

# *Triumph of the Heart*

SUFFERING THAT TURNS  
TO BLESSING

*Family of Mary*

*2014 (II) / No. 68*

*Christ's Cross embraced with love  
never leads to sadness,  
but to joy...*

*Pope Francis, March 24, 2013*

## *Suffering in God's Loving Plan*

Regardless of age, vocation or creed, everyone knows suffering. And yet how difficult it is for us to deal with suffering without losing hope or faith. When we hear about catastrophes or wars, about holocausts, hunger and epidemics, the question often arises, *"How can God let something like that happen?"* Only the Christian is able to give an answer to the cause and the sense of suffering because they know by looking at Christ's Cross that the divine Redeemer embraced all creation's suffering, took it upon himself and sanctified it in his love. If that is our understanding of suffering, then we know that when we are entrusted with suffering we also receive the sweet consolation of Christ's presence and his love. This knowledge allows a Christian to suffer very differently than a non-believer.

Since God's essence is love, he could never desire for his creatures to suffer. It would be a complete contradiction to his being. Every loving father knows that. Thus the origin of suffering and death is by no means God but solely man's voluntary turning away from his Creator,

the only source of joy. By turning away from God, man falls into countless pains and dire suffering; the ultimate result is death. Mankind is one large family in which we are all connected with one another. We are responsible for one another and are dependent on one another. This often means that the innocent have to bear the consequences of other people's sinful decisions, like children who have been aborted. We may also consider St. Edith Stein who said to her sister Rosa as they were picked up by the Gestapo, *"Come, we are going for our people!"*

Suffering in and of itself has no value. Yet through his infinite love, Jesus made suffering infinitely valuable and precious. He divinized it, gave it transforming power, let it become a source of grace and blessing. His suffering, Cross and death were proof of his love. The Cross became a sign of the greatest love—loving to the extreme. *"And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself."* (Jn 12:32) With these words, Jesus tells us that he will transform everything as the crucified man-God. That is redemption! That changes everything.

*N*ow something wonderful takes place: the redeemed person may cooperate in this redemption and the salvation of others. Jesus gave this coredemptive grace first of all to his mother who, as Bl. Pope John Paul II said, “*participated in all the sufferings of her crucified son. Mary... participated in a marvelous way in the suffering of her divine son in order to be Coredemptrix of Humanity*” (September 8, 1982). Through her immaculate conception and fullness of grace, Mary carried with her son his suffering for the redemption of the world in such a great amount that Pope John Paul II did not hesitate to call her “Coredemptrix”. God wants to give everybody the grace to offer their sufferings in a coredemptive way, united with Christ. Since man was not created to suffer, he naturally objects to

it. He needs prayer, which opens his soul and empowers him to accept suffering in love, to carry it united with Jesus and to offer it up to God for the conversion of others. This need not always be felt; a sincere act of the will is enough. Then suddenly suffering is no longer something which separates us from God but a precious gift which divinizes us. It unites us immediately and deeply with God. From this union with God, consolation and joy emerge even in suffering. Through the unification with Christ, everyone who suffers experiences what St. Paul wrote in his Letter to the Galatians, “*yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me!*” (Gal 2:20) That also means, “*yet I suffer, no longer I, but Christ suffers in me!*” Then suffering has redeeming power and becomes a blessing for you and the others.

## Saint Matrona

*For 71 years, St. Matrona (1881 – 1952) prayed and suffered for her people. A pillar of fire, the Russian Orthodox expiation soul maintained an unshakable belief in God’s love despite the gruesome persecution of Christians by the Communists and attacks from demonic powers. She advised thousands seeking help, healed the sick, freed those tormented by demons and spoke about future things as though she had read about them in a book.*

*M*atrona Dmitriyevna Nikonova was born in the little village of Sebino, 175 miles south of Moscow, the fourth child in a poor farming family. Her mother Natalya had a prophetic dream before Matrona’s birth in which a white bird with a human face, but with its eyes closed, landed in her hand. When her little daughter was born blind, actually without eyes and the lids closed tight, the meaning of the dream’s symbolism became clear. Despite their poverty, they did not place their handicapped child in a state institution as many people used to do in this time, but rather they cared for her with great love.

Her parents soon realized how much their child liked to pray; and, although she was completely blind, she spoke with the icons as if the saints and the Blessed Mother themselves were standing before her. Matrona liked to go to the liturgy in the nearby church with her parents, and her favorite spot was in the left corner next to the entrance. She often stood motionless for hours on end, singing with the choir the liturgical songs from memory to everyone’s amazement.

Unfortunately, the children in the village did not have the same sensitivity as her parents. Matrona would have loved to play with them,

but instead they made fun of her, whipped the defenseless child with weeds that cause itching or placed her in a pit to see if she would be able

to crawl out. Then they laughed at her and were so mean that she just went home and played by herself.

There are only a few pictures of St. Matrona which show her in the position that was so typical for her—sitting with her legs crossed. Blind and lame, she was completely dependent on God and at the mercy of others. Yet it was through this extreme helplessness which she endured with such great love that she became a spiritual mother for her nation. Just like her holy Russian contemporary Macaria, whom we wrote about in Triumph of the Heart #64, St. Matrona lived in extreme poverty, sometimes in downright misery. Yet her suffering, which she carried with heroic devotion, became a source of grace not only for the many visitors she received back then, but also for thousands of faithful who continue to visit her grave daily and entrust their needs to her.

## *Extraordinary suffering – extraordinary gifts*

*I*n addition to being blind, she felt very alone. Yet even during her childhood, God repaid Matrona with extraordinary graces. When Natalya reproached her six-year-old daughter one day, “*Why did you take off your baptismal cross?*” the child opened her little shirt and said, “*But mom, I have the cross here on my chest.*” What her mother was unable to understand back then, Matrona later explained to a confidant: Once an old man came to their little hut and asked for something to drink. She handed him a wooden bowl with water. He drank, gave her back the bowl and lightly tapped on her chest with his hand. A cross became impressed on her chest which was still visibly raised when her relics were exhumed in 1998. Matrona was sure that it was St. Nicholas who had visited her back then.

*A*t the age of eight, the blind girl began to speak about things which were impossible for her to know. Initially they laughed at her, but when different situations she had predicted came to pass exactly as the child had foretold,

people came from near and far to ask her for advice. Then God gave this patient, prayerful little child the gift of healing, bilocation, working miracles, discernment, liberating souls from demons and, above all, the gift to love every person who came to her throughout her life.

