

Triumph of the Heart

CONQUERING SIN THROUGH
THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Family of Mary

2017 (I) / No. 79

*Mary is able to recognize the traces of God's Spirit
in events great and small.*

Pope Francis in "Evangelii Gaudium"

Consecrate Yourselves to My Immaculate Heart!

*"Mother of Christ, help us with the power of the Holy Spirit to conquer all sin,"
pleaded Pope St. John Paul II in the consecration of the world on March 25, 1984.
For the final spiritual battle, in which we find ourselves today, God has given us
the means with which we can fight. We contemplated with you, dear readers,
some of these spiritual weapons in the last issue of Triumph of the Heart:
the devotion to St. Michael the Archangel, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament,
the Rosary and the Five First Saturdays Devotion, fasting, Holy Confession,
indulgences, forgiveness and especially the Sacrifice of the Holy Mass.
In this issue, we want to deepen our understanding of some other powerful means
which have been given to us to victoriously survive
the apocalyptic time in which we live.*

*F*rom the Cross, the dying Redeemer gave Mary, the one who crushes the head of the serpent and to whom the final victory over evil is entrusted, to the Apostle John, and thereby made all people of all times her children. However, for her to fully employ her protective motherhood for us, we have to recognize and accept her as our mother. This takes place first and foremost through the consecration to her Immaculate Heart, as St. Louis de Montfort teaches us.

Through the consecration to the Immaculate Heart, we enter into Mary's spiritual womb. When we do this, we are imitating Jesus, because we place ourselves in the same place where he became man. To consecrate one's self to the Im-

maculate Heart also means to take refuge in a stronghold, like a saving ark to which Satan never has access.

At the same time, through the consecration we give Mary the place in our heart which according to God's plan and will belongs to her—the center, near her divine Son! Since Satan knows that he will be defeated through Mary, the woman in Genesis, he does everything he can to prevent us from giving her this central place. Although the effects of the consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary are so powerful for individuals and whole nations, unfortunately its significance for our time is still not well known, treasured and lived. One of the "greats", however, has become

an unsurpassable example for us all: Pope St. John Paul II. He not only understood the meaning of the consecration to Mary, but experienced it during his life in the most impressive way.

Even though he chose an M beneath the cross for his coat of arms and has gone down in history as the “Totus Tuus” pope according to his election motto, the Holy Father, too, only gradually and through heavy suffering grasped the decisive importance of the consecration. “Totus Tuus, totally yours Mary!” This phrase is not only an expression of piety, or simply an expression of devotion. It is more.”

As he later testified as Pope, it was actually during World War II that the young student Karol Wojtyla, who was working in a quarry, discovered the little book “True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin” by St. Louis de Montfort. It gave the Marian piety of his childhood a deeper meaning and helped him to recognize that our devotion to Mary in no way hinders our unity with Christ, but, on the contrary, improves it and strengthens it. “At first, it had seemed to me that I should distance myself a bit from the Marian devotion of my childhood, in order to focus more on Christ. Thanks to St. Louis de Montfort, I came to understand that true devotion to the Mother of God is actually Christocentric, indeed, it is very profoundly rooted in the Mystery of the Blessed Trinity.... And so, I rediscovered Marian piety, this time with a

deeper understanding. This mature form of devotion to the Mother of God has stayed with me over the years. ...

“In regard to Marian devotion, each of us must understand that such devotion not only addresses a need of the heart, a sentimental inclination, but that it also corresponds to the objective truth about the Mother of God. ... The Mother of Christ the Redeemer is the Mother of the Church.”

John Paul II called St. Louis de Montfort, from whom who took his “Totus Tuus”, a “classy theologian”, who presented “indisputable” theological truths in his book. St. Louis clearly recognized the inseparable unity between Mary and the Holy Spirit and explained its extensive consequences for us.

“The salvation of the world began through Mary and through her it must be accomplished. ... Together with the Holy Spirit Mary produced the greatest thing that ever was or ever will be: a God-man. She will consequently produce the marvels which will be seen in the latter times. ... When the Holy Spirit, her spouse, finds Mary in a soul, he hastens there and enters fully into it. He gives himself generously to that soul according to the place it has given to his spouse. One of the main reasons why the Holy Spirit does not work striking wonders in souls is that he fails to find in them a sufficiently close union with his faithful and inseparable spouse.”

The consecration in practice

How deeply Pope St. John Paul II made “Totus Tuus” his own is proven by how naturally he used it, even in the most decisive moments of his life. It is of greatest significance that he titled his testament in 1979, just a few months after being elected Pope, “Totus Tuus ego sum”. In it, he entrusted the moment of his death completely to Mary: “I do not know when it will come but I place this moment, like all other things, in the hands of the Mother of my Master: Totus

Tuus. In these same motherly hands I leave everything and everyone with whom my life and my vocation have brought me into contact. In these hands I above all leave the Church, and also my nation and all humankind.”

As this hour drew apparently nearer before the eyes of the world, he never hesitated to confirm his surrender in all his suffering. Through his “Totus Tuus”, Pope John Paul hid himself again and again in Mary and fled—through her

and therefore in the most perfect way—to God’s world, to his love and to his will, to preserve his inner peace, that most valuable gift which Satan wants to take from us at all costs. In this way, he was victorious in every temptation of discouragement and rebellion.

