

Triumph of the Heart

THE LOVE OF CHRIST IMPELS US

PDF - Family of Mary

2011 (II) / No. 56

*Charity is love received and given.
As the objects of God's love,
men and women ... are called
to make themselves instruments of grace,
so as to pour forth God's charity.*
From the Encyclical Caritas in Veritate

Not with Our Own Strength

Anybody who has fallen in love knows how joyfully motivating love can be and how love gives one the strength to do great deeds. Nothing is too difficult for someone who loves. One is eager to take upon himself the burden of his beloved and is ready to make even the greatest of sacrifices.

And yet nobody can maintain such a standard. Everybody knows from their own experience how quickly we can run out of love. “*I just don't have anymore love,*” we have all said at one time or another. Where can we find this love when we truly feel that we have no more to give? At times like these we have to go to the one who can give us true love.

Dear friends, when you read this issue of *Triumph of the Heart*, “*The Love of Christ Impels Us*”, you will meet saints and people just like us. They also reached their limits, but they did not give up. They became humble petitioners, adorers before the Blessed Sacrament where divine love resides.

To put this divine love into practice which St. Paul described so beautifully in his “*Way*

of Love” (1 Cor 13), we have to allow God to give it to us. Only a God of infinite love could have the idea to make a gift of himself in the Holy Eucharist and even allow himself to be eaten.

When we receive God's heart in this simple way, he will fill us with a greater desire to help and console others. God's love inspires, impels and enables saints like Vincent de Paul and Joseph Cottolengo through concrete situations and circumstances to perform great works and start foundations. The countless challenges of everyday life can also become possibilities for us to say, “*Out of love for you, Jesus, and with your strength!*”

Mother Teresa confirms this. During Pope Paul VI's visit to the House of the Dying in 1965, he gave her the car which the American people had given him for his trip to India. Instead of selling it for a lower price, she auctioned it. The huge proceeds were enough to build a hospital for lepers. When her biographer Navin Chawla asked her, “*Where did you get the idea to auction it?*” she answered, “*If you pray, you will also have such inspirations!*”

Let us take these people who were so full of love as our models and ask ourselves how we can concretely live a dynamic love for our neighbor in our surroundings, in our family or at work! At the Final Judgment, which Jesus speaks about in Chapter 25 of St. Matthew's Gospel, God will only judge us by our love: "Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father ...

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me ...

Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me."

St. Vincent de Paul

"See how they love one another," is what they said about the first Christians in Jerusalem. Back then, seven deacons cared for the just distribution of goods so that everything was shared by everyone. Since the beginning of Christianity, dynamic love of neighbor—charity—has been active in the Church according to the Lord's word, "whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me." St. Vincent de Paul performed very impressive charitable works in 17th century France with his organizational talent. He is the patron saint of all charitable institutions, and any one of his numerous works would have been enough to make his name unforgettable.

The Creed

Kings confessed to and sought advice from Vincent de Paul (1581-1660), a whole generation of priests received spiritual formation from him, many saints proceeded from his religious order and entire provinces had him to thank for saving them from starvation and the plague. Yet in his early years, this farmer's son cared only about having a well-paying parish, a title, recognition and a career. The more the penniless priest hunted richness and honor, however, the more his plans were shattered. The 28-year-old priest finally moved to Paris

in 1609 with a mountain of debts, and it seemed his lot would continue to haunt him, but in reality his conversion was quickly approaching. Vincent de Paul was publicly accused of theft and defamed in the highest circles of the Church. For six months he remained silent, suffered and prayed until his innocence was proven. This incident was an inner purification which contributed to him abandoning his thoughts of a career and in a short time becoming an exemplary priest. Vincent had just started doing things only

for God's glory when he received a secure position in 1610 with Queen Marguerite de Valois. As almsgiver, he distributed a third of her wealth to the poor on her behalf and visited the sick in the hospitals. In this way, Vincent developed his life's true mission.

In the court of the highly educated Catholic queen, who was visited regularly by the best scientists, artists and princes of the Church, he met a famous theologian who had been suffering from doubts about the Faith for a long time. Since none of their discussions seemed to help, Vincent offered his own faith to God for his suffering brother. Suddenly the theologian found his way back to the Faith.

Vincent, however, was now oppressed by such an opposition to the Faith that he wrote out the Creed on a piece of cardboard and from then on, wore it as a badge over his heart.

Whenever he felt especially tried, he made an act of faith and placed his hand over the Creed which he had written. Vincent carried this spiritual weight unnoticed by others for three years. Then he experienced that his doubts about the Faith always subsided whenever he lovingly accepted a poor, sick person. In the end, he made a vow which he kept until his death. *"I will dedicate my whole life to the service of the poor,"* he promised, and from that moment on, he was able to fully believe again with a happy heart.

