

Triumph of the Heart

ALL PRAISE AND ADORATION

Family of Mary

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God Lives Among Us

*When the Angel of Portugal, youthful and as brilliant
as crystal in the rays of the sun,
appeared to the children tending sheep in Fatima
in the spring of 1916, he invited them to follow his example:
“Pray with me!”*

*The angel knelt down, bowed his head to the ground
and repeated three times the prayer,
“My God, I believe, I adore, I hope, I love you.
I ask pardon for those who do not believe,
do not adore, do not hope, and do not love you.”*

*H*ow easy God makes it for us to encounter him personally. We need only enter a church and repeat the words of the angel in adoration.

“He who created the whole world and whose Precious Blood washed away my sins is present here in the tabernacle. These are not just words or wishful thinking: the living God is truly present. I can fathom God’s majesty, but not his humility,” admitted Blessed Mother Teresa faced with the mystery of God’s presence in the form of such a small host. No wonder the saints fell in love with the Blessed Sacrament!

St. Peter Julian Eymard (1811–1868), the founder of the Fathers of the Blessed Sacrament, came to Paris, France, where he lived in dire poverty. He had almost nothing, but if anyone expressed pity, he emphatically replied, *“The Blessed Sacrament is here; that’s all I need.”* And those who sought help or consolation from him, he sent to the tabernacle: *“You find everything in the Eucharist, the power of the word, wisdom and miracles; yes, also miracles. The Eucharist is the greatest revelation of Jesus’ love. It can be surpassed only in heaven.”*

Therefore, St. Catherine of Genoa (1447–1510), the great theologian of purgatory, said, *“The time that I spend in front of the tabernacle is the best spent time of my life.”* Sure, it is understandable because when we pray, we

allow God to work in our lives. As busy, active Christians in today’s result-oriented society, it is not easy for us to believe that the time we spend before the Blessed Sacrament is our most effective use of time.

Mother Teresa had this difficulty as well. The postulator for her canonization, Fr. Brian Kolodiejchuk, MC, recounts in his well-known book, *“Where there is Love, there is God”*, that during their chapter meeting in 1973, a sister requested, *“Mother, we want to have an hour of adoration every day.”* Mother Teresa’s first reaction was, *“That’s impossible, we have too much work to do: the sick, the dying, the lepers, the children!”*

*S*Still, the sisters tried it and Mother Teresa testified, *“From this moment forward, we had a much greater, deeper love for Jesus and a much greater, more understanding love for one another. In addition, adoration deepened our love for the poor. We understand better their sufferings and their needs. Still more, we have so many wonderful vocations! I always say, it is the fruit of the Holy Eucharist; it comes from Christ’s presence, from our adoration.”*

*P*ope St. John Paul II left behind an impressive testimony. Cardinal Andrzej Deskur (1924-2011), who knew the future pope while

he was still a student, recalled, *“When Karol (Pope John Paul II’s baptismal name) was in the chapel, you could hear him talking, like he would be talking to another person.”*

As a priest, but then also as bishop and pope, he spent many hours on his knees before the Blessed Sacrament. He was convinced, *“To live from the Holy Eucharist, you have to spend a long time in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. I experience that every day. I find strength, consolation and support there.”*

Pope St. John Paul II showed his extraordinary esteem and love for the Blessed Sacrament during his last Corpus Christi procession, which he presided over on June 10, 2004. Since he was no longer able to walk, he rode along in the open-air car. His master of ceremonies, Msgr. Konrad Krajewski, recounts, *“The Blessed Sacrament was exposed in the monstrance in front of his kneeler. During the procession, the Pope turned to me and asked, in Polish, if he could kneel down. Physically, however, he was no longer capable of doing so. With great sensitivity, I explained that it was not possible for him and that it would be dangerous to kneel since the car rocked back and forth during the trip. His reaction was his famous, gentle murmur. After a while, he repeated, ‘I want to kneel,’ but with a heavy heart, I had to turn him down again. I proposed that it would be prudent to wait until we drew close to Saint Mary Major. I heard his murmuring anew. A few moments later, nevertheless, with determination he insisted, in Polish, ‘Jesus is*

here! Please...!’ It was no longer possible to oppose him. With great difficulty, we helped him kneel down. The Pope grasped the edge of the kneeler and tried to support himself. We witnessed a great demonstration of faith.”

Cardinal Joachim Meisner left adoration as a legacy of his episcopal work to his archdiocese. In the heart of Cologne, Germany, the Lord is exposed night and day in the monstrance. The former Archbishop joins the other faithful in the adoration chapel whenever it is possible.

During his farewell homily at the Cologne Cathedral on March 9, 2014, he said, *“A person on his knees before God is something tremendous. He who adores is in the right place and has a sense for proportion and measure of reality. He accepts that he is man and not God. It is pure truth and justice. Adoration is the beginning of any healthy human self-awareness. However, when a person kneels down in adoration, he will be sanctified there, he raises the bar there.”*

*L*et us be enflamed by the testimonies on the following pages, and begin with new zeal to take time in adoration. It will change our whole life. For those of you, dear readers, who have not had much experience with silent adoration, we are including a pamphlet from St. Anthony Mary Claret (1807–1870) with ideas how to make good use of the silent time before the Lord. Our Lady, the greatest adorer, will take by the hand everyone who asks her and teach him or her how to adore her Son.

Rome's Holy Beggar

Benedict Labre (1748–1783), the ragged French pilgrim and beggar, might not be the most attractive saint on the surface, but in him we encounter a soul of rare purity who “accepted the loss of all things to gain Christ” (cf. Phil 3:8). This great man of adoration speaks with eloquent example to people of our time where much sense of reverence for God and inner recollection has been lost.

Benedict Joseph was the oldest of fifteen children born to simple farmers in a northern French village, Amettes-en-Artois. Early on, his gentle obedience and introverted being were noticeable because he was concerned with only one thing: to love God with his whole heart. Consequently, his parents sent the 12-year-old to his uncle who was a priest so that Benedict too could become a priest. It was there that he made the radical decision to become a saint and “*never let a difficulty get in my way*”.

Benedict wanted to become a monk, and he wanted to enter the strictest order possible. Therefore, he set out for nearby Chartreuse in 1766 at the age of 18, but the Carthusians refused him. Further humiliating rejections from various monasteries followed. They all thought his health was too fragile, his penitential spirit too great. Yet the young man believed so much in God’s guidance that he was not discouraged. The Trappists of Sept-Fons, in the heart of France, finally accepted him, and they noticed right away how drawn Benedict was by the miraculous presence of the Lord in the Holy Eucharist: “*The free time he had outside of communal practices was spent before the Blessed Sacrament.*” In the summer of 1770, when they finally sent him away as well, he set out for Italy, convinced that he would find the right monastery.