As an example, at the end of February 2005, when, immediately after waking up from the narcotics in the Gemelli Clinic, he realized that he could no longer speak due to the tracheotomy. He motioned for a piece of paper and left the world his touching last written words, “*What have they done to me! But I continue to be always ‘Totus Tuus!’*”

Nevertheless, the assassination attempt at the Wednesday audience in St. Peter’s Square on May 13, 1981, was a critical moment for John Paul II’s understanding of the consecration. During the General Audience on the Feast of the Rosary, just five months later, the 61-year-old pope explained, “*Could I forget that the event in St. Peter’s Square took place on the day and at the hour when the first appearance of the Mother of Christ to the poor peasant children has been remembered for over sixty years at Fatima in Portugal? For, in everything that happened to me on that very day, I felt that extraordinary motherly protection and care, which turned out to be stronger than the deadly bullet.*”

Unfortunately, the greatness of the miracle which saved him barely became known, perhaps because it all seemed impossible despite the facts which testified to the contrary. The exceptional team of doctors operated on the Holy Father for five and a half hours, and he received more than six pints of blood transfusions. The doctors were convinced that what had happened could not be explained. A few days after the assassination attempt, the chief surgeon, Dr. Francesco Crucitti, entrusted to his friend Arturo Mari, the Pope’s long-time photographer, the miraculous path which the bullet cut through John Paul II’s abdomen. During a visit to our community’s seminary in Rome, Mari shared the following details with us: With x-rays and the examination of his injuries, especially to the small intestines, the precise “flight path” of the bullet could be clearly traced.

It entered straight into the abdomen below the navel at a velocity of 600 mph, changed directions twice—thereby circumventing vital organs by mere fractions of an inch—made a ninety degree turn and shot out of the abdomen into the white Jeep, where it was later recovered.

Without this “guided path”, at least one of the vital organs would have been hit, and the Pope would have died in a matter of minutes from internal bleeding. On top of that, the penetrating power of the nine millimeter bullet fired at close range, after passing through the abdomen, would have either hit the spinal cord or left a fist-sized wound upon leaving his back.

In 1994, the Pope testified publicly, “*It was a mother’s hand that guided the bullet’s path and in his throes the Pope halted at the threshold of death.*” While he was still in the Gemelli Clinic, the Holy Father intensively occupied himself with the message of Fatima. Through this, the Pope from the East understood, in light of Fatima and the teaching of St. Louis de Montfort as well as in view of the threatening situation in the world in the middle of the Cold War, how important it was at last to faithfully fulfill the wish of Mary and consecrate Russia to her. “*In these three months where my life was hanging by a thread, I recognized that the only solution to save the world from atheism and new wars and disasters was the conversion of Russia and the message of Fatima,*” he confided to his friend, the Slovakian bishop and Fatima Apostle, Bishop Paul Maria Hnilica.

During her third appearance in Fatima on July 13, 1917, in the presence of around five thousand pilgrims, Our Lady said to the three shepherd children, “*I want you to ... continue to say the Rosary every day ... to obtain the peace of the world and the end of the war.*” If men do not stop offending God, however, following the present First World War, “*another and more terrible war*” will come. “*To prevent this, I shall come to the world to ask that Russia be consecrated to my Immaculate Heart, and I shall ask that on the First Saturday of every month Communions of reparation be made in atonement for the sins of the world. If my*

wishes are fulfilled, Russia will be converted and there will be peace; if not, then Russia will spread her errors throughout the world, bringing new wars and persecution of the Church; the good will be martyred and the Holy Father will have much to suffer; certain nations will be annihilated. But in the end my Immaculate Heart will triumph. The Holy Father will consecrate Russia to me, and she will be converted, and the world will enjoy a period of peace."

Although Our Lady spoke through Sr. Lucia back on June 13, 1929, "*The moment has come in which God asks the Holy Father to make, in union with all the bishops of the world, the consecration of Russia to My Immaculate Heart,*" there were decades of hesitation and even intentionally blocking of what Our Lady revealed as being the will of God. Even though Sr. Lucia normally remained quiet, in regards to this she said, "*The Lord did not just complain about the great sins but rather about our lack of enthusiasm and negligence regarding his wishes.*" The Second World War and the spreading of Communism, along with all their consequences, could no longer be averted. It is hard for us to imagine today, but we could have prevented all that horrible suffering in the 20th Century, had we only done what God asked of us through Mary in Fatima.

Pope John Paul II was the first to have the

original statue of Our Lady of Fatima brought to Rome to show the world that he desired to fulfill Mary's request. He consecrated the world and Russia to Mary's Immaculate Heart in St. Peter's Square on March 25, 1984. Sr. Lucia confirmed the validity of the consecration that the Pope, "*with the bishops who wanted to unite with His Holiness, made the Consecration as Our Lady requested.*"

The large scale effects of this total surrender to Mary were seen very quickly. In March 1985, just one year later, Mikhail Gorbachev became the General Secretary of the CCCP. His Perestroika political reforms eventually lead to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union and the entire Eastern Bloc, resulting in an opening of the Iron Curtain.

No politician thought that something like that could happen. Even Pope John Paul II said, "*Those events remain surprising for their vastness and especially for the speed with which they occurred.*"

Mikhail Gorbachev gave credit to the Slavic pope during his legendary visit to the Vatican at the beginning of December 1989. "*Without you, Holy Father, the Berlin Wall never would have fallen.*"

The recently accessible military documents of the Warsaw Pact reveal how dangerously close Europe and the world were to being involved in a nuclear war during the 1980's.