Not everybody wished her well though. After Holy Communion once when she was 17, she passed by a woman who seemed particularly against her and must have cursed her. “*I did not avoid her,*” Matrona related, “*because I knew that it was the will of God to take this curse upon myself.*”

From that day forward, Matrona never walked again because she was unable to straighten her legs. Since she patiently accepted and offered up this and many other demonic torments, she was able to liberate others from curses and demonic ties. Matrona warned everybody, “*Do not go to fortune tellers or people who claim to have healing powers because although they can fix something in your body, they do unspeakable damage to your soul.*”

## Two pillars of fire meet

For as long as Matrona was able to walk, she was always invited on pilgrimages with a wealthy friend, Lidia Jankova. They prayed at the tomb of St. Sergey of Radonesh, at the Lavra in Kiev they venerated the holy monks whose bodies have remained incorrupt in caskets for centuries and also visited St. Petersburg in 1892. They attended a Holy Mass there with the famous miracle worker—like the Cure of Ars was for France—John of Kronstadt.

At the end of the liturgy he called out in a loud voice for the congregation to step to the

side and clear a path. Then he called out, having never seen the girl before in his life:

*“Matrona, come, come here to me! Behold, here comes my successor, the eighth column of Russia!”*

We do not know if the eleven-year-old Matrona fully comprehended the meaning of these words at the time. Yet, in the course of her life the prophecies made by St. John of Kronstadt—a true father for the people of Russia—turned out to be true .

## An expiation soul in communist Moscow

When Matrona’s brothers, Michail and Ivan, joined the Communist Party in 1925, the presence of their deeply faithful sister, who received visitors daily and strengthened their Christian Faith in word and deed, became unacceptable and they feared repercussions. Full of compassion for her family, 44-year-old Matrona left her family home and moved in with her sister in Moscow.

Since she was a Christian, she was refused a permit of stay and had to move frequently; and because she was lame, friends had to carry her to relatives and acquaintances. She lived in huts, drafty rooms and cellars, often under the most unbearable conditions. She was always inspired though before the secret police’s raids. It only happened once that she was unable to escape in time; then the Lord helped her in a different way. She warned the police officer who had come to arrest her, *“Go home quickly, there has been an accident.”* Surprisingly, he immediately followed her instructions and found his wife seriously injured after kerosene had set her clothing on fire. He had just enough time to save her life by bringing her to the hospital. When he was asked

the next morning if he had finally locked up the blind lady, he answered, *“I will never arrest the blind lady. My wife would no longer be alive if she had not warned me.”*

Matrona had to be satisfied with any hiding place which Providence gave her. She was cared for in the most painful of these places which the Lord desired of her for expiation by a woman who had signed her life over to Satan. She practiced black magic and was often drunk. At times, Matrona did not even receive enough to eat. During this time of great physical and spiritual sacrifice God worked many extraordinary miracles including the multiplication of food.

One of her visitors related, *“Once, when I was invited to eat with Matrona, I asked her, ‘Matrona, how is it possible that we are both eating this herring and yet the same number of pieces remain on the platter?’* The saint answered me, *‘Don’t worry about it; just keep eating.’*”

Exteriorly, Matrona’s life was constant and calm: she received up to 40 visitors a day. She sat up straight with her legs crossed, her hands held

out in a blessing over the person kneeling before her and she gently touched their head with her fingers. She would make the sign of the cross, say a few words which were important for the soul, pray with them and then they would leave. Every day was filled with the worries and problems of those who had come seeking her intercession. In the evening, Matrona allowed herself, in her exhaustion, a little quiet time. Small as a child, she sat, usually leaning on a hand or a fist to one side, and dozed off. Most of the night, however, she spent in prayer. Matrona predicted the Revolution and that they would, *“rob, destroy the churches and chase away the Christians one after another.”*

She knew about the assassination of the Czar’s family, but also that the youngest sister of the Czar, Olga Romanova, was able to save herself and was hiding in the area of St. Petersburg in an empty little house. Matrona found dependable people to secretly bring Olga food.

*T*he patient, blind lady consoled many women waiting for their husbands to return after the Second World War. Through divine inspiration, she could say whether the missing person was still alive or not. She spoke herself about how she was able to help the soldiers on the front during the war through bilocation.

“When elderly or ill people say something offensive to you, do not listen to them, simply help them. The ill have to be helped and forgiven from the heart no matter what they say or do.”

*“Anyone who turns to me for help  
I will assist in the hour of death.”*

## *Her homecoming and work from Heaven*

*T*he Lord adverted Matrona about her hour of death on May 2, 1952, three days ahead of time. Full of goodness, but with her last strength, she said goodbye to friends and visitors who came in these hours. She promised those who worried about her, *“When I am dead, then come to my grave. You can always reach me there; I will help you and pray for you like I did when I was here on earth. Speak with me, entrust your concerns to me and do what I say to your soul.”*

*S*t. Matrona had predicted, *“When I die, very few will visit my grave, only those who are very close to me. When these people die,*

*my grave will be neglected; nobody will pass by anymore. Only after many years will people find out about me and remember me. Then the people will flock to me seeking help with their concerns. They will ask me to plead to the Lord for them, and I will help them all and answer them all.”*

That is precisely what happened. On March 8, 1998, 46 years after her death, the relics of St. Matrona were exhumed from the Danilov Cemetery and transferred on May 1 of that same year to the Orthodox New Maiden’s Convent in Moscow. Matrona was canonized in 2004 by Patriarch Alexij II. From this moment on, an end-



less stream of pilgrims has flowed to Matrona's icon and grave.

*I*n the middle of Moscow, visitors stand in line for hours before they can finally entrust Matrona, their little mother, their requests and concerns. Experience shows that St. Matrona refuses nobody her help and protection. Countless answered prayers and miracles have been attested, and new ones are added almost daily.

Tatyana from Moscow, for example, reported: "In the summer of 1994, I fell out with a family that was close to me. I was very hurt and didn't have the strength to forgive. So I brought this wound to the grave of our St. Matrona. As I was praying there for help, I heard the words, '*God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*' (Jas 4:6) "Afterwards, I didn't merely walk home, I flew. My heart was so purified that I was even ready to ask for forgiveness myself."

Translated from: Hl. Matrona, Stariza von Moskau, Hagia Sophia 2012

## *The Cross has Wings*

*Manuel Lozano Garrido (1920-1971),  
a Spanish journalist nicknamed "Lolo",  
understood how to accept his incurable illness as a gift  
from God's hand, and through it he became a true apostle of joy.  
He experienced the coredeeming vocation of those who suffer.  
In 2010, he was the first journalist to ever be beatified.*

*M*anuel Lozano Garrido was the fifth of seven children; he was born in the town Linares in southern Spain. He was a joyful child, a trouble-maker who had a passion for acting and soccer; and, he loved exploring the great outdoors. After their parent's early deaths, rough times lay in store for the children. When Manuel was 11 years old, he joined a youth group named "Catholic Action", a lay movement of the Church, which became his spiritual family from that point forward. There he

developed a selfless and humorous personality which attracted his contemporaries; he made clear judgments and had high ideals. This was where the spiritual foundation was laid for his ardent love of Christ, the Holy Eucharist and Our Lady, a love which gave his apostolic zeal wings for winning people's hearts for Christ. In this community he also discovered his passion for writing: "*At the age of 15, my vocation was already pretty clear to me ... I wanted to be a journalist.*"

## *We can do it!*

*I*n 1936, when Lolo was 16, civil war broke out in Spain and with it a severe persecution

of the Church. Religious services were forbidden; many priests and lay were arrested or shot.