*Have a heart for the poor –
your peace of heart will be without measure.*

*A*t the age of 32, Vincent de Paul became the teacher for the son of the rich and pious Count Gondi, the commander of the French fleet and general of their galleys. On his estate he encountered dire poverty and religious neglect of the French country folk.

"One Sunday, as I was vesting for Holy Mass, I was brought news that on a remote farm about 15 minutes from the church a whole family was lying sick and in terrible need. I was very moved,

and in the homily I commended them so much to the congregation that God touched their hearts." That very afternoon, crowds of people rushed to the outlying farm with food and other necessities. Vincent, who understood the situation immediately, made arrangements to have food brought to the sick regularly.

His first service to the needy, the *"Association of Charity"* started small but spread like wildfire throughout France.

All things to all

*F*or Vincent de Paul, suffering and countless other disgraces were always a sign from God for him to act. That was also the case

in 1619 when Count Gondi placed the galley prisoners under his pastoral care. Before the criminals were sent to the galleys, they were

often held for months in the Paris prisons where they were treated like animals in dark, rotten cells. Covered with vermin and plagued by rats, they crouched in heavy chains on damp straw which they would even eat because they were so hungry. Fear of the galleys made them so crazy that many mutilated themselves so that they would be of no use in the galleys. The saint was shaken by the horrifying conditions.

The prisoners could not believe their eyes when the simple priest came to visit them, called them with a smile his children, bandaged their wounds and brought them something to eat. Shortly thereafter he saw to it that they received a humane place to stay where he cared, consoled and taught the thieves and murderers. In the beginning, Parisian society only shook their heads over the matter. As more and more prisoners who had lost any trace of faith in God converted, however, Vincent de Paul was soon admired in the court as the “*Charmeur de tigres*”, the “*Tiger Charmer*”. “*Only when I had suffered their pain with them, had compassion for their misfortune and kissed their chains did they listen to me and praise God,*” Vincent testified. It was not long before it became fashionable for the nobility to visit the prisons in person for their own conviction—something which Vincent cleverly used by getting the ladies who were moved with compassion to help him in the prisons.

As pastor, the saint also visited hundreds of prisoners on the ships, listened patiently to their complaints, kissed their shaven heads and consoled them all with words so mild that it eventually softened each one of them. As long as he was in the galleys, no guard dared to

swear or to beat the prisoners. Compelled by an inner fire, the saint even took the place of a despaired family father and was chained to the rowing bench. Only after weeks was the secret exchange discovered, and into his old age deep wounds on his legs were a silent testimony to his voluntary service of slavery.

“If God gave our first missions some blessing, it was only because we were friendly, humble and sincere to everybody,” Vincent de Paul explained modestly.

As a matter of fact, nobody could resist his loving manner. Therefore, he always called successfully on Anna of Austria, the mother of the future King Louis XIV, when he needed help with his welfare programs for abandoned children or the insane, for his beggar or refugee projects, for schools, hospitals, retirement homes or for his newly founded seminary for the renewal of the clergy.

Once in a hallway of the castle, motioning toward the precious necklace of the queen, he asked with a smile, “*Majesty, can you transform these stones into bread?*”

The queen understood, unfastened the chain from her neck and in no time the transformation took place. Altogether the enormous sum of 50 million gold Franks passed through the hands of the “*Father of the Poor*”, and it is not surprising that his heart which became so similar to the meek and humble heart of the Lord has remained incorrupt to this day and is venerated as a precious relic in Rue du Bac, Paris, in the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity.

*We are called
to let God's love become visible.*

Vincent de Paul, whose goodness and cheerful demeanor fascinated everybody, was, by nature, more inclined to be severe or melancholic, "I was as prickly as a blackberry bush. So I turned to God and begged him incessantly to take this dry, unpleasant character from me and give me a friendly, gentle spirit. Through God's grace I have given up somewhat my gloomy nature."

The House of Divine Providence

Joseph Benedict Cottolengo (1786-1842) worked in the Corpus Domini Church in the center of Turin, Italy, as a beloved confessor and zealous pastor.

Above all, his generous heart could not refuse the poor, whom his mother had taught him as a child to love.

Despite his good works, Cottolengo's priestly life seemed unfulfilled.

Restlessly searching, he withdrew more and more.

He was plagued by scruples and depression,

but then he read the biography of St. Vincent de Paul.

The apostle of charity's love for his neighbor brought him a new enthusiasm; nevertheless, he remained melancholic not yet having the strength for such a dynamic love. His life needed a dramatic intervention.

Lord, what do you want from me?

*T*he intervention took place on September 2, 1827, when the 41-year-old was called from the Corpus Domini Church to the dying Joan Gonnet, who was lying in the stable of a nearby tavern where the city guards usually brought homeless people who were ill and troublesome drunkards. The 35-year-old woman was traveling from Milan, Italy to Lyon, France with her husband and their three children when she contracted a fever and needed a doctor immediately.