Mikhail Gorbachev visited Pope John Paul II at the Vatican for the first time on December 1, 1989. He was accompanied by his self-confident wife, Raissa, who, contrary to protocol, wore a red outfit and no veil. During the one and a half hour long meeting of the two men, however, she remained motionless in the doorway of the papal office. It was the Pope who, following the talks, took the initiative and asked his distinguished guest if he may greet his wife.

John Paul II courageously walked over to Raissa and—doing something he never did to a president's wife—gently caressed her cheek. Gorbachev, who had followed him, explained, "Raissa, I present to you the Pope from Rome, the most important moral authority in the world, and a Slav like us." The Marian shepherd, through the consecration, radiated Mary's motherly love and care to everyone. Although this was their first and only personal encounter, the Pope conquered the heart of this non-believer. Every day for the rest of her life, she prayed with her daughter Irina for the Pope in Rome—with the Rosary which he had given her on that occasion. Raissa died of Leukemia at the University of Munster Clinic in Germany on September 20, 1999.

Despite all the positive developments, we still find ourselves today in Europe and worldwide in an extremely precarious situation and have to admit, that we too have not complied with God's

wishes through Mary. Therefore, Pope John Paul II renewed the consecration to Mary on October 8, 2000, in the presence of 1,500 cardinals and bishops and spiritually united with all the bishops

of the world. In it he described so fittingly the dramatic situation in the world, which has continued to worsen to this day. *“Humanity now has instruments of unprecedented power: we can turn this world into a garden, or reduce it to a pile of rubble. ... Today as never before in the past, humanity stands at a crossroads.”*

Since Pope Francis has spoken more than once that the Third World War has already begun, even if it is being played out in individual “chapters”, we should not hesitate to make it clear to ourselves that we are in the middle of the realization of the vision from the Third Secret of Fatima. In this vision, an angel stood above Our Lady with a fiery sword which flashed and gave out flames that looked as though they would set the world on fire; Mary, however, revealed her motherly power. Sr. Lucia saw that the flames *“died out*

in contact with the splendor that Our Lady radiated towards him from her right hand: pointing to the earth with his right hand, the Angel cried out in a loud voice: ‘Penance, Penance, Penance!’”

*T*his dramatic call to penance is meant for us—the call to conversion and loving correspondence to grace. Like never before, the affliction, fear and danger everywhere should lead us to renew our faith in the saving power of Our Lady.

We take refuge through the consecration, therefore, in the Heart of Mary, in her motherly womb. Indeed, Sr. Lucia said in 1992,

“What is still missing and what Our Lady requests is the effective consecration of our hearts, our communities and families.”

The Pope had the nine millimeter bullet, which was “guided by a motherly hand”, set in the precious crown of the original statue of Our Lady in Fatima. The crown was given by Portuguese mothers in thankfulness that their country and their sons were spared during World War II. The Portuguese bishops consecrated the country to the Immaculate Heart of Mary on May 13, 1931, exactly fifty years to the day before the Pope’s assassination attempt. As a result, Sr. Lucia explained in a letter in 1939, “Our Lord promises a special protection for Portugal during World War II. This is to be the proof and the sign for the grace which other nations would be given if they had consecrated themselves to the Heart of Mary.”

*“Mother, I am yours now and forever, through you
and with you, I want to always belong entirely to Jesus.”*

Sources: St. Louis de Montfort, True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin
Stanisław Dziwisz e Czesław Drajek; Renato Buzzonetti -Angelo Comastri, Lasciatemi andare.
La forza nella debolezza di Giovanni Paolo II. Cinisello Balsamo (Milano) 2006.

The Power of the Prayer of Amsterdam

Just as in the course of Church history, Mary, as Mother, again and again has notably helped us by throwing an anchor of salvation to a threatened Christianity through simple means like the Scapular, the Rosary or the Miraculous Medal, so too has the Prayer from Amsterdam been given especially for the nations of the twentieth and now twenty-first centuries.

This is not a little prayer like many others, because God, himself, has given this prayer power and a worldwide importance. “*You do not know how great and how important this prayer is before God.*” (May 31, 1955) It is **her** prayer. **She** was allowed to dictate it before the nations, and it is because **she** prays it with us that this prayer has such a power. “*The Lady of All Nations may now come in order to expel Satan. ... How strongly Satan is ruling, God alone knows. ... She will defeat Satan, as has been foretold. She will place her feet upon Satan’s head. ... You, however, shall pray my prayer which I gave to the world.*” (May 31, 1955)

“*This simple prayer has been given for all peoples.*” (December 31, 1951) That is why bishops are introducing it in their dioceses and missionaries are bringing it to the furthest corners of the world. Mothers are teaching it to their children and teenagers are handing it out on the streets. Why? Simply in obedience to Our Lady, who asks that her prayer and her image be spread in a “great world action” (October 11, 1953), a “work of redemption and peace.” (April 1, 1951) The prayer of Amsterdam and the worldwide action are the Marian way given to us by God for our so godless time; they are like the key to a new Pentecost, to the worldwide peace which God wants to grant us through Mary. “*This prayer is short and simple, so that everyone in this quick and modern world can pray it. It is given in order*

to call down the True Spirit upon the world.” (September 20, 1951) Archbishop Sooza Pakiam from Trivandrum, **India** is among the numerous bishops who have given thanks in Amsterdam for what the prayer of the Mother of All Nations has done for them and their dioceses. “*What attracted me most was the prayer taught by Our Lady. It is a meaningful, short and profound prayer.*” After the Day of Prayer, Archbishop Pakiam flew to the USA, and because he knew he should, “*Pray this prayer in all that you do*” (December 31, 1951), he prayed it the whole flight. “*When I arrived in Washington, I felt filled with the Holy Spirit like never before!*”