Even some of Manuel's friends, the youth in the Catholic Action, suffered martyrdom. Lolo was commissioned by the only priest in the city who had not been arrested to bring Holy Communion to the persecuted Catholics. The experience of carrying the Eucharistic Lord in the midst of the war made a deep impression on the teenager.

Manuel was also soon arrested and locked up for three months, but even in prison he did not lose his sense of humor. When he was released, the 17-year-old had to serve on the Republican front. In 1939, after the war, he was able to resume his apostolate alongside his training to become a teacher. Untiringly, he now worked as a catechist, visited the sick, wrote his first article as the head of propaganda for the youth section of Catholic Action and even directed a Christian radio program.

*I*n the summer of 1940, Manuel participated in a large youth pilgrimage to Saragossa to visit the shrine "Our Lady of the Pillar". There, in front of the venerated image of Our Lady, the priest reminded the youth of their contemporaries who just a few months earlier had given their lives for Christ. He asked them Jesus' question to James and John: "Can you drink the chalice that I am going to drink?"

With love and enthusiasm, Lolo and the others answered unanimously, "We can!" Manuel was 20 years old at the time.

Three years later, the Lord would hand him a chalice, filled to the brim and completely different

than what Lolo had imagined. While in Madrid in 1942 for another military tour of duty, he started showing multiple symptoms of a serious illness.

It started with severe pain in his legs and soon Lolo was unable to climb the stairs. Only after thorough examinations in Madrid was the terrible diagnosis certain: Morbus Bechterew, a rheumatic illness which is incurable to this day. It manifests itself especially in the spinal column, which, accompanied at times by unbearable pain, leads quickly and unstopably to complete rigidity.

Manuel accepted this cross without reservation as he was discharged from military service for being "incurably ill". He saw it truly as a gift, and yet with each deterioration caused by the illness, he had to endure pain and darkness and foster an ever deeper acceptance of the cross. "Accepting God's will.... We say: I accept, I accept, but we do it as if we gave our dear God a blank check and yet hope that the amount he writes in is as low as possible. Accepting—a nice word, but in our mind there is a built in meter. Christian acceptance is much more than simply agreeing. It means to love it as a belonging when God gives or takes something from us. It means completely and unconditionally trusting that whatever God does or permits is pure goodness."

He merely asked Jesus: "Lend me your heart for the one, three or five years that I still have to live. Grant me your heart, not so that I can selfishly master everything easily and without effort, but so that I can fulfill my obligation of loving you without measure."

## *The Consoler from Lourdes and the power of the Holy Eucharist*

*I*n 1943, soon after the diagnosis, Lolo was offered the opportunity to participate in a pilgrimage to Lourdes accompanied by his sister Lucia.

He received an impressive confirmation from which spring he was to draw all strength for his painful path. Lucia relates:

"We arrived at the grotto with immense joy.... Since he was unable to lift his head, I placed a little mirror on Lolo's knee so that he could see Our Lady in the rock alcove. When I took the mirror away, it was bathed in tears."

Manuel's heart-felt love for Mary gave him



more than just courage in his suffering. He also understood how to rest from his painful struggle in her consoling presence. Jesus once placed the words into his mouth, *“From my Mother streams forth something like fire, a sweet peace, happiness and joy. I guarantee that you will never be without tenderness because I want that, even when you are grown up, you will have a heart in you that will soften when you feel like crying. I give you my Mother, who had a heart as big as a mountain, and that is enough.”*

Manuel described the deep experience of the Eucharistic Benediction for the sick as the high point of the Lourdes pilgrimage.

Lucia reported about Manuel’s visit to the grotto: “Lolo never prayed to be healed. He said to Our Lady, ‘I also offer you my joy ... such a terrible joy.’” She was to help him keep this until the very end.

Before the first Holy Mass was celebrated in his room, Lolo requested spontaneously, “Bring the typewriter and put it under the table we’re using for the altar so that the base of the Cross from Golgotha passes into the keyboard and is rooted there.”

## *Suffering with love is called redemption*

*T*he experience of the faith-filled suffering of so many people in Lourdes, the experience of the nearly tangible love of Our Lady and the Eucharistic Lord gave Manuel, in view of his own cross, the decisive understanding, *“In Lourdes I began to realize the breadth and universal sense of suffering.”* He understood that the way in which he consciously accepted pain had *“a purifying, healing side which brought peace and joy to the heart,”* and becomes a source of supernatural light for others as well.

He later wrote: *“Christ is in everybody who suffers ... not only to share the suffering and make it easier to carry, but to unite it with his suffering and thereby give it the same redeem-*

*U*nited with her, living and yet motionless, his life became a single, perpetual sacrifice. In the years to follow, the priests in Linares took turns bringing Manuel Holy Communion every day. In September 1962, shortly before Lolo went blind on the Feast of St. Francis, the diocesan bishop allowed Holy Mass to be celebrated in his apartment. One of the priests who celebrated there testified, *“It seemed to me that there were two altars at Holy Mass and two sacrifices. Christ was in the bread which I had just consecrated, and yet he was also in this body which was so ravaged after nearly 30 years of joyful suffering.”*

*ing power that his Cross had to redeem the world. ... Only two things are necessary for this: our will and our love.”* Pain became Lolo’s vocation and his means to work as a missionary despite being unable to move. With great joy, Lolo understood with a laugh, *“Yes, the Cross is heavy, but it has wings.”*

*A* further glorious fruit from Lourdes was finally the, “Sinai, Prayer Groups for the Press” which Lolo founded. It was soon made up of over 300 sick people in around 20 prayer groups, along with numerous monasteries, who offered their prayers and suffering for the Catholic press.

Lolo implored journalists to recognize their work as a vocation: “The journalist knows, like no other, how difficult it is to serve the truth. He feels the responsibility, like no other, of communicating daily with thousands of readers; he knows and fears his mistakes. He knows that it is a very difficult place to be and remain a Christian—the press.”