As he was traveling through France, Benedict stopped for one night in the little village of Dardilly close to Lyon where the Vianney farmers, the grandparents of John Maria Vianney, the future Cure of Ars, gave him lodging.

At the age of 22, Benedict recognized his true vocation: to be a perpetual pilgrim, a living sign of the “Pilgrim Church”. He freely chose, for the sake of Christ, what in the eyes of the world is considered shame and misfortune. Homeless, destitute and alone, despised and laughed at, Benedict Labre understood this to be his personal calling from God. In a complete emptying of himself, in continual prayer and inner contemplation, he wanted to become similar to Christ Crucified, his only fortune. Poorly dressed like a beggar, with a cross on his chest and a rosary around his neck, he wore a backpack containing his few belongings: the Bible, his breviary and “The Imitation of Christ”. Benedict never actually begged, but rather kept only what he really needed from what was freely given to him and divided everything else among those who were in greater need. He traveled from one pilgrimage site to another, stayed with special love at the Marian shrine Loreto, made pilgrimages to Einsiedeln in Switzerland and Santiago de Compostela in Spain. He is said to have walked 20,000 miles during his lifetime! In 1777, the 29-year-old Benedict settled in Rome, Italy.

The beggar of the Forty Hours

In the Eternal City, his “accommodations” were the churches and basilicas at the communion rail close to the tabernacle. People saw him there from dawn to dusk, sometimes into the night, on his knees motionless and sunk in deep meditation. Wherever the Blessed Sacrament was exposed in the various Roman churches for perpetual adoration or the “Forty Hours’ Devotion”, Benedict

went there. His confessor, Fr. Giuseppe Marconi, later wrote,

“It is difficult to describe the faith with which he offered himself to the Lord, present in the Holy Eucharist. In any case, they wrote his name just as the people who knew him called him, ‘the beggar of the Forty Hours’.”

“God’s vagabond”, as they called the cheerful Frenchman, conscientiously chose the Fifth Station of the Cross at the ruins of the Coliseum for his “home”. Like Simon, he wanted to help the Lord carry the Cross.

“Neither distance nor downpour, icy cold nor blistering summer heat could hinder him though he wore only worn-out clothing and shoes. He spent whole days on his knees before the altar, and from his appearance alone, one could well see the fire that was burning in his heart.”

Actually, the disposition and recollection, the “silent homily” of this most humble man, deeply touched the other people praying. After the wanderer had read a little from a spiritual book, he steadfastly gazed at the Holy Host or leaned forward with his arms crossed over his chest and his eyes closed in deep meditation of God’s mysteries, especially Jesus’ suffering. *“When I meditate on the Lord’s Passion, I’m drawn into the highest mysteries of the Holy Trinity.”* His pale face was then enflamed and he radiated peace.

The holy beggar quietly spoke loving words to the Lord only when he thought that he was

alone before the Blessed Sacrament: *“Have mercy on me, have mercy... Give this cross to me... Your shoulder is not the right place for it.”* Some priests were so touched by this that tears of repentance welled up at the coldness of their own heart. Even in Benedict’s final years, when several times during the week, often with tears in his eyes, he received Communion, served at Holy Mass or accompanied the priests to administer last rites. His love for the Eucharist, which made him try to be close to the Lord in any way possible, touched the people of Rome.

Although many saw him in ecstasy, Benedict did whatever was within his power to be fully unnoticed and remain unknown. When an epidemic in the summer of 1780 emptied the city’s churches and streets, Benedict single handedly filled in before the Blessed Sacrament for all the missing adorers and did not abandon his position even when he himself came down with a fever.

Benedict confided about his thanksgiving after Holy Communion,

“First, I awake with the utmost possible attention the belief in the real, personal presence of Jesus Christ in my heart and adore him as humbly and reverently as I can. Then I compare the greatness of my divine guest with my nothingness, my sinfulness, and wonder in astonishment at the humble descent and immeasurable love of my Jesus. Then I pray, ‘My Jesus, let me deny myself and live in you alone! Whatever happens to me, I want to accept it from you. Look graciously upon me that I may love you; call me that I may look to you and possess you forever’.”

*I*n the last years of his life, the saint was so sick, exhausted and covered with sores that he could no longer remain constantly in adoration. God helped him then to fulfill his desire through the grace of bilocation. Many believers testified under oath that they saw him spend the whole day in one church or another in Rome before the Blessed Sacrament even though he was sick in bed at the hospital.

At the beginning of Holy Week 1783, although he was only 35 years old, he was in very poor condition. On Wednesday, the day the Lord called him to his eternal rest, Benedict, feeble and pale, prayed at length in his favorite church, Santa Maria ai Monti, until a spell of weakness forced him to drag himself out of the church where he

collapsed on the steps. The butcher, Zaccarelli, a good friend, carried the dying man to his apartment close by. On April 16 at 6 p.m., when all the bells of Rome were ringing for the Angelus, Benedict Labre died, having become similar to the Crucified Savior even down to the expression on his face.

The children of the city, who had often made fun of the “poor man of the Forty Hours’ Devotion”, now ran through the streets acclaiming, “*The saint has died!*” The never-ending stream of Romans during the Easter days to the church with his open casket demonstrates how much the beggar was loved by the people of Rome. Not even the funeral of St. Philip Neri had such a remarkable attendance.

Source: Maria Mazzei, Die Schritte der Heiligen hallen lange nach. Der heilige Benedikt Joseph Labre, Rome.

*“God is so good to me that I could never do enough for him...
Anything that we might suffer for the sake of Christ is very little!”*

Benedict Labre “belonged” so much to the church of Santa Maria ai Monti, close to the Basilica of St. Mary Major, that a four-day wake was held after his death, and he has been venerated there to this day. Through the intercession of this saint, 136 miracles, healings and conversions took place within only ten weeks.

Madre Sacramento

In a very different world from that of the holy beggar in Rome lived the Spanish noblewoman Maria Michaela of the Most Holy Sacrament (1809 – 1865).

The Eucharistic mystery was such a central part of her life that people simply called the saintly religious founder Madre Sacramento. “When I see him exposed,” she admitted, “I’m the happiest creature on earth.” After ten years of continuous persecution, she became a highly valued advisor to one of the most important Spanish bishops and figures of her time.

*C*ountess Maria Michaela Desmaisieres was born in Madrid, Spain in 1809, and with her three siblings, she was raised Catholic according

to the strict etiquette of Spanish nobility. She had a very lively temperament, a keen spirit and, from her youth on, a sympathetic heart open to the

needs of others. With the support of her mother, the young noblewoman began to care for the poor in many ways, even though she felt a “*distinct aversion to their filth*”. At the same time, she had a great love for the Mother of Sorrows, Christ Crucified and the Blessed Sacrament: “*Often I entered the church to be with him, and I usually spent two or three hours there where the time seemed to just fly by.*”

In her desire, “*to teach the poor and save souls so that they may also love and adore the Most Holy Sacrament,*” the 36-year-old opened the “House of Our Lady of the Forsaken” in Madrid in 1845. The purpose was to help those who had turned to prostitution to find their way to Faith and a normal life.