“*This* prayer has been given for the conversion of the world.” (December 31, 1951) Our brother Fr. Florian Kerschbaumer from **Austria** is an example of how true this is. “My sixteenth year was the beginning of a series of painful years for me. My friends and I would spend the whole night going from place to place, from nightclub to nightclub—and that, four times a week. I was always full of anxiety and dissatisfaction. In 1997, when I was twenty-two years old, my sister came back from the First International Day of Prayer in Amsterdam and gave me the prayer card. I went to my room, read the explanation, and suddenly asked myself, ‘*What would happen to me if tomorrow were the last day of my life?*’ This question hit me like a bolt, and at the same time

I recognized my misery and my sinfulness. The only thing I could do was cry. In the time following my conversion, I especially liked praying the prayer of the Lady of All Nations, because it transmitted great peace to me. As a priest today, I thank her for her help and protection, and pray her prayer which gave me so much strength in the time of my conversion. When war broke out in Iraq two years after the September 11, 2001 attacks, **United States** military chaplains spread 250,000 prayer cards within three months to the soldiers of the armed forces. All of them, even the non-Catholics, declared, *“This is exactly what we need... that we may be preserved from degeneration, disaster and war.”* At air force bases, on battle ships and among the pilots, it was widely known simply as *“the peace prayer”*.

Bishop Joseph Nduhirubusa from **Burundi, Africa** brought the Mother of All Nations to his diocese, Ruyigi. At the Seventh International Day of Prayer in 2005, he said, “I was personally allowed to make the translation of the prayer of the Lady of All Nations and give the imprimatur. In each parish of my diocese, the very beautiful image of the Mother of All Nations is enthroned in a visible place in the church ... everyone prays her prayer. ... During the war, even the rebels accepted and prayed the prayer. We believe that the Lady of All Nations contributed in granting us a cease-fire and the time of peace which we are experiencing now in Burundi, after so many years of suffering!” *“Through this prayer the Lady will save the world.”* (May 10, 1953)

What happened in Burundi in 2005, could also take place today in the **eastern Ukraine!** *“The people who accept this prayer shall make a promise to pray it every day. You cannot estimate the great value this will have. You do not know what the future has in store.”* (April 15, 1951)

In May 2016, Bishop Jan Sobilo reported about his diocese Kharkiv and Zaporizhia, which is in the middle of the war zone: “It seems there is no way out. ... Soldiers who previously served together in one army and lived on the same base are now divided into two camps and are now on

opposite sides of the battlefield. When our priests visit the front lines together with volunteers and reporters ... we pass out the image of the Mother of All Nations with the prayer. This prayer gives us hope. ... For more than a year now the soldiers on the front have been praying the prayer on the prayer card of Our Lady.


“I am convinced that if we ask the mother of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples with a pure heart, she will work the miracle of reconciliation between the two. ... Prayer through the intercession of the Lady of All Nations can stop all evil. ... This prayer is also prayed by many of the faithful in my diocese ... I personally pray the prayer of the Lady of All Nations every day.”

Military chaplain Fr. Benedicto Peña experienced the power of the prayer very noticeably last year in the **Colombian** jungle during dangerous military operations in the fight against the drug cartels. “The prayer is particularly valued by the special forces who have life-threatening missions. That is why I celebrated the Holy Mass for four hundred soldiers on one of the military bases as soon as I arrived and handed the prayer card out to them with the words, *‘Take it! Pray this prayer with trust and take care of it so that the Mother protects you and grants us peace.’*” A short time later, a forty-man, heavily armed, special commando unit was deployed, only to return a few hours later—safe and sound—with a drug cartel commander who had a \$133,000 price on his head. It was a miracle that a shoot-out did not occur during his capture. As a result, nobody was hurt or killed, which otherwise had always been the case. Unbelievable! The officers were very moved and thanked Fr. Benedicto for bringing the Lady of All Nations to them.

“See to it that the prayer is made known throughout the world, among all peoples. They all have a right to it. I assure you that the world will change.” (April 29, 1951) It may not have been earth-shaking, but a personally important change took place for a woman in Sherbakty, **Kazakhstan**. She knocked on the door of our mission station and requested, “Give me another image with the prayer. My whole life


I was accustomed to swearing from early in the morning until late at night. When you gave me this image of Mary, I prayed the prayer every day, and I never said another swear word. Last week, I gave it to somebody who helped me out of a bind, and immediately my tongue began to curse again. Please give me the prayer again!”

“This simple prayer will create one community.” (February 17, 1952) While waiting for a flight in Pavlodar, Kazakhstan last year, our Sr. Marta offered a prayer card to a practicing Muslim woman and explained to her that Mary, Myriam, has given it to us for the struggles and reconciliation of the nations. *“Please, do you have a few more?”* the woman asked. “You know, I am flying now to **Dubai** in the **United Arab Emirates** on business. I will meet many associates there from different countries; they are Muslim, Orthodox, Lutheran and non-believers too. It does not matter that they believe something else, does it? Do not worry, I will not throw away the pictures. I know that prayer really helps! I guarantee you that I will hand them out before my presentation. And for my especially close friends, I will give each of them one at dinner as my personal gift.”