*“If someone asks  
what God is like,  
tell them that first and foremost  
he is father and then  
say whatever else you want.”*

## *Vocation: paralytic and journalist ...*

*B*y 1943, Manuel was already in a wheelchair; his hands and feet began to cramp up and his upper body was inclined forwards. He spent 28 years like this in constant pain, and he lost his sight for the last nine years of his life too. He was confined to a single room in which his sister Lucia cared for him continuously; he slept, prayed, ate and worked there. Lolo suffered grievously from loneliness; yet he never complained about all these great sacrifices. The more his suffering increased, the stronger his will became to lead as “normal” a life as possible without ever feeling sorry for himself.

*T*he time until early afternoon was reserved for prayer, often meditating for hours before his crucifix; his Rosary always hung from the armrest on his wheelchair. The rest of the day Manuel untiringly worked, read, wrote and edited.

When he could no longer use his hands, he dictated to his sister or made audio recordings. His work colleagues, who held him in great esteem, testified, “He was a journalist from head to toe.”

By the end of his life, he had published nine books and over 300 articles in which he elaborated on his experiences to transmit hope to others. In this way, he realized what he had written at the beginning of his handicap: *“The pain of my illness radically changed my life. I left the lecture hall, gave up my teaching post; loneliness and silence were my portion. The journalist whom I would have liked to be ... the little apostle I dreamt of being, no longer passed through the city quarter. Yet I have my ideal and my vocation before me, in a fullness which I never could have dreamt.”* Lolo’s writings were an inspiration for others. *“One of my articles produced a vocation to religious life. Just at the right moment, a young woman, who was still wavering in her decision, found the world I described attractive and took the all-important step to dedicate her life to Christ. Perhaps she is the only visible fruit of my efforts. Always closed up in my room, I tell myself that in any case I can only be a humble sower. ... Sowing in silence and being alone, always at a distance; that what unites us: if there is a spring, his fruit will ripen even if far away.”*

## *From the Creed of Suffering:*

*I believe  
in suffering  
as an election.*

*I believe  
that sacrifice  
is a telegram  
to God,  
which he  
answers  
unfailingly  
with grace.*

*I believe  
in the redemptive  
mission of suffering  
and approach  
those who suffer  
like a relic  
of the Cross.*

*I believe  
in the usefulness  
of solitude.*

*I believe  
that bodily uselessness  
is transformed  
into spiritual fertility  
for everybody.*

*Bl. Manuel Lozano Garrido*

## ... and apostle of joy

Lolo's suffering and the way he dealt with it, helped him to mature, and it became for him an inner wealth with which he enriched others—a literary and spiritual apostolate. His greatest wealth however, which impressed everybody, was his joy.

He was convinced: *“What distinguishes the Christian is not patience, surrender and maybe not even goodness, but joy because he who endures a trial without joy has not yet fully penetrated the mystery of the Cross. All virtues grow out of joy. He who has joy has everything.”*

Nevertheless, he knew very well the experience of spiritual darkness due to fear, loneliness and the feeling of uselessness. *“Before the window of my heart the gloomy sparrow of sadness flutters in search of a crack where he can come in.”*

Even when Manuel was alone with Lucia, he did not always smile. For those on the outside, however, his smile seemed to be eternal. He

knew, *“Joy in the heart is the result of fighting and self-denial: it is the lasting fruit of a conquest.”*

This joy, rooted in doing God's will, was continuous, deep, peaceful and contagious. In this positive disposition, he met everybody: the many journalists, priests and young people who came and went from his apartment at the invitation of his generous friendship. This “man of suffering” in the wheelchair transmitted to them hope and trust in God's goodness.

Towards the end of his life, Manuel admitted, *“There is one word that really wells up in me: ‘Thanks!’ Beyond all the suffering my life was so much richer through the love that was given to me from above.”*

Even on the day of his death, November 3, 1971, he was still able to give a smile, despite his terrible pain. After a short agony, accompanied by the priest's Our Father and Hail Mary and with the Cross in his hands, he closed his blind eyes forever.

Source: Rafael Higuera Alamo und Pedro Camara Ruiz, *La gioia vissuta. Vita, profilo spirituale e opere del servo di Dio Manuel Lozano Garrido „Lolo“*, Editrice Paoline

*In the decree  
proclaiming Lolo as venerable  
it is written:  
“Pain became the source  
of his sanctification;  
his illness made him a teacher.”*

# *Prayer of the Sick*

*Lord, we the sick come to you.*

*We are useless to society.*

*We are a bother everywhere.*

*We cannot leave our homes and dive into the world of business.*

*We need our meager savings for medication,  
injections and countless doctor visits.*

*Everybody laughs, we cry silently.*

*Everybody works, we are forced to relax,  
a relaxation that is incomparably more difficult than any work!*

*We cannot go to the telephone when it rings,  
cannot open the door for our friends,  
cannot set up the knocked-over chair.*

*We are not free to love a man or a woman.*

*We cannot think about our own home, a family;  
nor can we run the fingers of our illusions  
through our children's mops of hair.*

*And yet an enormous task awaits us: to help people to their salvation!*

*Lord, let us recognize this task that is given to us, united with you.*

*Let us recognize its deep purpose.*

*Lord, receive our uselessness as a bouquet of glorious lilies.*

*Take these flowers in your hands marked with your wounds,  
so that they may contribute to universal redemption.*

*Bl. Manuel Lozano Garrido*



# *Twin Sisters in Spirit*

*Blessed Mother Teresa is renowned by the whole world as a woman of extraordinary faith and charity. Relatively unknown however was her 50 year friendship with a noble woman from Belgium, Jacqueline de Decker. Their spiritual unity was so precious to the “Mother of the Poor” that she always referred to her sick friend in the wheelchair her “second self”.*

*A* modest, 37-year-old sister in a white sari with a blue border left the security of the Loreto Convent in Calcutta on August 17, 1948, to take in the poorest of the poor in the slums. It was the first step toward forming a new religious order whose missions would spread throughout the world.

Inspired by God’s call, Mother Teresa began her vocation as a Missionary of Charity. First, she received medical training from the sisters in Patna before serving the homeless, naked, hungry and thirsting Jesus in every poor, sick, and dying person.

It was there in Patna that she had a memorable

encounter with 35-year-old Jacqueline de Decker who, following God’s call, had already worked for two years in the slums of Madras as a nurse and social worker for the poor. Jacqueline traveled through half of India in order to meet “*this little nun with high ideals*”. “*A Jesuit priest in Madras told me about a ‘Sr. Teresa’ who intended to live and work like me. We finally met in the sisters’ chapel and discovered in our conversation that we shared the same ideals. ... We planned for me to join her, but when I shared with her in what poor health I was ... we decided it would be more prudent for me to first return to Belgium for some rest and medical examinations.*”

## *Suffering united with the Passion of Jesus*

*I*n her inner need, Jacqueline made a pilgrimage to Lourdes during her return trip to Europe because she was convinced, “*My heavenly Mother surely knows what I am going through.*”

At home in Antwerp, specialists found out that Jacqueline’s spinal cord had been irreparably damaged. Shortly thereafter, her arms, an eye and her right leg showed indications of paralysis requiring several operations to prevent total paralysis. The sick woman spent a whole year in a body cast followed by twelve more operations on her neck and spine.