Michaela usually went to church early in the morning and stayed until going to take care of the poor and sick. She used her wealth and her great love for the Blessed Sacrament tastefully to decorate chapels and to found adoration groups in Paris and Brussels. If she succeeded in having expiation made to the Eucharistic God throughout

the day and even at night, she rejoiced, “*Just the thought that the Lord remains always with us is something so special to me. It fills me with a great desire never to separate myself from him. If only everyone would visit him here and learn to love him!*”

Once Michaela was able to receive Holy Communion every day, she felt in her noble soul an even stronger call to belong completely to God. Nevertheless, it was a five-year interior struggle before the countess was able to leave behind the worldly obligations, all the luxury of the noble society with horse rides, carriage drives, dinners and balls, concerts and plays not to mention the elaborate clothing to go with it.

The Lord revealed to Michaela in prayer, that he wanted to entrust her with the leadership of the center for neglected women: “*I want you in my work.*” So in 1850, the 41-year-old moved into the “House of Our Lady of the Forsaken”, and from then on, she gave her life as a mother for the, initially forty, girls looking for a way out of their troubled situations.

The Blessed Sacrament is my refuge

This courageous step, which Michaela’s family neither understood nor approved, was also the modest beginning of her future community of adoration sisters, the “Handmaids of the Blessed Sacrament and Charity”.

As mother superior, Michaela entrusted the care of the first houses, as well as the painful experience of her own inability, to the Lord in the tabernacle whom she valued as her best friend. “*I often approach God with apprehensions and doubts because if he does not do everything for me, I am not capable of anything. I go to*

him like a little child so that he holds my hand and takes care of everything himself. Whether they are great things or small, I always have the unique habit of saying, ‘I will speak about it with the Lord. I will ask him for it. God will do it for me.’ And as a matter of fact: he does everything for me.”

In adoration she obtained some extraordinary graces of physical healing for herself and others; she drew light and clarity for those entrusted to her, consolation and strength in all opposition.

“I accepted the name ‘Sacramento’ so that everyone who turned to me would be reminded of him.”

“*Once, I saw my heart transformed into a little ciborium that contained many consecrated hosts. Some were more radiant than the others; I understood that they were the Communion I made when I had better prepared. For an hour this mystery astounded me, and I decided from then on to prepare better for Holy Communion.*”

Since she did not receive any support from her family and her own fortune was not nearly enough, Madre Sacramento was often in dire financial need. “*One day, there was nothing in the house for the seventy of us to eat. ... It was already noon. With tears running down my cheeks, I knelt at the foot of the altar and knocked on the door of the tabernacle. ‘Look, my Lord and my God, we have nothing to eat! Lord, if this house does not glorify you, I am willing to have it shut down...’* At that moment, I heard the voice of a priest at the door who wanted to see our operation. After the tour, he expressed his amazement to Mother Michaela, and she attested, “*He gave me a large bill and two coins, and at 1 p.m. the house had a fine lunch on the table.*”

It was inevitable that the saint soon saw herself exposed to suspicion, serious slander and attacks, even from the Church, for her efforts with the young women. In 1857, St. Anthony Mary Claret took over her spiritual direction, bringing calm to the situation. She understood, “*The benefit of all this suffering is that I spent many hours at the foot of the altar in tears.*”

Once, the responsible pastor even wanted to have the Blessed Sacrament removed from

their chapel. However, the mother superior defended it more than her own life, “*Reverend, if the Lord leaves this house, I will follow him. I will not remain a single hour here without him. Nothing and nobody in the world will separate me from him....*”

She received death threats from people, especially men, who could not forgive Mother Michaela for taking “their girls” from the streets or brothels or even managing to shut down houses of ill repute. The Eucharistic Lord often warned his servant in advance of aggression or he would protect her in danger as he did the day someone threw a sharp crowbar at her through an open window.

Even among the girls, there were those who wanted to stab or poison Mother Sacramento. However, she said calmly, “*With the Lord in the Most Holy Sacrament I have nothing to fear and I feel the courage and strength for everything and everyone.*”

When Cholera broke out in Valencia, the mother superior arrived at the center to console her exhausted sisters and while caring for the sick became infected. Madre Sacramento died on August 24, 1865, at the age of 56.

Source: Saint Maria Michaela of the Most Holy Sacrament, Autobiography, Generalate of the Sisters Adorers, Rome

To the Ends of the Earth

Conchita of Mexico (1862 – 1937), from whose rich life we have already recounted several times (see Triumph of the Heart issues 13, 28, 31 and 72), was in love with the Holy Eucharist from her earliest years.

Later, it would have been her desire to spend many hours a day in adoration before the tabernacle, but being the mother of nine children, she did not have that luxury. Instead, God revealed to this great mystic one of his heart's intentions—the foundation of a congregation in which the Blessed Sacrament would be adored night and day.

In Rome, we had the opportunity to speak with the mother superior and several “Sisters of the Cross of the Sacred Heart of Jesus” and be enriched by their profound experiences.

MOTHER GENOVEVA, COULD YOU TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT THE FOUNDATION AND GOAL OF YOUR COMMUNITY?

*M*other Genoveva:

The origin of our congregation goes back to the words of Jesus to Conchita: “*Daughter, I want an association of people who, without interruption, trading places hour after hour, adore my heart on the cross night and day—yes, night and day. I will pour out torrents of grace over these souls.*”

When Conchita received this task, she replied to Jesus that it would be too difficult. Yet the Lord did not give in, “*I will give them my grace! My daughter, my heart lives alone in the middle of the world: my ears hear the sound of footsteps, but they wander off into the distance and nobody comes in to greet me, to put out the fire of my love that consumes me; nobody comes to receive grace, to console me in my loneliness. I am thirsting for con-*

solation, and I am thirsting to be received. To whom can I turn to receive this? To you, my daughter, and to the few souls who eagerly visit my tabernacle, who keep me company and share my Eucharistic life with me.”

Conchita's spiritual father, Fr. Mir, complied with Jesus' wish and took the necessary steps to found an adoration congregation. When the first three sisters consecrated themselves to Our Lady during the Holy Mass of their foundation on May 3, 1897 in a little chapel in Mexico City, Conchita was also present. Yet not even her husband knew that the origin and the charisma of the new community had its roots in revelations to his wife. Today, there are 19 adoration convents in Mexico, the USA, Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Honduras and Rome, Italy.

WHAT IS DAILY LIFE LIKE IN YOUR CONVENT?

*M*other Genoveva:

Our first responsibility is adoration in which we expiate the indifference of all humanity towards Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Along with Holy Mass, the Rosary and the Liturgy of the Hours, each sister has an hour of adoration

during the day and an hour at night. We leave our houses only when necessary, like when a sister has to go to the doctor or when our parents are seriously ill. Besides our daily chores like cleaning, doing the wash and cooking, we sew and work on translations.