 Our Sr. Bernadette Marie from **France** experienced a similar openness in May during a bus ride from Beauvais airport to downtown Paris. As she offered the prayer card and explained its power to the guy sitting next to her, a young, deeply faithful Muslim from **Algeria**, whose mother is even a teacher of Islam, he was truly touched. Our sister was very surprised, especially because he thanked her several times and promised to pray this prayer for peace every day. He included it with the other prayers he had saved in his iPhone, prayers which he, as Muslim, prays five times a day.

“The world no longer knows where to turn. Very well then, peoples, trust in your Mother, for she has never forsaken her children.” (May 31, 1955) Even Hindus pray the prayer of Amsterdam, as do Buddhists, like Rasamee Poppes-Sowat from **Thailand**. She is married and lives in the Netherlands where she works as a hairdresser. She received the prayer

from a friend. “Yes, I am a Buddhist, but I also love Mary. I call her “Mom” and she truly is a mom for me! I especially experienced this about three years ago when I had severe health problems. The doctors had given me only a few months to live. In this difficult time, I withdrew every evening to my bedroom to pray all by myself. Since the time of my grave illness, I have prayed the prayer of the Lady of All Nations every day, first in Dutch, then in my mother language, Thai. I do this to this day, and as you see, I stand here before you healthy,” she said in her testimony at the Seventh International Day of Prayer in Amsterdam in 2005.

 *This prayer shall be spread in churches and by modern means.”* (December 31, 1951) One billion Miraculous Medals were spread worldwide within the first ten years. That could happen today with the prayer card in one week! There needs to be only enough believers who, in harmonious cooperation with the bishops and priests, use the modern means of communication and the media, like in the **Philippines** where the prayer is prayed on the radio and the image and prayer are shown regularly on the television as well as spread through Facebook. There is a wonderful example from **Japan** too, where there is a prayer group that prays the Rosary and the prayer from Amsterdam every Sunday via Skype with Japanese living abroad.

“The Lady of All Nations will be brought throughout the world in the same way, from town to town, from country to country.” (February 17, 1952)

 Yes, the prayer of Amsterdam is a prayer for LOVE. Everywhere, where love is lacking, even in our own heart, we should immediately begin to pray, slowly and consciously, “... *send now Your Spirit!*” Then in thousands of little daily situations a true “little Pentecost” takes place within us when, through the power of love, we do not give in to our ego, we forgive and are silent without justifying ourselves. The little spiritual victories are what make up our lives, and the Mother helps us through *her* prayer.

The Power of Jesus' Suffering

Through the centuries, the Lord has inspired souls to look away from their own interior or exterior suffering and look towards his Cross, and to understand that, in reality, he suffered infinitely more for us. St. Nicholas of Flüe, for example, had already prayed much during a deep trial in his life, but he only found significant relief when he followed the advice of a priest, who told him to meditate on Christ's suffering.

The same goes for the Church today: Jesus reminds us of the power and the blessing which flow forth from *meditating on the Stations of the Cross*. He insists on the great grace which, in the *Holy Hour*, is bound to meditating on his suffering. *"I remind you, My daughter, that as often as you hear the clock strike the third hour, immerse yourself completely in My mercy, adoring and glorifying it. ... In this hour you can obtain everything for yourself and for others for the asking; it was the hour of grace for the whole world. ... In this hour, I will refuse nothing to the soul that makes a request of Me in virtue of My Passion."*

"In virtue of My Passion", therein lies the full strength, when we meditate on the Lord's Passion. The strength is in the merits of Jesus' suffering out of love in the eyes of the Divine Father. At the same time, we remind him of the infinitely valuable and powerful redeeming sacrifice of his Son; we offer him, the Father, the sacrifice in a spiritual way in order to request salvation and forgiveness for the whole world. *"For the sake of his sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us..."* we pray in the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. Such a prayer is undoubtedly heard, just as Jesus promises! As decisive as our personal conversion is, as precious as our own sacrifices made out of love are, we do not expect anything in the Holy Hour from what we do. We do not accomplish something, but we make ourselves entirely dependent on Jesus and the great sacrifice which he accomplished once and for ever. Therefore the

Lord says, *"There is more merit to one hour of meditation on My sorrowful Passion than there is to a whole year of flagellation that draws blood."*

It is not only the fact that our accomplishments do not matter in this hour that make meditating on Jesus' sufferings of love so attractive, it is also practical that we can do this Holy Hour anywhere. *"My daughter, try your best to make the Stations of the Cross in this hour, provided that your duties permit it; and if you are not able to make the Stations of the Cross, then at least step into the chapel for a moment and adore, in the Blessed Sacrament, My Heart, which is full of mercy; and should you be unable to step into the chapel, immerse yourself in prayer there where you happen to be ... immerse yourself in My Passion, particularly in My abandonment at the moment of agony."*

Yes, we may also do it comfortably, going for a walk or even sitting in a recliner, as long as it helps us to spend at least a little time looking with deep love on the Lord's suffering. It is only important that we take time for the Holy Hour; that we learn to better understand true, humble love which accepts and forgives everything and only seeks God's will; that meditating on the Stations of the Cross as a "Way of Love" awakens in us compassion for Jesus, Crucified Love, and, as a result, we have the readiness of a lover to imitate him and be generous and ready to sacrifice too.

In this way, the Holy Hour is a weapon which God himself has given us. It does not require a lot of strength, but there are great graces associated with it for the spiritual fight. We know all of this, because the Lord himself revealed it to St. Faustina.