It was clear to Jacqueline that she would never return again to India and become a sister, something which she had considered until that time as truly the will of God. Feelings of failure, pain, bitterness and depression tormented her. Nevertheless, she courageously allowed herself to be led by God in this condition which she could not understand. “*Since my doctor did not give my illness a direct name, I simply called it GGI, ‘God-given illness’.*”

Back then, in the fall of 1952, a letter arrived from Mother Teresa which helped her severely handicapped friend to discover her new vocation:

*“Jacqueline, I make a proposal to you today. You have such a great desire to become a missionary. Why don't you unite yourself spiritually with our community which you love so much? While we are doing our work in the slums, you can ... share the work with us through your suffering and prayer. The work here is unimaginable, and I need helpers, it is true. Yet, I also need souls like you who pray and suffer for this work. You will be in Belgium with your body but with your soul in India, where many souls are longing for the Lord but are incapable of going to him on their own because nobody is willing to pay the price for their redemption. You will be a true Sister of Charity when you pay the price. ... I need many like you who in suffering unite*

*themselves with our order. ... God must have a preferential love for you since he gives you such a great participation in his suffering. Be courageous and joyful because God has chosen you!”*

*J*acqueline accepted the “mission assignment”. “When Mother Teresa asked me to seek out sick and suffering helpers for her, I understood for the first time how important the unity between suffering and activeness is for the kingdom of God. I never could have imagined that ... sick people could help those who are active. ... Yet, as Mother Teresa said, suffering, united with the Passion of Christ, became a precious gift.”

Jacqueline tells about an important moment in her life: “I had my first experience accepting suffering when I was 15 years old. After a diving accident I had serious back pain; and it seemed to me as if God was asking me to accept this suffering, and I did. Back then, I had already considered going to India some day because I thought, ‘There are so many people suffering in the world, but God cannot reach them without hands that care for them or feet that go to them. Could that not be me?’ So I decided to offer my whole life to God and the service of my neighbor.”

## *Everybody is welcome!*

*Q*uickly Jacqueline was able to win over an amazing number of others suffering like her to offer themselves with all of their suffering, afflictions and their prayers for Mother Teresa's blossoming work. In this way, every sister received a “second self” by name.

That is still the case today with now more than 5,000 sisters. In 1953, Mother Teresa wrote Jacqueline, “*In reality, you can do much more with your pain than I can do running around here.... Anyone who wants to be a Missionary of Charity ... is welcome, but especially the lame, cripple and incurably ill are dear to me because I know for sure that they will bring many souls to Jesus' feet. ... When the times are heavy, my soul is strengthened just by the*

*thought that you are praying and suffering for me. Everything becomes easier, and a smile for our dear God forms all by itself.”*

For the rest of her life, Jacqueline remained Mother Teresa's personal “second self”. She had to undergo more than 30 operations and in 1996, one year before Mother Teresa's death, she handed over the leadership of the more than 3,000 sick and suffering coworkers from all the ends of the earth, walks of life and age groups. Mother Teresa wrote her “twin sister” in Belgium a last letter of thanksgiving on September 3, 1997, just two days before her death. Jacqueline de Decker died on April 3, 2009, at the age of 96, and wanted to be buried in an Indian sari.

# If There were No Heaven

The oldest of three sisters from Herrenried, Germany, Sr. Sebalda Neger, age 75, joined the Schonbrunner Franciscans in Bavaria when she was only 16, and she just celebrated her 60th anniversary in December. Throughout her religious life she has been at the service of handicapped children, encouraged also through the personal words which Padre Pio wrote to her, "Venerate the Sacred Heart of Jesus and everything will turn out well!"

Sr. Sebalda had countless touching encounters with young people who had to live with disabilities and whose sufferings became an obvious source of blessing for themselves and others. Let us hear some of these stories in her own words:

Dear readers, some of you may have worked with disabled people as I have, and some of you might even be the parents of a disabled child. First and foremost I would like to testify to the wonderful value such a life has and what a precious blessing it is that these disabled people give. I have often received this blessing from "my children" and passed it on.

Once, as a very young sister, I asked a paralyzed ten-year-old named Robert, who was completely dependent on the help of others, "Roby, wouldn't you like to be able to run around?" "Yes, if there were no heaven, I would like to!" he answered immediately.

I was very touched. Roby carried his disability throughout his entire life. For decades I often had the opportunity to ask him how he was doing, and every time he answered without hesitation, "I'm doing well!" This constant attitude I can only explain as a wonderful soul dwelling in a completely impoverished body, and that God's grace is very effective.

I learned through Roby how extraordinarily important it is to pass on to handicapped children faith and hope in our loving God because with the disabled you cannot do much through words. Only through loving affection and accepting God can they experience love. Roby understood how valuable suffering can be.


When he was diagnosed with cancer at the age of 50 he said to me with a smile, "Balda, you don't have to worry a bit about me! In heaven I'll be close to you."

## A chain reaction of grace

Tobias, with whom I have been united since 1982, shows us that a handicapped child is not simply a child who needs to be taken care of, but on the contrary, he can become a blessing for all those who know him. Tobi came to our home when he was five, and it was the family's first contact with the Catholic Church and religious orders. Only the mother had been baptized in the Protestant Church, but not the father, Tobi or his sister.

Yet, within a year, the parents wished to have


Tobi baptized into the Catholic Church. His younger sister Marion was there when he received his First Holy Communion and Confirmation. After that, she often asked me to speak with her parents because she too wanted to be baptized. "I want to be like my brother," she repeated. Her parents did not listen to her though because they were of the opinion, "She is healthy and has to decide on her own when she is old enough." When she was 14, Marion happily decided to be baptized.

 On the Monday after Pentecost in the Holy Year 2000, I received an unexpected phone call from Tobi's father: "*Sr. Sebalda, I am going to be baptized and I would like it if you would be there. Would you please come?*" He was 58 years old at the time and ran his own business. Shortly before the baptism, he entrusted to me, "*I don't know how my life would have turned out without Tobi in our family, but it definitely would have been different.*" It was a touching moment when his disabled son lit his baptismal candle from the Easter candle and radiantly handed it to his father. Many of the 20 guests could not hold back their tears. "*At last, we are really a family,*" Marion said.