The hospital had turned her away because she was late in her pregnancy and the screams

of a newborn baby would have disturbed the peace; and she was refused in the house where women normally gave birth because she had a fever. Cottolengo, who had hurried to help, had to watch helplessly as the young mother, after receiving Last Rites, died in this miserable shelter followed just minutes later by her newborn baby girl.

Shaken, he returned to the church, fell on his knees before the tabernacle and prayed, "Why God did you make me witness this? What do you want from me? I have to do

something that such a tragedy does not happen again.” Lord, what do you want from me?

A short time later, he had the bells rung, lit all the candles on the altar to Our Lady, intoned the Litany of Loreto to the surprise of all the people who had hurried in and he exclaimed, “*The grace has come! The grace is victorious! May the Blessed Virgin be praised!*” Now he knew God’s plan. From then on he was to take care of those for whom nobody cared. And so began Cottolengo’s great work to which he dedicated the remaining 15 years of his life.

With new vigor, he rented three rooms, although he did not have a cent in his pocket. One of his penitents paid for the first five beds and Cottolengo was full of trust, “*Divine providence brought us the beds so it will also take care of the ill people.*” Three years later, more than 200 sick people could be cared for, and doctors and pharmacists helped voluntarily.

When cholera broke out four years later and the neighbors accused the hospital of being an epidemic center, Cottolengo had to close its doors. He did not lose hope though and said with a smile, “*Cabbage has to be replanted if it is to grow better.*” Just seven months later, in 1832, in the suburb of Valdocco, he opened the “*Little House of Divine Providence*”, with two rooms, a stable and a barn. The first thing he did was hang a sign over the door with his motto, “*The love of Christ impels us!*”

Only four weeks after they had moved in, the Little House was too small. Yet in just a short time, Cottolengo was able to acquire the neighboring hat factory and several houses. His first assistants prophesied back then, “*Oh, this is only a little beginning, and the Little House will become great. It is like a mustard seed whose destiny is to grow and turn into a large tree. The time will come when thousands will eat the bread of divine providence in these rooms.*” And so it came to pass despite opposition, derision and slander. “*I am just a laborer of divine providence, and I am more convinced about this*

providence than about the existence of Turin,” said Cottolengo always modest about himself. Impelled and inspired by the needs, he founded “*new families*” as he called the homes for his “*beloved children and pearls*”: penniless sick people, elderly, orphans, the blind, deaf and dumb, epileptics, handicapped and mentally ill. At the same time, he founded 15 religious families for their physical and spiritual care, including several communities for contemplative adoration as well as a congregation of priests.

From the beginning, numerous volunteers assisted them including Don Bosco who had recently come to Turin as a young priest and would later found the Salesian order in Valdocco. At Cottolengo’s invitation, he began serving the poor there in 1841 by listening to the patients’ confession and taking care of the invalid children. Once, when the 26-year old priest came to help, Cottolengo touched his cassock and said jokingly, “*This material is too light. See if you cannot find a more resistant one because many young people will grab hold of this robe.*”

The holy founder never grew tired of repeating to his spiritual children, “*What is given for the poor must also be given immediately to the poor. If we save something, divine providence will not send us anything else because it knows we still have something.*” If at any time they did not have the necessary means, he had the whole house searched for the reason. If an empty bed was found, the assistants had to go out and search for somebody who was ill. Once the empty bed was occupied, or at other times only after the leftover food or medicine had been given out, did new gifts arrive.

According to the motto, “*We have only to give out what providence gives us today and not to think about tomorrow,*” Cottolengo distributed any left over money every night before he went to bed as an expression of his trust. “*Be assured,*” he liked to say, “*that divine provi-*

dence will never fail. It has never gone bankrupt. It is not more difficult for it to feed 5,000 people than 500. If something is lacking, it can only be a result of our lack of trust.” Therefore, Cottolengo never lost his cheerfulness when worries or creditors pestered him. Indeed, he often prayed through the night, always convinced, “Prayer is the first and most important task in the Little House,” the key, so to say, to the treasury of divine providence

*I*t happened that when things were especially tight, he trusted all the more, admitting many more poor petitioners, making contracts for new houses and once even starting construction on a women’s hospital although at the time no financial help was in sight. “The Little House moves ahead as long as it does not have anything. There will be no debts after my death,” he foretold. Indeed, after the death of the 56-year-old founder, all his creditors can-

celed his debts and today, nearly 170 years later, there are over 100 branches worldwide. In Turin, the Little House turned into a 22 acre section of the city with clinics, modern laboratories and therapy centers. The laundry building alone occupies more than two acres and the kitchen is the equivalent of a gymnasium. From there, more than 500 homeless people are fed daily, and just as in Cottolengo’s time, the Gospel is read before serving them bread and soup.