This weapon demonstrates its full effectiveness especially in the hour of the final battle, the hour of death. The Lord gave a tremendous promise in this regard:

“At the hour of their death, I defend as My own glory every soul that will say this chaplet.” He also says, “When this chaplet is said by the bedside of a dying person ... unfathomable mercy envelops the soul.” St.

Faustina often witnessed how true this promise was, in astonishing ways. Certainly many of you have witnessed the power of the Chaplet; we missionaries experience this truth over and over again in our pastoral work.

The Power of Offered Suffering

Sooner or later, everyone is confronted with the painful reality of some sort of heavy suffering, which can overcome us suddenly like a tidal wave. Suffering, with its thousands of faces, is, without exception, everyone’s greatest challenge. That is why you even hear Christians saying, “*That’s life. There’s no explanation for suffering!*” Yet there really is an explanation because it has to do with the central mystery of our Faith, it has to do with Redemption. Jesus, through his suffering out of love, atoned to the Father for us; and united with him, therefore, our suffering, through love, can also become valuable and a loving offering.

The image of Amsterdam explains this in a special way, even without words—the Mother before the radiant Cross of her son, standing on the world without the evil serpent beneath her. It is an image which points to a new, paradisiacal time since it shows us that the Redeemer’s sacrifice of love on the Cross, together with that of the Coredeemprinx, so fully conquered the power of evil that Satan, the serpent, is no longer found on the globe.

Note well, however, the Mother of Sorrows, united with her crucified son, did not crush the head of the serpent with violence, but with love. It was a victory of love! The two of them—with *one* heart—did not destroy all that was evil and what was not of God, but rather redeemed and transformed sin, suffering and death from the *inside* out by taking the sin, suffering and death of all people of all times upon themselves and

presenting it to the Father as an offering of love. In this way, the Redeemer’s divine love “suffered” so that all suffering, without exception, has an infinite, divine value and wonderful sense.

So, through love, all our sufferings, which may be really horrible, can also become valuable, even divinized and a source of grace for others. As soon as one is prepared to say, “*I want to accept my pain, my worries out of love for you, Jesus,*” he begins to love divinely, as Jesus did.

All suffering, whether it is our own fault or not, becomes powerful and valuable when we accept it in view of Jesus and desire to bear it out of love. Then the wheelchair of someone who cannot walk no longer remains a wheelchair but an altar! Even someone who is dying, who is already too weak to pray, can offer himself up in silence. If he does this out of love, he transforms death into a gift to God and his family. It is true: **The most powerful prayer is suffering offered up out of love!**

All the saints, beginning with the Apostles who were scourged, knew the divine power of love with which they offered their suffering, applying it as a treasure of grace, often for their torturers, to free them from evil’s influence and help them open up to the effects of grace. Therefore **St. Peter Chanel**, whom the natives of the South Sea island of Futuna called “the man with the good heart” because of his meekness, whispered at his martyrdom, “*This is good for me!*” Like Jesus, the first martyr in Oceania consciously offered his life as a ransom for the islanders. His sacrificial

death, as a matter of fact, broke all resistance. His murderers repented and converted and helped build the first church.

Later, one of them, Musumusu, as a newly baptized, accepted his serious illness as expiation for his former misdeeds and died as he wished on the spot of Fr. Chanel's martyrdom. Beforehand, he advised everybody, "*Listen to the priests!*" And, shortly thereafter hundreds were preparing for baptism. Just three years after Peter Chanel's offering of love, the seed sprouted and the subsequent missionaries were able to reap a bountiful harvest. "*It is like paradise here, among the newly baptized whose zeal fills us with a sweet consolation. I do not believe there are two missionaries happier than we are anywhere on earth.*"

*I*t is a grace and a great consolation when one understands that there is such a thing as a "mission of suffering". Do we Christians even know anymore that the Church has always drawn her strength from suffering which has been accepted and offered up? **Dismas**, the Good Thief, understood in the last hour that he had to repent all his crimes and the suffering which he caused himself, and give them to Jesus together with all his sins. "*Remember me when you come into your kingdom.*" And Jesus instantly opened Heaven to him with the wonderful promise, "*Today you will be with me in Paradise.*"

St. Padre Pio was an expert in offering up his sufferings out of love and understood how to place his wounds in Jesus' wounds and profit from his patiently endured suffering. "*The greatest tragedy in the world is suffering which is not offered up,*" Padre Pio complained with worry, almost jealously guarding his suffering. He was

well aware that sacrifices have an immense value before God and, more than homilies and words, they contain a redeeming power. This enlightened shepherd of souls was then able to pass on precisely this co-suffered grace to millions of spiritual children, as conversion or liberation from evil, as light, council, forgiveness, consolation or healing.

*M*any still have a vivid memory of the impressive humility with which our beloved **Pope St. John Paul II** accepted and endured his suffering. He was convinced of the power of coredemption. From it, he drew the strength to forgive his assassin and approach him with reconciliation. Above all though, in age and illness, the holy Pope's acceptance of suffering shined with consolation. He never tried to hide his weakness from the world. Rather, his yes to powerlessness became an eloquent testimony, "*all the families and the whole world can see that there is a gospel – I could say, a superior gospel – the gospel of suffering, with which we are to prepare the future, the Third Millennium.*" We have an indelible memory of John Paul II's most famous Urbi-et-Orbi blessing at Easter 2005, as a final goodbye to his flock. He gave it with great effort and without words due to the tracheotomy.