MANY PEOPLE ASK THEMSELVES HOW SOMEONE CAN DECIDE ON A LIFESTYLE THAT ENTAILS RENOUNCING PRACTICALLY ALL THE BEAUTY AND JOYS OF THE WORLD. HOW DID YOU FIND YOUR WAY TO THE CONVENT?

*S*r. Maria Antonia:

My childhood and teenage years were pretty much like those of my Mexican friends. Growing up in a big family with twelve brothers and sisters, I also dreamed of having a harmonious family. My fiancé was a wonderful man; we prayed together and had a pure and very happy relationship.

We were in love and already had our whole wedding planned. We had just bought a house with a garden when God intervened in my life. My future husband invited me to go to adoration with him, which was common for us. Yet that day, I experienced something I had never experienced before: God's love for me, such a great love that my love for my fiancé paled in comparison.

I had to decide: God or man. As we were walking out of the church, I admitted to my boyfriend that I had fallen in love with someone else.

"Who is it? I will fight for you!"

"It's Jesus," I said.

With tears in his eyes, he answered me, *"I cannot fight with God, but I will wait for you."*

I joined the "Missionaries of Our Lady of Guadalupe and of the Holy Spirit", who had the task of evangelization. My life was overflowing with grace until God knocked on my heart again. I was traveling with a priest and some sisters to

bring the Word of God to the people in remote villages. When it was time to return in the evening, there were still many unvisited villages waiting for us. I pushed to keep going, but soon had to accept that, even with the best intentions, we would never make it to them all. This filled me with such sorrow that I began to cry and nothing could calm me down.

The question gnawed at my heart, *"How can I reach everybody to proclaim the Gospel to them? Is there anything I can do to work for Jesus all throughout the world?"* After many hours of prayer, and with the help of a good priest, I understood God's answer: *"Yes, there is a place from which you can reach to the furthest corners of the earth. This place is before the Blessed Sacrament. There you can pray for priests, yes for all people and imitate Jesus in his priestly self-offering: 'I consecrate myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in truth' (Jn 19:17)."*

Secluded from the world, alone with God, he widens my heart, which he created to be filled with himself, true love, who chose me and to whom I desire to answer with all my being. I cannot express how happy I am to live for his love and, like Moses, to intercede for mankind before God.

*"There is a place from which you can reach the furthest corners of the earth.
This place is before the Blessed Sacrament."*

MOTHER GENOVEVA, SHARE A LITTLE OF THE SECRET ABOUT HOW YOU PERSONALLY PRAY IN ADORATION?

When I go into the chapel, the first thing I do is make myself aware of before whom I am kneeling. Then I give Jesus a kiss. I read to him all the people who have asked for prayer and bring their intentions to him. If I am very busy or if I have made a mistake, I talk to Jesus about it so that I will calm down and be entirely there for him.

Then I read the Bible because the Word of God nourishes, enlightens and forms the soul. If any time remains, I simply stay in silence with him. Before I leave, I ask him for the grace to remain in his presence for whatever I am going to do.

AT THE AGE OF 82, SR. THERESA CAN LOOK BACK AT NEARLY SIX DECADES OF PERPETUAL ADORATION

Adoration is the moment in which we who are baptized live our priestly lives. We intercede and do what Christ did on the Cross: He offered himself on the Cross to glorify the Father and for the salvation of souls. In adoration, we unite ourselves with Christ and pray for grace for priests and other souls.

We adore in expiation for the sins of the world and to console the Heart of Jesus. Those who think our lives are easy and full of ecstasies are greatly deceived. It is a life of Faith, because we rarely see the fruits of our self-offering, and

yet we experience that we live a deeply fulfilled life.

I have prayed day and night for the last 58 years, and I would not take back one of them. It is something so beautiful to be like Mary at the foot of the Cross, and in this way to help the priests and win souls for Jesus. It is my vocation and my joy to live a priestly life, which means to offer everything up, small and great. And when there were times in which my path seemed senseless, the Lord always gave me the inner certainty, *“What you are doing is something great.”*

Eucharistic Love in Central Asia

At the invitation of Archbishop Tomash Peta, our missionaries have worked in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, since 2003. For the last eight years, Sr. Notburga, who was with the first missionaries to go there, has been the secretary for the Kazakh Conference of Bishops. Sr. Madeleine has also worked in the curia since 2006. They both have seen many impressive things over the years because of the perpetual adoration chapel in the nearby cathedral where people from 23 parishes have been coming night and day for the last twelve years.

“Our archdiocese would be lifeless without perpetual adoration,” emphasized Archbishop Peta in an interview with Sr. Madeleine last summer, looking back over the initial stages of this

Eucharistic initiative.

“When Jan Pavel Lenga was named bishop for Central Asia in 1991, and saw how few priests and sisters there were for this immense territory,

he decided to solemnly consecrate his enormous diocese to Our Lady; at the time it included five

countries: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

In 2003, Pope St. John Paul II erected the Archdiocese of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Astana. At the same time, the Holy Father named Tomash Peta archbishop of the new archdiocese and metropolitan of the young church province Kazakhstan. Whenever he can, Archbishop Peta substitutes in adoration during the day, and even at night when others cannot make it to their hour.

“On June 25, 1995, Bishop Lenga consecrated Kazakhstan and Central Asia to Mary in Osornoje, my parish at the time. On that occasion, he chose the Queen of Peace as our patron; she had been named as the patron of the whole country one year earlier, together with Abraham. Soon thereafter, Bishop Lenga took a trip to the USA where he visited numerous parishes. He had no sooner returned than he said to me, *‘I saw many adoration chapels in America. Open one also in Osornoje.’*

“Yet, honestly, I didn’t understand the importance of adoration at the time, although I had

already been a priest for 19 years. I also hesitated because Osornoje was just a little village with 700 inhabitants, of which less than 200 even knew who Jesus is. I didn’t object, but I thought to myself, *‘Karaganda, Alma-Ata are big parishes, but to organize adoration from morning until evening in our little nest, of all places, is impossible.’*

“A half a year went by and whenever the bishop passed through Osornoje, which was often enough, before he even said hello he always asked me the same question, *‘Has adoration started yet?’*”

Fall in love with the Blessed Sacrament

*B*ack then, we regularly received the magazine ‘The Voice of the Queen of Peace’ about the apparitions of Our Lady in Medjugorje. Currently, the Church has not issued a final judgement, and I do not want to anticipate a judgement, but people are allowed to visit the pilgrimage site.

“It was surely meant to be that, at that time, I read a message from Our Lady: *‘Fall in love with the Blessed Sacrament! Adore him in your parishes!’* That was the inspiration. I did not think twice about whether it would work or not.