As in the time of its foundation, the Little House today has no capital, no guaranteed income, no subsidies and no budget. It lives totally from God’s loving providence. Here, around 15,000 people with no means have a place to stay, are treated and cared for. It should not be forgotten that along with the 2000 Cottolengo Sisters, also doctors, therapist and volunteers work for free according to their holy founder’s rule of life, “The love of Christ impels us.”

A Holy Helper for Our Time

Emma Uffing (1914-1955), later known as Sr. Maria Euthymia, was born in Halverde, Germany. She joined the Clemens Sisters in Munster, Germany at the age of 20. This deep soul never shined through attractive charismas or ecstasies, much more her strength came from the unnoticeable: from serving and remaining silent, from listening and from rejoicing with or being compassionate to the others. And yet as hidden as Sr. Euthymia lived, she became a popular intercessor shortly after her death. In the Motherhouse’s archives, there are 150,000 letters and cards from around the world reporting healing, conversion and various forms of help. Altogether, there have been more than 45,000 prayers answered through the intercession of this beloved German nun.

The Angel of Love

*S*r. Euthymia worked from 1936 to 1947 as a devoted nurse at St. Vincent’s Hospital in Dinslaken. Although she was just 20 years old, she did unbelievable things. Patients who

had been away from God and the Church for 30 or 40 years found their way back through her. She wrote, “The poor, sick world, how much it is calling for our help. Nothing should be

too much for us; no failure should deter us. True, there are sacrifices here and there, but love is stronger and can overcome anything. It's all for the good Lord."

During World War II, a wooden barrack served as an isolation ward where often the majority of the 50 patients were children. During the frequent air raid sirens, this nun carried the little children untiringly to the bomb shelters and helped relieve them of their fears by playing, telling stories and praying. They lovingly called her Aunt Timmi. One of Sr. Euthymia's assistants testified, "*She always gave her instructions in the form of a request. Her quiet, calm manner, her fine, exemplary way of doing things made an unforgettable impression on me. You had to like her.*

Two sisters visited Sr. Euthymia when she was sick and brought her beautiful passion flowers. She smiled with tears in her eyes; the sick sister herself had become a flower of suffering. She repeated thankfully, "May God repay you!"

Her compassionate love could intuitively feel when others were in need. She wrote to her brother Herman, "*If you could only take the place as these poor people's mother then they wouldn't seem like such orphans! I want to bring them lots and lots of love!"*

The memories of one French prisoner, Leon Clemont, show how successful she was with this wish. "*Dear little Sr. Euthymia received me like a mother. 'My dear sick people,' she loved to say. I often heard her praying for us prisoners, 'since,' as she said, 'it doesn't hurt as much when you ask the Lord.' She showed an infinite goodness to suffering strangers. She had the heart of a saint. By showing us great and benevolent love, she was a model especially for our Russian brothers. I saw with my own eyes how these men really turned back to God whom they did not know enough, and only Sr. Euthymia could teach them to love him so much."*

Even after Sr. Euthymia's brother was killed in

Through her, I found the way to my religious vocation."

In 1943, the St. Barbara barrack was made into a ward for the prisoners of war with contagious diseases. Sr. Euthymia was responsible for up to 80 serious cases at a time, most of who arrived starving, miserable and dirty. "*The Angel of Love*", as they soon called her, was there for each one of them.

One of her sisters said, "*She always had a little place left. To take care of them, she set up areas among the ruins and in the hallways with lawn chairs and mattresses.*" They often asked astonished, "*How does Sr. Euthymia know that more Russians have arrived?*" as she stood by with warm blankets even though nobody had called her.

Russia, her loving disposition towards the Russian prisoners did not change. She was true to the resolution,

"To win somebody's heart, you have to give your own heart in return."

Naturally she struggled to carry the sick people up and down the stairs with the helper assigned to her, a French prisoner named Fr. Emile Eche. She noted on a page in her handwritten prayer book, "*Lord, help me because I need strength to smile in spite of my tears. Lord, give me strength on my way, a smile and a never-tiring, sure step!"*

For over two years, Fr. Eche followed her example. "*It was her mission to proclaim Christ through her life. Some of them called her Mother as they were dying because she was a source of peace through her Christian love. With a smile, she carried her cross which practically became a never-ending Good Friday."*

*E*ighty-five percent of Dinslaken was destroyed by bombing in 1945, and with it also St. Vincent's Hospital. Consequently, Sr. Euthymia was put in charge of the laundry. When she, a nurse through and through, heard about the unexpected change, she turned pale but quickly composed herself and said calmly, "It is good like this. If the superior thinks I can do it, then I'll go to the laundry. We do everything for God."