*C*ardinal Van Thuan from Vietnam, in his great pain, found all the strength to live Christ's love in the Holy Eucharist. Singularly nourished by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass during his thirteen years in prison, he could offer up and conquer the misery, fear, sadness and even rebellion in his own heart, but also overcome the guards' evil. The power of this suffering bore so much fruit that, to the shock of the government, his guards converted one after another.

"Every day, with three drops of wine and a drop of water in the palm of my hand, I would celebrate Holy Mass. That was my altar, and this was my cathedral! It was true medicine for soul and body ... the antidote to survive. Each time I celebrated Mass, I had the opportunity to extend my hands and nail myself to the cross with Jesus, to drink with him the bitter chalice. ... Those were the most beautiful Masses of my life!"

The Power of Meekness

*“There is nothing more victorious than meekness,”
was the deep conviction of St. Francis de Sales,*

the holy bishop from Geneva (1567-1622), from his own experience.

Meekness—something victorious? In our daily lives, when we are out and about, even in our own families, we frequently encounter injustice, aggression, wrath, impatience, shortage of self-control, hardness of heart, contempt, and lack of peace.

How do we react as Christians? Do we dish out the same?

Or do we turn to the Holy Spirit that he may give us his love, his meekness—the gift which is the only weapon with which can break and defeat the forces of evil?

Jesus, the Lamb of God, approached all his suffering, even his death on the Cross, with meekness. That is why he gave us such a hopeful promise, *“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land”* (Mt. 5:5). In other words, they will win over the hearts of the others so that God’s kingdom can spread. Many saints testify to this truth of the Gospel. Just consider the two Roman women, **Bl. Anna Maria Taigi** (1769-1837) and **Bl. Elisabetta Canori Mora** (1774-1825).

Anna Maria Taigi, mother of seven and inspired advisor to popes, though joyful and loving by nature, needed an incredible amount of love and patience to pacify the explosive temper of her husband, Dominico. At the age of ninety-two, he testified during her beatification process, *“I often came home from work tired and irritated. My wife had the gift of calming me down. She could be quiet ... and was so kind that she drove away my bad mood and cheered me up. I have to thank her because she broke many of my bad habits, but with such perfect love and goodness like you do not find anywhere today.”*

For Anna Maria, it was a Calvary which she ascended with the strength of Jesus’ love and for him; and yet she reached her goal.

The same was true for her friend Elisabetta Canori Mora, who was five years younger and equally gifted as a mystic. For thirty years, she

endured the infidelity of her husband, Cristoforo, and their poverty, because he drove their once wealthy family into financial ruin.

With much prayer and the help of her confessor was she able to forgive him, approach him with goodness and offer up all of her suffering for his conversion. The inner martyrdom which she suffered bore fruit only after her death: Cristoforo recognized and repented his sinful lifestyle and decided to give his life to God in a spirit of penance. Grateful to his wife, he became a priest and joined the Franciscans.

A very different, but no less spectacular example of meekness can be seen in the life of **St. Leopold Mandic**. On June 14, 1934, he took a tram to visit some sisters and listen to their confessions. As he stepped off the tram with the rest of the crowd, he bumped into a teenager who, full of fury, hit the little priest.

Fr. Leopold remained calm and asked with a smile, *“Embellish the other side as well! I would make a poor impression with just one red cheek.”* The outraged, aggressive young man was so taken by his meek, gentle words that he knelt down in the middle of the crowd and asked Fr. Leopold for forgiveness. Fr. Leopold patted him on the shoulder, *“Come on! We are still friends like before.”*

In the life of the martyred bishop **St. Josaphat Kuntsevych** (1580-1623), there are many events

which illustrate how, through goodness and meekness, he won over the Lithuanian and Ukrainian people for the truth; namely, that the Pope in Rome is the supreme shepherd not only for the Catholics, but for the Orthodox Christians as well.

Untiringly, he led one soul after another back to Rome, earning him the name “soul robber” from his enemies. One day, he visited a woman in Vilnius who did not yet belong to the unified Church. As he entered her house, she flew into a rage. Yet Bishop Josaphat reacted meekly: “*I could have guessed that I might be a cause of scorn and sin.*” He asked the lady for forgiveness and went on his way. She ran after him, however, fell on her knees before him and excused herself. The saint’s meekness had touched her hardened heart. Not only did she convert to the Church united with Rome, but she led many other women to this unity as well.

*T*he power of meekness over the heart is also testified to by the patron saint of Vienna, the Redemptorist priest and tireless preacher **St. Clemens Maria Hofbauer** (1751-1820). He often passed through the city holding out his hat, begging for his orphans.

Once, while asking for alms, he entered a rowdy pub with people laughing. At one table, where several men were playing cards, he hoped to receive a generous donation. When he made his request, however, one of the men jumped up from his chair like he had been bitten by a tarantula, outraged that someone had bothered him during his card game, and defiled Fr. Hofbauer with swear words. Since the priest just listened to him calmly, the man grew even angrier and finally spat in his face. The priest took out his handkerchief, wiped off the spit and said meekly, “*My dear sir, that was for me. Now, please give me something for my orphans.*” Silence fell over the whole room; nobody dared to utter a word. The vicious man, ashamed of himself, pulled out his wallet and put a sizable sum in the hat. As if that was not enough, the saint’s meekness so moved the man that a short time later he confessed to Fr. Hofbauer all the sins of his life and became a great benefactor.

S. Faustina also experienced meekness, and the grace that proceeds from it, as a powerful spiri-

tual weapon. One day, five aggressive unemployed men knocked vehemently on the convent door and the porter sister could not turn them away. The mother superior, therefore, told Sr. Faustina in obedience to help them.