Only their grandma remained convinced, until just shortly before her death, that, "*After death, it's all over!*" When I found out that she was about to die, I wanted to write her a letter to say goodbye. Since this very sick woman was not a believer, I could not write to her about God either. So I directed her thoughts to the memory of her grandson's First Holy Communion because after the celebration years ago she had said, "*Sister, I will never forget the moment when a ray of sun enveloped Tobi with light as he processed into the church!*" In the letter I reminded her of that moment and that light: "*I have encountered this same light of grace many times in my life, and I am deeply convinced that we will all encounter it, at the very latest on the day we pass over to the other side and may leave behind all suffering and the shadows it casts.*"

Her daughter read the letter to her over and over again; as a result, she wanted to see a Protestant minister and died a Christian. Without a doubt, she had her seemingly powerless grandson

to thank for this grace, and in reality he is not "powerless" but a strong and diligent helper for our two sisters doing the landscape gardening.

 I would also like to briefly tell about our Mario, a child who has become a great blessing for me personally. The boy was continuously in the hospital until he was three. His parents, both only 18 years old, separated before he was born. When I held the severely handicapped and blind Mario in my arms for the first time, he became very calm and fell asleep. I knew in an instant, "*If this child survives he will need love!*" His mother could not give him the love he needed; she was herself in great need. So I held this blind child very often in my arms and I knew, "*Now you are God's instrument!*"

Only after three years of intense prayer did I finally receive permission from Mario's father to have him baptized on May 8. Thirteen years later Mario died at the age of 17—on the anniversary of his baptism. Through this death, I felt once again a deep blessing and an inner peace. I am convinced that Mario's no longer blind eyes now see the glory of God.

God uses our hands and voices for the "right to life" of the disabled, something which unfortunately is no longer self-evident in today's world. With what reverence we should look at the sick and disabled because through their suffering and handicaps they are very close to God and bring us many blessings and graces.

As for me, I look forward to the day in heaven when I will be able to see all the children I have taken care of and assisted over the course of the last 55 years. I am sure they are all there. As Roby said, "*If there would not be a heaven, I would prefer to run around.*"



# My Pain Helped Me Find True Joy

*“Conversion is a greater miracle than raising somebody from the dead,”  
St. Bernard said. Looking back, Fr. Nars (a diminutive form of Bernard) Beemster  
from Holland agrees with this wise saying from his patron saint.  
The Lord had to powerfully intervene before this rowdy young man  
found the way to his vocation. For a long time he was convinced,  
“The last thing I want to be is a priest!”*

I grew up in a little village named De Weere in northwestern Holland with four sisters and a brother in a Catholic family. Even as a little boy, I was fascinated by the giant tractors of my father’s tulip plantation. This instilled in me the desire to become a mechanical engineer and realize my dream: money, a big house, a cool car and a fast motorcycle.

Yet shortly before starting college, something happened which changed my direction. Where I grew up, there were many outdoor festivals in the surrounding towns from April to September. Although it bothered my parents, that was my life. We guys went out every week, three times if we could manage it.

My manner was bold, harsh and arrogant. I strutted my stuff by showing up all the time with different good-looking girls.

On the night of August 19, 1990—I did not know when I was 20 years old that that was the feast of my patron saint, Bernard—my friends and I met up with another group of guys at a bar in the next town. That night, the beer really flowed, and it was late by the time we left our drinking binge. There were already several drunken groups outside waiting impatiently for their taxis and tensions were high because everybody wanted to go home.

A fight broke out which turned into a huge brawl; I joined in too because one of my friends called for help. Since I was a boxer, I could hit pretty hard, of course, but that night I was so drunk that I did not even react to the punches and kicks of my attackers, and I was beaten into a coma.

I woke up in the hospital a day and a half later. Following a trail of blood, they had found me lying unconscious in a pool of blood at the entrance to the church. That is what the police report says anyway. To this day, I cannot explain how I reached the church doors.

My face was completely beaten; and along with a nose broken in several places, I suffered brain damage which resulted in seizures and convulsions. It was very difficult for me to talk because the left side of my face was lame. I could not move my left arm and the first time I tried to walk, I could only drag my left leg behind me.

Problems keeping my balance prevented me from boxing and when I tried to ride my motorcycle I fell over with it. Since I could no longer concentrate I could not study and had to delay my engineering studies.

My friends still went out at night, but I was strictly forbidden to drink alcohol and anyway I did not have the strength to go and party. So I stayed home feeling abandoned. In the beginning,



I still hoped to return to my wayward lifestyle as soon as possible, but my recovery process totaled more than six years. I never made it back to my original strength and condition.

*S*ix months after the brutal attack I was at the end of my rope physically and psychologically. My thoughts centered continually on the suicide of a former boxing mate who jumped in front of a train. I was tortured by the questions, “*Why did Michael do that? What do I have to live*

I trained hard for four years as a teenager to be a boxer. I took out the frustration and rage that often tore me up inside. Above all, being a boxer meant that in my group of friends I was “the man” whom everybody looked up to. They were happy to have me on their side when fights broke out because we usually won.

*O*ne of the most unique things about my life is that from my childhood on, I always went to church on Sunday. Why I continued to do this as a teenager, sometimes even pretty drunk and with my hair wet from beer, is a mystery to me too, because I did not really participate at Mass and I understood nothing. I believe it was God himself who woke me up every Sunday morning and dragged me out of bed.

I was much more deliberate about going to church only after that infamous August night, when I was a 22-year-old university student. I perked up my ears for the homilies and something became very clear to me: God always forgives, so anybody can start over again. My fascination of the Faith grew and I read a lot about it. I was deeply touched in 1995 when I read in a book about Fatima the words of Our Lady to the shepherd children: “*Many souls go to hell because there is nobody to sacrifice and pray for them.*” I was horrified to realize at the age of 24: “*There is a hell, and if I don’t radically change my life, I will probably end up there.*” As if of themselves, my feet carried me to the old parish priest, and I made my confession. What a liberating moment!

*T*he tangible joy of having finally found

*for? Maybe I’ll end up like this good guy!”*

To make matters worse, my friend, with whom I had taken many motorcycle trips, had a serious accident and lost an arm and a leg and was paralyzed for life. My despair and fear were so great that one night I climbed out of bed, knelt down and, at the age of 21, said a prayer from my heart for the first time in my life: “*God, I don’t know you, but I know you exist. I hardly dare to say it and I don’t deserve it, but I ask you: Help me!*” Today I see how wonderfully Jesus answered my prayer.

Jesus my savior became more intense that year when I made my first pilgrimage to Medjugorje. Nevertheless, even after five years it was incredibly difficult for me to tell my friends about my Faith experiences. The guys, practically none of whom believed in God, said with a laugh, “*If it does something for you and you need it, okay. But leave us out of it. Hey, waiter, ten beers for us please, and a glass of holy water for Nars!*” I didn’t hold it against these “tough guys” that in their world, which had also once been my world, there was no room for God.