Three years later, Mother Ottokara sent the 33-year-old to the Motherhouse and the Rafael Clinic in Munster for the same difficult responsibility. "There has to be a sister there who loves peace in an extraordinary way." When the head doctor in Dinslaken heard about the transfer, he told her superior, "The little sister you took from us could also have been left here. We could also use the little saint."

*W*ork was hard among the mountains of wash, the stuffy air and strong odors. One of the nursing students recounted, "So much love and joy radiated from her. Often, when something is difficult for me, I suddenly see the face of this sister before me, which was frequently wet with perspiration. She never refused one of our requests. She did not do anything great, but precisely the little things, the lowliest tasks, are what made this sister so loved and valued in the eyes of all those who knew her. I wish I could be just a tiny bit like Sr. Euthymia."

*H*er boundless readiness to help was a problem for some of her sisters. "Don't always be so obliging and don't let the others get used to always having their wishes fulfilled!" Sr. Euthymia accepted the criticism silently, and in the evening, after a hard day at work, took over doing the dishes alone for all the sisters who wanted to go sing in the Motherhouse choir. "Sure I can do it," she repeated to each of the sisters who asked her for this favor.

*S*r. Euthymia drew the strength for these countless services of love from prayer. Mother Ottokara testified, "I know she worked according to the principle, 'Everything out of love for and united with Jesus!' If it was too hard for her physically to fill the machines with the wet wash, she prayed under her breath, 'Dear Jesus, come, help me!'" She spent her few free hours on Sunday in front of the tabernacle where she refueled spiritually because she wanted "to always, always make the Savior happy". When Sr. Euthymia was diagnosed with cancer in July 1955, the doctors were shaken to hear that she had worked up to that point. "Sometimes I almost couldn't go from one laundry machine to the other," Sr. Euthymia admitted and proceeded directly from the laundry to the section for the sick on the third floor where she suffered greatly for the last eight weeks of her life. At the age of only 41, she died calmly with the words, "Dear Savior, accept me".

*For 40 years Mother Teresa
worked without differentiating between caste, nationality,
culture or religion; she was faithful to her motto:
"Everything we do —pray, work, suffer— we do for Jesus and with Jesus.
We serve him and we love him in the poor."*

“The Slum-Sister”

Mother Teresa, who after her first rounds through the streets of Calcutta quickly became known to all as “*The Slum Sister*”, recounted at a Catholic Congress in Berlin, Germany in 1980 the impressive encounter with a dying woman when she first began her mission: “Thirty years ago, as I was passing through the streets alone with Jesus, I found a woman, half eaten by rats and ants, covered with filth and full of worms lying in front of the Campbell Hospital. I couldn’t look at her, couldn’t touch her nor come any closer; I just ran away. As I ran, however, I prayed to Our Lady, ‘Mary, my mother, give me a heart so pure and so beautiful, so pure and so immaculate, so full of love and humility that

I may be able to receive Jesus, to touch Jesus, to love Jesus in that ruined body.’

So I went back and picked her up off the street, and I knew that it was him, the Lord, whom I lifted. That was the sign that Christ’s love is greater than my weakness. I carried her to the hospital where they didn’t want to admit her, but because I was so insistent, they finally just laid her on a mattress on the floor. The woman died a couple hours later.

Back then I decided to find a place for the dying where I would care for them myself. If I hadn’t picked up that dying woman, our Society would have died.”

The place of pure hearts

In 1952, Calcutta’s city administration gave Mother Teresa a building behind the temple of the goddess Kali in the middle of the Hindu temple area Kalighat. She set up there her House for the Dying which later became famous all over the world.

She often recounted in her public speeches, “*Once, I pulled a man out of the gutter whose body was covered with wounds and there were worms crawling out of the wounds. At Nir-mal Hriday I began to wash him and treat his open wounds. He paid attention to what I was doing with half-open eyes; to my surprise he didn’t complain. ‘Does it hurt a lot?’ I asked him. ‘Yes,’ he replied and added softly, ‘but I am happy because I have never lived in a house. I lived like an animal, but now, surrounded by so much love, I will die like an angel.’*”

In the House for the Dying it is quiet and clean, and the sisters preach through their actions. Unnoticed, an atheist observed for a long

period of time one of the sisters who was attending to another dying man who had been carried in from the streets. He was so touched that he told Mother Teresa, “*I came here god-less, but I experienced God’s love with my own eyes through the hands of this sister who took care of a poor sick person with tenderness and love. Yes, Mother, I believe now!*”

Although Mother Teresa suffered an interior darkness for all the decades that followed the founding of her apostolate for the poor (see Triumph of the Heart #46), she clung with all her might to Jesus saying, “*Holy Mass is the spiritual nourishment which sustains me. I could not live a single day or a single hour of my life without it. In the Host, I see Christ in the form of bread; in the slums I see him in the pitiful form of the poor, in their wretched bodies, in the children and in the dying.*” Therefore, when she was invited to open a mission station in the Muslim country of Yemen in 1975, she posed

only one condition, “We will come if we are allowed to have a priest to celebrate Holy Mass every day. Otherwise we will not survive.”