“I immediately went to the convent of ‘The Servants of the Immaculate Conception’ and shared my decision with them, *‘Sisters, we have to surrender! Look what is written here!’* The words of the ‘Gospa’ convinced me.

“It went astonishingly quick, in fact, to find the necessary number of around 100 people who were ready to spend two hours a month in adora-

tion. Naturally, the sisters also gladly participated, and so adoration began on March 25, 1996, at first from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

“It is interesting that from the time of the solemn consecration to Mary on June 25, 1995, it was a ‘pregnancy’ of exactly nine months to the day until the beginning of adoration. What a clear ‘Marian answer’ of Our Lady who accepted our consecration and gave us the gift of adoration, the ‘newborn child’!

“At the beginning of perpetual adoration, we often had to laugh. For example, when a 40-year-old electrician working on a collective farm was eager to sign up for adoration, I asked him what time would suit him.

“He responded, *‘Anytime! This is a holy thing!’*

“*‘But you have to work!’*

“*‘That doesn’t matter; I’ll take time for it.’*”

“‘Good, how about from noon to 2 p.m.?’

“‘Oh no Father,’ he responded quickly, ‘that won’t work; that’s lunchtime!’

“Of course, I chuckled until I found out that the problem was not his ‘lunch’, but that at that time they herded in and fed the cows. Yes, a village like this had its own rhythm. In the end, the good man did find an appropriate time for this

‘holy thing’. Until he immigrated to Russia, he came very faithfully to ‘his’ two hours before the Blessed Sacrament.

“Before long, I could see that adoration was the most important pastoral event and the greatest blessing for our parish. I am certain that without adoration, which is going well to this day after 18 years, Osornoje would be spiritually desolate.”

I will not let this baby go

“*I*n 1999, I came to Astana as the apostolic administrator, and here too I was told, ‘Start perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament—for the whole diocese!’ Naturally, I was fond of the idea since I was aware of what a blessing it had been in Osornoje. The only question was where to find volunteers since, even on Sunday, there were only 300 people at Holy Mass.

“There was a group of people who were ready to participate in adoration, but not enough to cover all the hours. On top of that, some priests objected, ‘How is this going to work for people from distant parishes? Where are they going to sleep and eat? Is it really necessary to go to the capital for adoration? Is the Lord not also present in our parish churches?’ Never-

theless, I remained firm, ‘*With God’s help we are starting NOW with perpetual adoration. I will not let this baby go!*’

“Slowly the resistance subsided, and on April 14, 2002, we started perpetual adoration at the cathedral in Astana. Again, there was an interesting connection. During the Pope’s visit in September 2001, John Paul II consecrated Kazakhstan to Mary with the same prayer as Bishop Lenga did in 1995.

“From the day of the consecration until adoration started, exactly seven months passed. A baby born at seven months is able to survive. Our Lady granted the same wonderful gift in Astana as she did in Osornoje—the ‘newborn child’, perpetual adoration to this very day.”

A source of blessing for the whole country

“*O*nce or twice it seemed that the whole thing would fall apart, and I seriously asked myself if we had the strength and the means to ensue this very special form of adoration as Jesus wants of us. Especially in winter, poor transportation and infrastructure as well as storms, snow and ice, make it very difficult for parishioners—a colorful mixture of young and old, men and women, laity sometimes with their pastors or religious sisters—from remote villages to come to Astana for night adoration. In such situations, if people signed up for adoration cannot make it, there are

always priests and sisters in Astana who are ready to cover for them.

“The people signed up for adoration changes frequently. If one person moves away, another finds his way to the Blessed Sacrament. Only one thing is important—that we never give up on adoration! Never! It would be our spiritual death! In my opinion adoration is the greatest blessing, not only for each one of our parishes and not only for our archdiocese because they all participate in adoration, but adoration is a true source of blessing for the whole country!”

“A beautiful fruit of night adoration,” said Archbishop Tomash Peta, “is afterwards when we sit together in the bishop’s residence and many of the believers from the parishes, especially the older generation, tell interesting stories about their lives during the time of persecution and how they struggled to keep their faith. Without this meeting, which takes place because of adoration, we would never hear these precious stories, which strengthen us in faith and solidarity.”

It was touching when the little Babushka (grandmother) with the goat hair scarf shyly came into the kitchen one morning and handed the cook a homemade treat saying, “Here is something small for the priests. They’ll love it.” It was a large piece of marinated pork and a bar of chocolate. The adorers from that village always bring something for the priests with them.

The Journey is Part of His Adoration

*For the night adoration of the Archdiocese of Astana,
23 parishes participate; each of these is composed of eight to ten villages.
The adorers from Lisakovsk in the Ural Mountains have the longest trip
at 530 miles. Wilhelm Baskal, age 87, has “only” 88 miles to travel every other
month to the Blessed Sacrament in Astana from his isolated village Novorybenka out
in the steppe, yet this demanding journey is part of his “visit to Jesus”.
Let us hear what Sr. Madeleine has to say about this man of prayer whom she,
together with Archbishop Tomash Peta and Sr. Notburga,
visited last summer.*

You often hear that people who have met saints feel a deep peace or God’s love. This was the case for me when I met Wilhelm Baskal, whom everyone calls Willi, when we met at his modest home. In this deeply pious man, we encountered a thankful soul of extraordinary simplicity in whose presence the three of us immediately felt comfortable.

Willi had experienced all sorts of unimaginable hardship during his lifetime. The little that the old man told us in his broken German dialect didn’t have a trace of rebellion, but was full of meekness and surrender to what God had allowed.

There is no church in Novorybenka, where he and his wife started their family and where he still lives today. Over the decades, his desire for the Holy Eucharist led him some Sundays and

feast days to the city of Shortandy, more than 25 miles away. Since bus connections have always been bad, he made his pilgrimage there on foot, up until a few years ago. Summer or winter, hot or cold, he would go to attend Holy Mass and receive the Sacraments. Once in a while, he was able to catch a ride, but more often than not he had to walk the whole way there and back.

Once, Wilhelm who was already over 80 years old decided to go to church when it was -50° F. He made it there and back, but when he returned he was in terrible condition. His wife was afraid that he had collapsed or died on the way, and begged him with tears to give up finally his visits to the church. Since then, Willi waits patiently for a priest to visit his village. He set up a little altar in his home so that he can spiritually

adore and receive communion, and he spends many hours there in prayer.

Every two months, he faithfully comes to Astana for night adoration. For this encounter with his Eucharistic Lord, he carefully prepares a half a month before because night adoration is a pilgrimage for him. He prays for good weather so that the bus can leave, that the streets are plowed, that he does not miss his connection, and that he will be in good health. Just to be safe, Willi goes one day early so that he will surely be in the

right place at the right time for his adoration slot. Sometimes it happens that he spends the whole night alone with the Lord when blizzards prevent the others from coming.

