pray that my children will find peace and be able to move on with their lives. I pray that they will find peace in knowing that my pain is through and that I am going to a much better place.

“The main thing I want to say to my children,

family, and friends is this, find peace and happiness, live a long life full of love, forgiveness and hope. To my children, my family, my friends and to those that hate and despise me, to my last breath you all will remain in my prayers and thoughts.

“I hold fast to one prayerful thought, that my children, the rest of my family and friends and those that hate me will now be able to find the peace of God that passeth all understanding.

“All that has been killed here is my body. A body that was worn out and tired and ready to rest. All that has happened is that my spirit has been allowed to go home and to be with our Lord. To my last breath I pray for this world and forgive those I leave behind.”

# Jesus, the Gate to the Eternal Homeland

*I*n December 2011, a handsome 21-year-old man, Tomáš Völgyi, climbed out of his car at our Motherhouse in Stará Halič, Slovakia. He had packed up a bunch of clothing that he wanted to give to us for the poor children. Through this act of charity, his life changed radically. Sr. Veronika greeted him with a smile, took his plastic bags and, to thank him, gave him the Lady of All Nations prayer card. Tomáš took courage and started to tell his story. *“One month ago, I had a serious operation because they discovered a tumor in my brain. I grew up without the Faith, and I don’t even know if I am baptized. Maybe my believing grandmother secretly baptized me, but that is merely a rumor. Under Communism, everything had to be done in secret since my grandpa belonged to the party.”*

It turned out that Tomáš’ father restores furniture, and since the sisters in the art studio were having a hard time with wood worms in some old statues, she asked him for advice. The next day, Tomáš showed up at the Motherhouse again with a useful remedy for the sisters’ problem.

At the time, our spiritual father, Fr. Paul Maria, happened to be with us and blessed Tomáš with St. Padre Pio’s glove. At length, he explained to Tomáš the immeasurable value of coredeeming

suffering when it is carried and offered up united with Jesus. Naturally, he had never heard anything like that before and was deeply touched.

From then on, the seriously ill young man came to Holy Mass as often as he could and absorbed like a dry sponge all the truths of the Catholic Faith which were so new to him.

Since Tomáš was in imminent danger of death due to his brain tumor, the bishop gave permission to baptize him on December 23, and the following night, at Midnight Mass, to confirm him. Tomáš wanted Mother Agnes to be his godmother. Finally, he joyfully received Holy Communion. *“That was the most beautiful day of my life!”* he declared again and again.

Tomáš loved life. Girls were enamored with him, and he was passionate about cars and music. A brain tumor did not really fit into his plans.

As if he suspected something, he had always acted oddly towards cancer patients, even when he was still healthy. He told us, *“I had a phobia when I met people with cancer. Out of fear I might become infected—although I knew that this was impossible—I always avoided them. I couldn’t even shake the hand of somebody with cancer. And now I had it myself—a 3.5” (8 cm) tumor in the fourth ventricle of my brain.”*

*O*ur friend had to undergo strong radiation treatment, and then the unexpected happened. After his baptism, when he was convinced that Heaven exists and that he has a loving Father in God, a God who can also heal him, his dreadful fear of the terrible cancer disappeared. Tomáš continued to grow in the mystery of love and suffering. Just a few months after his conversion, he

wrote us a letter. *“I am always happy; I don’t feel I’ve been treated unfairly by God. So, I don’t blame him for the operation like, unfortunately, many people do. You have to preserve love in your heart, peace and humility. With humility, you have to accept the good with the painful, even if it is often hard. It is enough to use the power of prayer; then even the greatest*

*suffering can be a gift. As the discomforts of the operation awaited me, I repeated over and over again, 'The pain only lasts a moment; love, however, is eternal.' Love—it's up to us. I am happy!"*

Tomáš hoped to be healed right to the very end. Yet when he realized that this was not the will of God, he said, *"God healed me through my illness. He showed me my vocation and liberated me from the false ideals I had chased after. I have understood that suffering is my vocation."* He lived longer with his serious illness than the doctors expected. He continuously gave God his great pain for all sorts of inten-

tions: for the conversion of his family, for people in need or for helpless situations which he had heard about. With his childlike heart, Tomáš took in the graces of Faith in an exemplary way. He was convinced that God is his loving Father who entrusted him this illness as a mission. Therefore, he repeated with the greatest naturalness, *"I am truly looking forward to Heaven."*

He had learned to trust the Lord's words, *"In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you?"* On September 14, 2014, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, Jesus took him to Himself.