She received permission, and her sisters started working with the lepers. A Muslim mufti commented, “All these years I thought Jesus was just a prophet like Mohammed. Now, however, I am convinced that Jesus must be God since he has made these sisters capable of such a great love to the poorest people.”

Mother Teresa had another important experience in India. “I was going to a Eucharistic Congress with some sisters. I saw a man and a woman dying on the street. I stopped and said to the sisters, ‘Go to the congress, I will stay here and help them.’ Many people were upset that I didn’t

come. Later, I gently explained, ‘I went out to adore Jesus in the form of bread, but I found him on the street in the form of those two who were dying. I stayed to adore him.’”

She often encouraged her young sisters, “‘If you really want to grow in love, then go to the Holy Eucharist, go to Eucharistic Adoration.’ Earlier, we had an hour of Adoration every week in our congregation. In 1973, we decided to do an hour of Adoration every day. We have a lot of work, but since we started going to Adoration every day, our love for Jesus has become much deeper, our love for one another more understanding, our love for the poor more compassionate and the number of vocations has doubled.”

The Holy Eucharist, th the source of our strength

Not for a million dollars!

*I*n 1957, Mother Teresa began with her sisters to take care of lepers who, because of their illness, had lost their families, homes, friends and work. In Titagarh, close to Calcutta, she opened her “first practice” under a tree on an overgrown plot. It soon became a mobile clinic on a truck and finally the first of more than 100 modern centers in India where nearly 200,000 patients are treated every year, for now a days leprosy can be stopped and even healed.

Back then an American journalist who watched her care for a severely dismembered leper said, “I wouldn’t do that for a million dollars!” “I wouldn’t do it for a million dollars either,” she said with a smile, “but I do it out of love for God. This poor person who is suffering is the Body of Christ for me.”

From the beginning, Mother Teresa wanted Not for a million dollars!

An Indian government official observed once with Mother Teresa: “We do the same social work as you, but there is a great difference between us— we do it for something, you do it for someone.” ©1995 by Christian Brandstätter Verlagsges.m.b.H. these outcasts “to feel that they are also needed”. That is why there were soon dozens of looms set up in Titagarh where the lepers weaved white saris with a blue edge, 4,000 of which found their way to the Missionaries of Charity in one year.

*T*he visit of Pope Paul VI in the 1960’s made Mother Teresa’s work well known around the world. More and more people offered their help; Mother Teresa noticed that “in Calcutta, most of them were not even Christian. Hindu students came once, for example, bringing money for the poor which

they would have used to buy the trophies for an athletic competition. Another time, a Hindu

boy who was just four years old taught me how to love more.

*An Indian government official observed once with Mother Teresa:
“We do the same social work as you, but there is a great difference between us, we do it for something, you do it for someone.”*

I do not know how, but the boy found out in his kindergarten class that I did not have any more sugar for the children. He said to his parents back home, ‘I will not eat sugar for three days. I am putting it aside for Mother Teresa.’ After three days, he came to our house, accompanied by his parents. He stood before me with the little bag of sugar he had saved. This generous gesture of a four-year-old Hindu, who could not even say my name, convinced me that every gift which we offer out of love for God immediately has an infinite value.

“There was a similar case with two newlyweds who gave me a considerable sum and explained, ‘We were married two days ago. Beforehand we decided to renounce precious saris and an extravagant dinner to bring you this money for your poor.’ When I asked them, ‘What did you do that for?’ they gave me the surprising answer, ‘You know, our love for one another is so great that we wanted to share it with the poor. This is an immense joy for us.’”

A wealthy Hindu woman also experienced the joy of sharing. She offered to help Mother Teresa, but had to admit, “You know, luxurious saris fascinate me. I buy myself a new one every month.” “And as a matter of fact,” Mother Teresa noticed, “she was wearing a beautiful sari worth 800 rupees com-

pared to mine which only cost about eight rupees. I took a moment to recollect and asked the Blessed Mother to inspire me with the best answer for this rich Hindu woman about how she can participate in our mission. I had the idea to tell her, ‘It seems to me the best thing to do would be to start with the sari. Next time, buy a sari for 500 rupees instead of 800 and use the other 300 rupees to buy saris for the poor.’ In the end, the rich Hindu woman cut back her expenditures to just 100 rupees for herself. She admitted to me that this changed her life, ‘Today I really understand what it means to share. I have the impression that I have received much more than I have given.’”

*M*other Teresa always remembered fondly the following example. One evening, a beggar insisted on speaking with her personally.