For me, on the other hand, it was important to give Jesus and Mary more and more the first place in my life. Not even my girlfriend understood this and, unfortunately, she ended our beautiful relationship in 1995 with the words, “*You love God more than me.*” Although it hurt initially, it turned out that she was right.

Now I began an intense search for my path. What did God want of me? Religious life, social work? No, that wasn’t it. In the end, I signed up in 1996 for the winter semester at the seminary in Amsterdam. I thought it was simply terrible in the seminary, but that was my problem because I had not yet changed. I blamed it on everybody else. Nobody was good but me. So one day I went to our spiritual director bringing a list of everything I had to criticize. I read it to the 75-year-old priest:

this is not good, and that is worthless. The seminarians are good for nothing, the food is good for nothing, the classes are good for nothing, as are the teachers, and in the end I told him directly to his face, *“And you are good for nothing.”* In response he said only one thing, *“The next time you point your finger to make an accusation, take a look at your own hand and notice how many fingers are pointing back at you!”*

*I*t was a horrible moment when he said that to me. Only after I recognized my own mistakes, admitted them and asked for forgiveness was I able to really begin my priestly formation.

When Bishop Punt spoke to me about the priesthood in the summer of 1996, I adamantly responded, “No, I definitely won’t become a priest!” The telephone rang three days later and the bishop spoke to me anew, “If you are called and you are not willing to leave your home, parents, possessions and a new job to follow Jesus as he is asking of you, then you are not worthy of him.” That cut me like a knife. Even though I was in disfavor with many people because of my choices for God, I wanted to be worthy at least in God’s eyes. After a sleepless night, I had made my decision.

In the chapel of the “Lady of All Nations” in Amsterdam, I also discovered the most beautiful veneration of Mary there is—Mary as the Mother of all peoples. For me, to be honest, there is no more meaningful prayer as the one which Our Lady revealed in Amsterdam. Yes, I do not know where I would be in life without this Mother whom Jesus gave to me at the foot of the Cross. Therefore, I like to bring the teenagers and children who are entrusted to me in my pastoral work to this special chapel.

## *My Cross - a Gift!*

*Méabh Carlin, a 20-year-old student teacher from Lurgan in Northern Ireland, had a passion for dancing until three years ago. Having spent over a year in a wheelchair following a horrific accident,*

*Méabh now speaks about her Faith to young people, prayer groups and at national and even international congresses.*

*This lively, sociable young woman had an intense desire to live a vibrant relationship with Jesus. Her desire was fulfilled in a most unpredictable manner.*

Fr. Patrick Cahill, one of our priests, heard Méabh give her testimony for the first time in the

I was ordained a priest on May 25, 2002, and although it is not always an easy vocation, in my heart I am a truly happy priest who cannot imagine being anything else. At the beginning of 2012, I was appointed rector of the Dutch pilgrimage site “Our Lady of Refuge” in Heiloo.

If by chance, my patron saint, Bernard, was “involved” in that decisive night more than 23 years ago, I thank him dearly! My serious injuries completely changed my life, and my pain helped me indirectly find true joy today. I am still surprised how God worked in such a sorrowful situation and, in the end, everything turned out to be such a blessing.

summer of 2012 at the International Eucharistic Congress in Dublin. He recently had the oppor-

tunity to meet and speak to his compatriot: *Méabh, when we see the photos of you as a ballerina and more recent photos of you in a wheelchair, we might ask ourselves, how is it possible that you can now talk about Jesus with such a smile. What happened in your life?*

Méabh: *I*n the summer of 2011 I traveled to World Youth Day in Madrid, Spain. I had hoped to receive a more vibrant relationship with Jesus from the trip, something which would give my life a deeper meaning.

On Wednesday August 17, the day before the arrival of the Pope, the streets were thronged with young people. As a typical teacher, I took it upon myself to usher my friends across the road safely. As I crossed to the third lane I looked to my left. I didn't even have time to inhale. A taxi was coming towards me at a steady, fast speed and I knew it would not have time to stop—nor would I have time to react. So I stood there for that split second and awaited my fate.

The next few moments occurred in slow motion, and if I close my eyes I can relive those six seconds over and over again. The taxi struck my left side. I somersaulted mid-air and on my way down I knew that I could not let my head hit the ground first. I was not ready to die.

I suddenly turned 180 degrees, which prevented me from landing on my head. Scientists may ascribe it to gravity... I ascribe it to God. After sliding across two lanes of traffic, I managed to make my way to the side of the road before falling into the arms of a complete stranger.

Before I knew it a crowd of pilgrims, including some of my friends, surrounded me, offering their support in whatever way they could. Even though I was in pain and couldn't think straight, as I looked at the crowd, I could see God in the faces of the people around me.

After a series of painful examinations in the hospital I was wheeled to intensive care. I lay there for six long hours, unable to communicate with the Spanish doctors and nurses, feeling so bewildered, alone and afraid. I wasn't sure whether I would live or die and wanted to phone my family to make sure they knew I loved them.

I remember not knowing what to do, so I closed my eyes and prayed. I was unable to concentrate long enough to say the Our Father. But I remember asking God to stay with me. And although I lay alone and in shock, I felt God's presence surround me and comfort me through those hours of trial. I trusted that if I died it would be God's will. I was content.

Fr. Patrick: *What consoled and strengthened you the most in these difficult circumstances?*

Méabh: *I* was wheeled to another ward early the next morning and greeted some friends and pilgrims who, unknown to me, had spent the night in the hospital waiting. That night, my parents arrived. The love of God I experienced through the dedication of my friends and parents at that time was priceless, and something that I will never forget.

I was beginning to realize how crucial the presence of others is when someone suffers. It was a great shock when I found out that I had multiple fractures to my pelvis and groin as well as ligament damage in my knees and feet.

During my time in the hospital my eyes were opened to true sufferers each dealing with their own illness in a heroic manner. I feel privileged to have come into contact with such amazing people and will always draw strength from the modest way in which they carried their crosses.

Fr. Patrick: *You spent many months in the hospital and in rehabilitation. It may well be that you will never dance again. Despite this, you are a radiant and joyful person. How did you manage to accept this tragedy? Did you not blame God?*

Méabh: *I* am a strong believer that everything happens for a reason and that our suffering is often part of a bigger and better picture. My journey has not been a straight and easy one. I have encountered many hurdles and been challenged in many ways.

Coming home and having to adapt and change

my lifestyle to cater for my disability has been an eye opener in itself and has enabled me to develop a true compassion for those who are physically disabled. Learning to walk again has been disheartening, as it can sometimes be one step forward and two back. However, when I find that I am unable to make the jump over the next hurdle, I turn to God and ask him to carry me there. As I learn to take one more step every day with the physiotherapy, I am also taking personal steps in my own life and with each step I can feel my Faith deepening. I feel the only way to endure the suffering that so often darkens our doorway is to remain centered, to ask God for help. I see that building a relationship with God is in fact the fuel for our journey and something to keep us going along the way.