Recently, I saw Willi in adoration, but he was not feeling well that night. Full of compassion, I said to him in the morning, “*Dear Willi, the Lord will richly repay your efforts!*”

I was referring to night adoration, but he responded modestly, “*No, no, prayer is not a problem for me. I have so much to tell him.*”

Willi was delighted to show the Archbishop this bookcase where, among all sorts of other treasures, hangs a list with the names and pictures of all the priests of the archdiocese as well as other missionaries.

“I pray for them all by name every day to our dear God because they must become holy!”

Kazakhs and Muslims Find Him Too

In the multicultural country of Kazakhstan, which is about one-third the size of the continental United States of America, the 200,000 Catholics are less than two percent of the population. Of the seventeen million inhabitants, more than sixty percent are Kazakh, but, in general, they do not practice their Muslim faith. Referring to the Muslims, Archbishop Peta said, “What is very special here in this essentially Muslim country is the fact that Eucharistic adoration attracts not only the Catholics, but also the Muslims and those who are looking for God. Some came ‘by chance’ to the adoration chapel while others were encouraged by someone just to stop in for a look. Still others, who had no idea who is present or what to do, simply sat there in silence. They encountered Christ and became Catholic.”

Once a month for the last four years, a group of about fifteen Kazakhs comes to night adoration. Masken, Archbishop Peta’s Kazakh language teacher who found her way to the Catholic Church through the Protestants in 2008,

started it. After a year of preparation, Masken was baptized and received First Communion.

A short time later, we read on the adoration list, “Masken’s group” and found out that Masken

brought her Protestant friends with her to night adoration. She came faithfully month after month, even the nights when none of her friends came, and she knelt alone before the Lord. Masken did not give up, she kept praying, and so more and more people found their way to adoration through her. They are all Kazakh, many with Islamic backgrounds, some not baptized and searching, others

have been baptized in the meantime. These close friends all have one thing in common—they felt drawn by the Eucharistic grace.

Before the Kazakh group goes to night adoration, they usually meet for a cup of tea with Archbishop Peta who gladly takes time, answers their many questions about the faith, and sometimes even holds a little presentation.

Seeing God on our knees

Several members of the Masken Group are patients of Dr. Turanbeck Manglaevitch, and they have found their way to the Catholic Church through him. The Kazakh psychiatrist experienced in his own life a deep intervention of God's mercy:

“It is not necessarily the best people who find their way to God. In any case, I was quite a sinner, full of guilt and fear, frustrated and desperate. My sins so oppressed me that I did not see any way out. After four failed suicide attempts, my wife made fun of me saying, *‘Look at you, you’re so bad that not even Allah wants you to be with him!’*

“I was shocked, and so I started searching for God; that was nearly 25 years ago. Of course as a Kazakh of Muslim heritage, I sought him first in the Mosque, spoke with the Mulla (a Muslim scholar), learned the prescribed prayers in Arabic and studied the Koran. Yet my heart remained cold and untouched.

“I searched further until one day I picked up a Bible and began to read; I read it like a fairytale though. God is a living God however, and his words are also living. I was afraid that somebody might find out about my sins; I just wished I could bury them. It was a puzzle to me that Catholics tell everything to the priest in Confession.

“For me, I was much too ashamed until I was struck like with a bolt of lightning by the

words of Psalm 50: *‘When you do these things,’ Turanbeck Manglaevitch, ‘should I be silent? Or do you think that I am like you? I accuse you, I lay the charge before you. Understand this, you who forget God, lest ... [there is] no one to rescue [you]. Those who offer praise as a sacrifice honor me; to the obedient I will show the salvation of God.’*

“I felt miserable, but I was determined not to go to hell! Like a child, I knelt down and started speaking to God in simple words. I was 44 at the time, and I experienced that prayer has great power. I have prayed to Jesus now for the last 24 years, and I invite everybody, even my patients if they are open to it, *‘Do you want to see God? When you really want to see him, you have to kneel down and start praying. God is like a mother because he is completely loving, infinitely patient and good!’*

“I let my patients experience this by leading them to the adoration chapel in Astana, where I often go because I feel the need, even when after work I am tired and hungry. Many people call me a traitor, but that doesn't matter! Not long ago, I prayed to him for an enemy, for the first time in my life, because Jesus wants us to. I personally draw strength again and again from the consoling words of scripture, *‘Then everyone shall be rescued who calls on the name of the LORD’* (Joel 3:5)—even an Eskimo or a Kazakh like me.”

Dr. Turanbeck Manglaevitch was baptized in October 2013. The doctor has led many people to Jesus, like Karina Tuvatova. However, his wife and their three grown children, all observant Muslims, are not open to the Christian Faith.

A shimmer of light in my soul

“*M*y name is Karina Tuvatova. I am 27 years old, and my way to Jesus started in 2006, when I no longer had any joy or sense in my life. I was 19 back then when my well-to-do, non-practicing Muslim parents and I moved from the southern Kazakh city of Shardara to the capital Astana. I started studying social psychology. I knew from my grandmother that Allah exists, but I went to the mosque once a year at most. Everything was going perfectly for me until that ominous day, eight years ago, when I met Alexander, a convict drug user with AIDS. Nevertheless, I fell so undyingly in love with Alex, that I was ready to give up everything for him. College, family and friends meant nothing to me anymore. My mother tried in vain to pull me out of the relationship.

“One scandal followed after another. My boyfriend was sent back to prison for another crime, but I remained in close contact with him for three more years. Then in 2010, the police picked me up at home and took me in for questioning regarding his charges. It made me start to think about what a mess I had made out of my life and how close I was to taking drugs myself; perhaps I would have become infected with AIDS too!

“*A*t that time, the psychology professor gave us students after class the telephone number of a psychiatrist. I acted as if I had no interest, but I immediately thought, *‘It’s me who needs help!’* The next day I was in the office of a psychiatrist named Dr. Turanbeck Manglaevitch with the hope that he could help me overcome all the sadness that had piled up in me over the last years.

“In the course of our conversation, the doctor asked me the unusual question about my religious beliefs, and he advised me, *‘If you are a Muslim, then visit the mosque and don’t leave immediately. Pray to God that he helps you and then come back here in two weeks.’* I obeyed and spent a long time in the mosque over

the next fourteen days, going there every day as if to a job. It didn’t do anything for me.

“Then during our next session, Dr. Turnabeck said to me without any explanation, *‘Come with me.’* Since I was in such bad shape, I followed him, ready to do anything. We went to the Catholic cathedral. The moment we stepped in the church, my soul was deeply moved, and then I experienced, for the first time in my life, a Holy Mass, almost without taking a breath. It was overwhelming. My psychiatrist explained afterwards that one may also come here to pray at night.