“The poor man did not ask for food or money. No, he wanted to give me what he had received from begging all day, a couple of coins in a metal bowl, not even two rupees worth. I briefly hesitated and thought, ‘If I accept it, he will go hungry this evening, but if I turn it down, I will hurt his feelings.’ So I accepted his gift and the beggar kissed my hand for joy. I knew that he had given me everything he had. This gift was more valuable to me than the Nobel Prize and all the other awards which I have received.”

You did it for me” was Mother Teresa’s “Five finger Gospel”.

Calcutta is everywhere!

During Mother Teresa’s acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, which she received in the name of all the poor, she spoke about the “leprosy of the West” which she encountered everywhere in the first world countries. “The poverty of the West is much more difficult to overcome. A person who is shut out, that feels unwanted, unloved, terrified, the person who is shunned by society - that poverty is so painful, so terrible. This is the hunger that you and I must find, and it may be in our own home.”

Then she reported that she noticed in a retirement home how all the residents just constantly stared at the door. When I asked, “Why do they do that and why don’t they smile?” one of the nurses answered, ‘they are hoping that a son or daughter will come to visit them. They are hurt because they are forgotten.’ This poverty can be found in our own homes; there too we can neglect love. Maybe in our own family we have somebody who is feeling lonely, who is feeling sick, who is feeling worried. Are we there to receive them?”

Mother Teresa had an unforgettable encounter in this regard when a rich man on the streets of London asked her if she could send her sisters to his house. The old couple was rich, but they were oppressed by a fearsome loneliness. Mother Teresa then began to

build conversation groups for old and lonely people. “The sisters let them talk, talk, talk, and they just listen. Yes, it is nice to lend your ear to someone to whom nobody wants to listen.” Mother Teresa also recounted often about a lonely, neglected man in Rome. Her sisters cleaned his apartment, bathed him and prepared him something to eat. “And yet the sisters could not get the old man to say anything. For three consecutive days, he remained silent during their visit until he finally asked for something, ‘Now that I have seen you bring God into my life, bring me now also a priest.’ And this man, who had only opened his mouth for this single, short wish, made his Confession. He was Catholic and had not been to Confession for 60 years. The next morning he died peacefully.”

Over the years, the Missionaries of Charity have spread all over the world. In their House of Mercy in Melbourne, Australia, they took in an alcoholic who had been out of work for years and had become an outcast of society. After a few weeks of detoxification, he was like a new man, and he said to the sisters, “Your love made me aware that God loves me!”

He returned home to his wife and children and started looking for work. After four weeks he brought the sisters his first paycheck and said, “Use this money to show God’s love to others like you did to me.”

Another time, Mother Teresa received a letter from a Brazilian with a high position. “He wrote me about how he had lost his faith in God and then his job as well, and it seemed to him that suicide was the only way out. As he was walking by an electronics shop he happened to see on one of the televisions our sisters caring for

the sick and dying in our House for the Dying. He wrote to me saying that after he saw this, he fell down on his knees and began to pray for the first time in many years. He made the decision to turn back to God and to trust people again. What he saw convinced him that God still loves the world today.”

An Unexpectedly Quick Answer

Emanuela Ruggeri and Marco Ballabene from Riccione, Italy experienced in an extraordinary way how God listened to them. They are convinced that a sacrifice out of love—even if it is hidden from the eyes of the world—is one of the most powerful acts of charity.

Marco fell in love with his wife Emanuela seven years ago when she gave a testimony in their prayer group about the meaning of suffering in her life. Emanuela had taken care of her very sick mother until her death. Marco wrote her an anonymous letter expressing his great esteem and love. “It seems to me that I have known you my whole life even though I have never spoken to you. ... In this painful situation I feel especially close to you. ... You are an example for all of us and a confirmation that Jesus really exists even though we don’t see him. ... I pray that you will be happy; and above all I pray that God gives me a chance to know you better...” For this chance, however, Marco still had to wait a long time because Emanuela was not capable of starting a friendship so quickly after the death of her mother. It did not take her long to figure out who the anonymous author was, but she did not give him the chance to come closer.

With time though, Emanuela overcame her mourning and sincerely asked God what plans

he had with her life. “I felt very clearly that I wanted to share my life with somebody, and my vocation to be married became certain. Seemingly by chance, I reread the letter Marco had written to me three years earlier. This time, however, I was deeply touched by his genuine and pure love which was seeking my happiness. Although in these three years he had never heard anything from me, I suddenly felt pushed to send a text message to his cell phone thanking him for his readiness to continue accompanying me along my path. Since there were also others whom I could have imagined as my husband, I asked God for a sign: on a certain day, he should send the one he chose for me to Holy Mass. It was Marco.”