I have discovered a great treasure in silent adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. I look at him and he looks at me. I just love being there in his presence! I believe the power of prayer has been a great source of strength for me and my loss of mobility has provided me with a new appreciation for the smallest things in life.

As I began to see the cross that has been given to me not as a cross but as a gift, my eyes were opened to see the true beauty of life. My cross has enabled me to help others to come to know God in the way I have and am continually learning to do.

Fr. Patrick: *Méabh, you have spoken about how you have helped others come to know God. You have started a Youth 2000 group and sing in a music ministry group. Where has this missionary zeal come from?*

Méabh: *As I lay in the hospital in my broken body, a friend of mine wrote a card to me with the words of St. Catherine of Sienna, "Be who God wants you to be and you will set the world on fire."*

I am me, with my broken bones, and temporary disability. If I accept this I will become a consolation and encouragement for others. I experience this often. I met a woman from Tyrone a few days ago who came to me after Mass at which I had given my testimony. With great sincerity

she recounted, *"My husband died a few weeks ago. I was terribly distraught and didn't know how I would go on without him. But now after your testimony I have hope again because I see in your life that it is possible in a hopeless situation that our lives can be rebuilt through God's power and that we can make something beautiful of them. Thank you!"*

Whenever I tell my story, people are consoled and strengthened. I know that this is also fruit my cross. I have often had the experience that when we are at our weakest, then God's grace really comes to the surface. What a privilege that God is using me!

Fr. Patrick: *What is important in your life today?*

Méabh: *One of my favorite saints is Mother Teresa. Some of her words have been such an inspiration for me that I have taken them as my motto: "Be faithful in the small things because it is in them that your strength lies."*

It is not strength of body that matters but strength of heart. Through my suffering I learned to appreciate every moment of every day. Everything is a gift! Another expression from Blessed Mother Teresa which struck me profoundly is *"We cannot all do great things, but we can do small things with great love."*

It has been so challenging but, ... I wouldn't change anything that has happened because I have understood that it is only through suffering that we can see the beauty of the cross. It is often portrayed as something negative but you can't have the rainbow without the rain! Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass. It's about learning to dance in the rain. I want to give glory to God with my scarred legs.

Fr. Patrick: *We thank you dear Méabh that you have accepted your cross and that through it you have become such a sign of hope.*

*Whoever listens to you is inspired by your joy, touched by your purity and has a desire to meet Jesus more intimately. When you speak*



*about him, you can feel that you speak about someone you know.*

*The cross which has become a gift for you is a great source of hope and strength for others. You give us a living example of what*

*it means to not look inwardly when you suffer but upwardly towards God and to give it all to him. Through your acceptance of your suffering you are a wonderful witness for the risen Lord and for the power of Faith.*

## *The Healing Spring from Sarotschiy Log*

*A* few years ago, we missionaries visited the Siberian town Sarotshiy Log, 50 miles east of Talmenka for the first time. It is considered a place of pilgrimage for the Orthodox Church. Its origin dates back to January 19, 1921. On that day the faithful were celebrating the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, as they do every year, when Communist revolutionaries stormed into the church, called out 12 prominent men, including the priest, drove them out of the church and shot them because of their Faith. Then they buried the corpses in a close-by hollow.

One of their mothers, Proskovia Petrovna, went there every day to pray because she wanted to be close to her murdered son. As she was praying once in the field near him and the other martyrs, she saw in a puddle the face of Our Lady of Kasan, a famous Russian icon. As she went to take the icon out of the water, it disappeared and a strong spring of water gurgled in its place.

News of this event spread quickly, and more and more faithful began going to the martyrs and the spring to pray and beg for healing and for their intentions. In 1921 there were reports about a paralyzed eight-year-old boy whom someone carried to the spring in the hope of healing. That very day, he went home on his own two feet. In 1924, they started building a chapel which was immediately destroyed by the authorities.

Nevertheless, in the first three years thousands of pilgrims came, like a “little Siberian Lourdes”, making it a great thorn in the Communist’s eye. The chief-of-police, Bondar Dibrovna, wrote in his detailed report on July 2, 1925, “*I was informed that in the town Sarotshiy Log a ‘holy spring’ has emerged to which a huge number of fake believers are flocking to ask for healing from various weaknesses and illnesses. From June 19-21, 1925 we found 2000 people ... many elderly, but also families with children and sick people in carriages, obviously from villages far away, who had filled many bottles of water from this holy spring to take home with them. There are ... stories about healings which took place there ... where the bandits who were shot are praised as ‘saints’ by the believers.*”

*I*n the course of several waves of persecution, many more than 2000 Christians were brought to Sarotshiy Log where they were brutally tortured before they were murdered like the first martyrs here and buried in the nearby fields and depressions.

During the Second World War, a few young men suddenly saw an oil lamp, like the ones found in the Orthodox churches, burning on one of these graves. They knew nothing about the



mass graves of the persecuted Christians there and reported this unique event. The town authorities immediately had the fields leveled and the depressions filled, but one week later the phenomena happened again. Mother Martha, the superior of the present-day Orthodox convent situated there, recounted how she as a 12-year-old pilgrim saw the filled-in depression with her own eyes.

The healing spring, which the government tried in vain several times to cover, never ran dry and the stream of pilgrims was never stopped. As in all the years past, remarkable healings take place there to this day.

In the spring of 2005, 30-year-old Natalia

from Barnaul was healed from cancer after going to Confession, receiving Holy Communion and bathing in the spring. Tatyana came in May 2008. *"It's over. Death is at my door."* And she was right because she really was a physical and spiritual wreck. She cried, prayed, begged for healing and, full of trust, washed in the spring. After just one day, she was completely transformed, even exteriorly.

When Tatyana returned in June, she embraced Mother Martha full of joy and cried out, *"Thanks be to God! Here the Holy Spirit and Our Lady heal through the intercession of all the martyrs of this place!"*

*God's eternal wisdom saw from all eternity  
the Cross that he gives you  
as a precious gift from his heart.*

*Before he sent you this cross,  
he meditated on it with his omnipotent eyes,  
considered it with his divine understanding,  
examined it with his wise justice,  
warmed it with his loving arms  
and measured it with both hands  
to make sure it was not an inch too large  
or an ounce too heavy.*

*He blessed it in his most holy name,  
anointed it with his grace  
and scented it with his consolation.*

*And then he looked once more to you  
and your courage  
and finally it came down from heaven,  
as a gift from God to you,  
as alms of the all-merciful love.*

*St. Francis de Sales*