“*D*uring my very first adoration, someone tried to explain to me the preciousness of the ‘Blessed Sacrament’, but I did not understand anything at all and thought they must be talking about the golden object with the precious stones (the monstrance). A light shimmered in my soul however. I prayed the whole night and left the church in the morning overjoyed.

“More and more, I was drawn to pray in the Catholic church, and I soon signed up for a group that met for night adoration once a month. At the same time, I learned more about the Catholic Faith through homilies and conversations with priests, sisters and other believers. I started reading Sacred Scripture, and the relationship with my young, criminal boyfriend dissipated on its own. I graduated at the top of my class and started working as a teacher. The previous friendships I had started up again, but the most important thing for me had become my life with Jesus.

“My parents gradually forgot about the terrible things they had to go through with me, and they were happy that my life had become ‘normal’ again, no matter what the cause was. When my mother noticed how much I was going to church, I reassured her, *‘It gives me peace, but I’ll remain a Muslim and will not change my faith.’* I was convinced of my words until the next night adoration. In that crucial night, I realized in deep prayer before Jesus in the host that there was no

sense in pursuing this spiritual way without Holy Baptism. In that very adoration, I decided to become a Christian and prayed, *'I want to be yours, Jesus. Help me!'* "The next morning I signed up

for catechism, and to my joy, my mother came to my baptism three years ago. Since then I have silently prayed that also my loved ones will one day take the step toward Jesus."

Sholpan's Encounter with the Living God

"The two of us sisters often have no idea what miracles are taking place in the hiddenness of our adoration chapel," explained Sr. Madeleine.

"Our eyes, like those of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, are really opened sometimes when we listen to individual testimonies. Such was the case when we met Scholpan Bajserikova."

Our first encounter with this 34-year-old Kazakh woman was in the summer of 2013, during our annual parish pilgrimage. Sholpan was not baptized. I liked her modesty, and we started talking during one of the breaks on our thirty mile, two day march through the steppe. I found out that she had just started preparing for baptism at the cathedral in Astana. During our conversation, this otherwise quiet young woman entrusted to me the painful acts of fate that had caused such a depression that she wanted to take her life:

"In my hopelessness, I dared a last ditch effort and went to a psychiatrist named Dr. Turanbeck Manglaevitch. One futile appointment followed the next until the doctor finally took me to the Catholic church, Mother of All Nations, and then to the cathedral as well. To this day, I do not

know why I, a Muslim, agreed to go with him.

"Before the doctor sent me into the perpetual adoration chapel, he encouraged me, *'Sholpan, just go in, sit down and look straight ahead!'* Clueless about what would be awaiting me, I did what the doctor ordered—I went into the room, sat down and looked straight ahead. In that moment, something strange happened.

"In my heart, I suddenly knew, with an irresistible certainty, *'God is before me!'* I was shocked and ran out of the chapel, calling to the doctor in amazement, *'But God is in the chapel there! I was so sure that he doesn't exist! That is what I was raised to believe. And now God is in there!'* Then, without waiting for a reaction from the doctor, I returned immediately to the chapel."

A visit for the others

That was the end of my conversation with Sholpan during our pilgrimage, but we met again a few weeks later. Several times, my ado-

ration time followed hers. Someone told me that she now spends two or three hours almost every day in adoration, and that she eagerly participates

in the baptism preparation classes. Surprised that someone who has not yet been baptized spends so much time before the Eucharistic Lord, I politely asked her, “*Sholpan, what do you tell God in so many hours of adoration?*”

She smiled, “*In the beginning, after this special experience, I came and prayed only for myself. I recounted all my problems to God and looked for a solution. My relatives and colleagues laughed at me every time they found out that I had been in the Catholic church again. Yet more and more they started asking me to pray for them with one intention or the other, and now I am entrusted with so many prayer intentions from all around that I have no more time for me and my problems.*”

I was touched to hear about the numerous Kazakh Muslims who were counting on Sholpan’s prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, and I said to her, “*Sholpan, I am sure that our dear God is happy that you pray so much for others. You will see; he will certainly take care of your intentions.*”

On another occasion, Sholpan slid a piece of paper with the name of a man over to me before she left the Eucharistic Lord and asked, “*Sister, help me pray for this seriously ill man who has an operation in a few days. I have so many*

intentions that I can’t even pray for them all during my adoration time.”

Sholpan, who was baptized during the Easter Vigil 2014, is one of those souls in whom God’s silent work can be seen. I experience, here in Kazakhstan, how true it is what our spiritual father wrote about the essential points of our community’s spirituality: “*Our first mission is adoration. The second mission is the sincere, brotherly love within the community as a testimony to the world. And only then comes the third mission to proclaim the Gospel to the others.*”

The Archbishop here in Astana thinks exactly the same; he recently said, “*A pastor always has the great desire to bring the others closer to Jesus, but they often do not know how. Therefore they come up with all sorts of things that are not really helpful like rock concerts to reach the youth, the louder the better, with the result that the same youth—so I’ve been told—then go to do Buddhist meditation where they sit for a long time in complete silence before a burning candle. Why sit speechless before a candle when we could be with Jesus? An encounter with the living God takes place in adoration! He works there!*”

Flowers of Thankfulness

My name is Gulnaz Shaylauova and I am 37 years old. I am a Kazakh, a child of the steppe, who was saved thanks to the love of Jesus. The greatest of all problems is sin: the lack of goodness and love, not being able to reconcile because of pride and finally, spiritual death.

That is how it was with me. In this painful condition, I stepped into a Catholic church for the first time six years ago, as a Muslim. I had not the faintest clue about Christianity. Yet there was a Catholic priest in the cathedral praying for me back then, and a ray of hope pierced me that even

a sinner like me could be saved. My first prayer to God was a cry for forgiveness. Yes, I wanted to start again, to turn away from sin. Intuitively, I understood that God is truly here and even waiting for me, so I started going to the church at any hour of the day, just to visit and speak to him. God heard my prayer and purified my heart before I knew the Catholic Faith or participated in a Holy Mass. My tortured heart gradually became lighter. With a great thirst, I participated in catechism classes, and my spiritual horizon opened up as I grew in understanding of the Holy Trinity,

of Sacred Scriptures and of the Church. With my spiritual growth, my whole situation improved.

Slowly, everything came into place in my life. For the first time, I was happy again.

A silent meeting

*T*hat is not all, though. My family, my husband Alibeck (51) and our daughter, Botagoz (16), followed me on my way of Faith to Jesus. Of course, our family and friends who are Kazakh Muslims did not understand our conversion. But no opposition or aggression could keep us three from entrusting our lives completely and forever to Jesus. Nobody had loved us so deeply and as sacrificially as Jesus Christ does. I always experience this in a very special way when I go to night adoration once a month. At the side altar in the cathedral, there is a large icon of Divine Mercy, which I love. When, in the silence of the night, I am the only soul in the church, I always go over to him, bow down and kiss Jesus' feet on the icon. Each time I have the impression that Jesus feels my kiss and that it pleases him.