On September 29, 2007, they took their first walk along the beach and prayed the Rosary together. After the first decade, fireworks exploded in the sky, and it confirmed for both of them what they were feeling—God

had led them together. They consecrated their friendship to Our Lady and decided to live their time of engagement pure and chaste, even in their thoughts and the way they expressed their tenderness. Soon thereafter, they experienced what a struggle it is to make and maintain this resolution. While they were praying the Rosary together, they finally had the idea to offer their struggle to God as a sacrifice for her neighbor Claudia.

Claudia had been living with a man for 20 years. Although they finally married in the Church six years earlier, they were still far away

from the Faith. In her great suffering that they had been unable to conceive, Claudia was now considering artificial insemination although she knew the Church does not allow it.

After Emanuela and Marco offered God their sacrifice of love, Claudia suddenly changed her mind, and after a couple of talks she was willing to place her trust totally in God. And he did not disappoint her!

On December 8, 2008, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, she became pregnant, and on September 10, 2009, her daughter Aurora was born.

Our Siberian "Children"

We send you, dear readers, our sincerest greetings from snow-covered western Siberia! Since the winter of 1993, when our missionaries landed in Novosibirsk for the first time, many good things have happened in the souls of the people here, and some exterior things have changed for the better as well. Nevertheless, after 18 years, the East is still by and large a giant poor house.

As far as the material misery and the social and spiritual needs are concerned, it seems that time has just stood still. We experience this also in our mission in Talmenka, a city of 26,000, where currently two priests and three sisters of our community are working. We have been entrusted with a huge parish 300 miles wide and 60 miles long. During the week, we visit 13 different villages in rotation and pray with the faithful, give a catechism class, administer the Sacraments and celebrate Holy Mass as the culmination.

Along the way, we see work to be done everywhere and yet there are countless, hopeless

unemployed people because there is nobody here who pays a just wage. Many fight to survive by collecting wood and berries from the forests during the summer and selling them on the roadside. A very faithful grandmother explained to us, *"It was a lot like this during the time of persecution and during the war as well. Our dear God helped us to survive on nothing and kept us from starving."*

It is a great grace for us to help these people in their suffering and need, whether they believe in God or not! The Catholics from the time of persecution who are scattered in the remote villages are of special concern for us. We met Katya, for example, at the entrance to the village of Novotroizka the first time we visited. Since then, she is the first person we visit when we come, because we want to bring this faithful soul God's love. Back then, we also met a German-Russian, Ferdinand and his wife Amalia. They were married 50 years ago and had been unable to receive the Sacraments since. Amalia welcomed us with tears

of joy, “*Today, the Holy Church has come to us!*” Earlier, up to 20 German-Russians met in the church house; today, since many have returned to Germany, there are at most 10 that come. In the deserted village of Sageinovo, only two Catholics still patiently await us.

*I*n Talmenka, we are often approached by the needy on the streets, or we go and speak to them ourselves. And so, each one of us has his or her own poor person whom we visit and for whom we personally care. Two months ago, for example, a dear friend of Fr. Alexander, 84-year-old Nikolai, died. Since the old man was very dirty and had an unpleasant smell, Fr. Alexander asked him gently if he could help him clean up. Nikolai waved him off with a smile, “*No, no. I cleaned up real good just four months ago.*” In the end, he let Fr. Alexander convince him that it was necessary. So Nikolai was washed—first his body and then his soul through Holy Confession. From that point on he accepted this act of love from Fr. Alexander every month until he died.

*A*nother case was Genadi, also from Talmenka. He suffered indescribable pain because of a terrible skin cancer on his face. We met him through his wife who had asked us for some pain killers because the poor people here cannot afford medicine. Genadi was not

a believer; but our priest visited him and, aided by pictures, told about Jesus’ love and explained truths of the Faith. Eventually peace entered his soul. In the end, he was grateful to receive the Sacraments, and it was impressive to see how complacently Genadi accepted his suffering, carrying it without rebellion until he died peacefully two years ago.

*I*t is also very important for us to bring a little consolation and joy to the retirement home here where the conditions are deplorable. They are lacking everything in this sad place, especially love. Robbed by other residents and even by the staff—because the few things they have “*they don’t need any more*”—many of the discouraged elderly just drink away their last rubles. Young people who are physically or mentally impaired, many of whom have lost limbs due to frostbite while being drunk, are also brought to this home. Entirely without emotion, they spend most of their time sitting or lying in bed because there are no wheelchairs.

A 27-year-old orphan who moved around on his amputated legs like they were feet died recently. He was mentally sound and never complained even though he had nothing useful to do and just stared at the old people all day. Perhaps he understood us when we asked him to offer his suffering to Jesus. We believe he did.

*Amen, I say to you, whatever you did
for one of these least brothers of mine,
you did for me.*

Mt 25: 40