I needed this strength from adoration especially in July 2013, when I was in poor health. I was diagnosed with cancer. Everything came so quickly and unexpectedly that I was afraid at first. However, then I said to myself, *"Gulnaz, that would disappoint Jesus. You entrusted your whole life to him, even your health."* So, I consciously wanted to accept my illness and fear as a trial on my spiritual path to baptism. At the same time, Jesus let me feel his presence so strongly once in prayer with the priests and sisters,

that it was as if he wanted to say, *"Through my wounds you will be healed!"*

*T*hanks be to God, the doctors performed a successful operation. I had to remain in the hospital for ten days, and I anxiously awaited the test results to see if there was any metastasis. I spent this time in prayer. My body was weak, but it was so wonderful to be quiet and alone with Jesus. Then, in the moment that they told me I did not have any metastases, I looked out the window of my hospital room and saw a rainbow in the clear sky. It was a sign for me that the Lord had healed me. It was September 23, 2013, and so, as an expression of my deep, thankful love, I bring a bouquet of flowers to the church on the 23rd of every month.

Following various treatments, I am back to full health, and all the test results have come back negative. Looking back, I can only thank Jesus for this illness, which brought about so many changes. Through it, all my Muslim relatives found out that I am Catholic, and that it was as if God himself had given me back my health. Nobody dared to contradict it nor the conversion of my family to the Catholic Faith. I pray to him every day, *"Jesus, I will never be able to thank you enough. I love you so much!"*

Gulnaz, the human resources director of a company, and her husband Alibeck, a sales manager, go to Holy Mass and adoration regularly with their daughter Botagoz. At home, they pray the Rosary and the Chaplet of Divine Mercy every day. They greatly look forward to their baptism, "the greatest celebration of our lives," as Gulnaz put it.

An Extraordinary Couple

In November 2002, Fr. Logan started perpetual adoration in his parish "Our Lady of Guadalupe" in Silvis, Illinois.

Since then, adoration has continued night and day, with volunteers signing up for one-hour time slots.

Among them are Manny and his wife Kathy, who took the time to tell us their extraordinary love story.

Manny was 66 and answered God's call for Perpetual Adoration after he retired; he had worked third shift for most of his career. He began taking on the early morning hours at Our Lady of Guadalupe's Adoration chapel. Each time he would hear of a lady having the hours ranging from midnight to about 6:00 a.m., he would offer to take the hours, stating that they should not be out alone at that time. Eventually, Manny had all the hours from midnight to 6:00 a.m. Monday through Saturday, then he would attend 6:15 Mass.

I was 54 and still working. I also answered God's call for Perpetual Adoration, starting with one hour of adoration before work on Thursday and one hour on Sunday morning at 4:00 a.m. Eventually I took on 2:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m. Sunday morning.

Manny's family and my family belonged to the same parish for all of my life. Although we attended the same grade school and went to the same late Sunday morning Mass, we never met.

Now God had us meeting at 2:00 a.m. Sunday morning. For a year, our conversation at that hour was 'Hello, Goodbye, have a good week.' After about a year, Manny asked if I wanted to say a Rosary with him before he left, which I agreed to. Eventually we began to share our thoughts about what we were learning from Holy Scripture.

One weekend morning, after Mass, Manny asked me out for coffee. I said, "No, I have plans for the day." Another time, on a Saturday morning, Manny asked me out for coffee; again, I said

no. Manny is a very proud man. In his culture, one turn down would have been enough for him to walk away. So with God's urging, while sitting in front of the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Manny called to ask me out for dinner. I said no one more time; my parents were requiring more help and I did not want to add anyone or anything more to my life.

Enough was enough for Manny. He formulated a plan that he would give up all the adoration hours he had at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish and sign up for adoration at a parish across town. The Saturday Manny was going to tell the adoration coordinator, I approached him after Mass and asked if he wanted to go for breakfast. He did. We talked for a couple of hours. When we parted Manny drove away quickly. I found out later that he went straight to the adoration chapel to give thanks. It is the end of August 2005.

We continued to go to breakfast on Saturdays. We continued to pray together and discuss the bible.

A few months later, on the feast of the Epiphany, while I was in adoration, I saw a light shine on Manny. My thought was 'I do not want this man to ever walk out of my life. I love him.'

Just as I was about to tell him, a woman walked into the chapel. I knew that I had to wait a week before I would tell him what was in my heart. This was a joyful week of anticipation for me.

I told Manny that I loved him. He bolted

up from his seat and said, *'We have to do three things. First, we have to talk to Father Logan. Second, we have to ask for your parent's blessing; if your parents do not give their blessing, then this goes no further.'* Manny was brought up in a time when not all parents would accept a Hispanic for a son-in-law. In fact, he had come across this in his younger days. *'Third, I need to get you a ring.'*

We told Father Logan of our intent. He said fine, just do it soon, and that we should attend the diocese's 'Engaged Couple Retreat'.

We went to my parents for their blessing. My mother began to cry and said, *'Now someone will take care of Kathy'*. Manny told her he would always take care of me. My father had a grin from ear to ear. Yes, we had their blessing. Manny's parents were deceased, so we called his brother and sisters to join us for lunch and share our news.

As for the ring, Manny called me at work to ask for my preference. I told him, *"keep it small and simple."* He got the simple part, but not the small part. I thank God that the jewelry store did not have a larger diamond at the time. I had the band sized, but did not see the ring until Manny gave it to me the next Sunday in the chapel. Manny and I were both on our knees in front of Our Eucharistic Lord when Manny slid the engagement ring onto my finger. We have kept this tradition of always exchanging important gifts in the chapel.

Manny has a great devotion to St. Joseph so we set our wedding day for May 1st, the feast of St. Joseph the Worker. It was to be a small wedding, followed by a dinner with our immediate family, brothers and sisters and their families.

*T*he morning of the wedding, May 1, 2006, Manny surprised me by having a limousine pick me up and take me to the church. The church was packed with family and friends. We said our vows holding a crucifix that we began our tradition of saying daily prayers holding. We were blessed to receive the Eucharist for the first time as husband and wife.

After sharing a meal with our families, we knew our day was not quite complete. After the last guest left, we looked at each other and knew where we had to go. We returned to the chapel to say 'Thank you'. When we entered the chapel, there were bouquets of white roses.

*W*e have been happily married now for nine years. Even though we come from two completely different cultures, our love for God and one another has always helped us find a solution together for our problems. We go regularly to adoration, and Manny works six days a week as sacristan. Since we both come from large families, one of our siblings is always in need of help. So we pass on the love that we receive from the Blessed Sacrament wherever we can.

*“Nobody comes to greet me,
to put out the fire of my love
which consumes me.*

*Nobody comes to receive graces,
to console me in my loneliness.”*

Jesus to Conchita of Mexico