St. Faustina reported in her diary, “When I was still a good way from the gate I could hear them banging loudly. At first, I was overcome with doubt and fear, and I did not know whether to open the gate or, like Sister N., to answer them through the little window. But suddenly I heard a voice in my soul saying, ‘*Go and open the gate and talk to them as sweetly as you talk to Me.*’

“I opened the gate at once and approached the most menacing of them and began to speak to them with such sweetness and calm that they did not know what to do with themselves. And they too began to speak gently and said, ‘*Well, it’s too bad that the convent can’t give us work.*’ And they went away peacefully. I felt clearly that Jesus, whom I had received in Holy Communion just an hour before, had worked in their hearts through me.”

Naturally, we have to be wise and should not put ourselves in danger with presumption. Yet where obedience requires it, or when we end up in an unavoidable situation, confronted with overbearing aggression, we may, with trust in God’s grace, courageously imitate St. Faustina.

Meekness is a spiritual weapon, not only in dealing with the impatience and mistakes of the others, but also in dealing with our own sins and weaknesses. We all know from our own experience how quickly we become upset, impatient or discouraged by our own mistakes. Here, St. Francis de Sales, the wise bishop from Geneva, advises us:

“Lift up your heart very meekly when it has fallen, then humble yourself deeply before God in recognition of your misery without ever being stunned by your fall. It is not surprising when weakness is weak, feebleness is feeble and misery is miserable. Detest, nevertheless, with your whole heart the offense you have committed against God and return with great courage and trust in his mercy to the path of virtue from which you strayed.”

The Weapon of Humility

Just as pride caused the first rebellion in heaven and was the original sin in paradise which broke the intimate relationship with God, humility, on the other hand, is the virtue which heals this wound.

It is the strongest weapon in the spiritual battle.

Is it a virtue worth striving for? Or is it really just something for the saints of times gone by?

For many people, the word humility has a negative connotation because they associate it with the idea of a person who has no self-confidence, no opinion of his own, who shyly withdraws and timidly answers when questioned. Or perhaps it reminds us of humiliations which are below human dignity. Yet none of this has anything to do with Christian humility.

Humility requires courage, courage to serve and courage to be little. Our model is the Lord himself, about whom **Bl. Charles de Foucauld** wrote, “*Jesus was born, he lived and he died in deepest disgrace and the most extreme shame in that, once and for all, he took the last place in such a way that nobody could ever go lower than him.*” God became man for love of us, to make the lost unity possible again. Therefore, Jesus’ humility is not simply the bowing down of a slave, but rather the deepest expression of his love.

For us that are weak, humility is first of all simply admitting the fact that without God we are not capable of anything. Since a humble person is surely aware of his limits, mistakes and inabilities; and, like a child, therefore, awaits all his strength from God, he will be victorious in every spiritual battle, even when on the outside he is seen as a weakling, a loser or a fool.

This was the case for many saints, including **St. Faustina**. She wrote, “As I was taking leave of the sisters and was about to depart, one of them apologized much to me for having helped me so little in my duties, and not only for having neglected to help me, but also for having tried to make things more difficult for me. However, in my own heart, I regarded her as a great benefactress,

because she had exercised me in patience to such an extent that one of the elder sisters had once said, ‘*Sister Faustina must be either a fool or a saint, for truly, an ordinary person would not tolerate having someone constantly do such things out of spite.*’ However, I had always approached her with good will.”

St. Faustina learned from Jesus what it means to imitate him in his humility: “*Strive to make your heart like unto My humble and gentle Heart. Never claim your rights. Bear with great calm and patience everything that befalls you. Do not defend yourself when you are put to shame, though innocent. Let others triumph. Do not stop being good when you notice that your goodness is being abused. I Myself will speak up for you when it is necessary. Be grateful for the smallest of My graces, because your gratitude compels Me to grant you new graces.*”

Are our days not filled with situations in which we so often react in a “human” way, wanting to be right, becoming upset when things are not like we imagined or ambitiously fighting for a position, only to go to bed in the evening disappointed, frustrated or restless?

Our days pass much differently when we take Our Lord’s heart as our example and accept with the strength of prayer that which Providence allows, even when we are hurt or overlooked. Our humility grows with every humiliation. Let us not be provoked by evil and misled to rebel against what God has allowed, when it turns out to be painful. When we imitate Jesus, then

nothing can discourage us. Even when we have to endure suffering, they will not be able to rob us of our peace.

St. Anthony of the Desert (d. 356), also known as Anthony the Great, is considered the father of Christian monasticism. He left us a very encouraging example of humility. He lived for decades in the Egyptian desert where his efforts to live the Gospel brought forth countless spiritual fights, as Bishop of Alexandria St. Athanasius recounts in his biography of St. Anthony.

The monk himself described one of his visions: “I saw once in spirit the snares of the enemy spread all over the ground. My heart became anxious and I sighed, *‘Who will be able to escape all these snares?’*”

At that moment, a voice spoke from heaven, *‘Humility!’*”

In some cases, like when we are criticized or mobbed, it may be that we have used all the spiritual means within our reach—we have prayed, fasted, blessed, etc.—and the hostilities still try to wear us down. Humility always remains at our disposal. The Lord demonstrated this to **St. Mariam of Jesus Crucified** (1846-1878) in a vision. The stigmatized mystic, who founded the first Carmel in Bethlehem where she is also buried, felt sometimes that she had to fight against herself like against an undefeatable giant. She defended herself with every possible weapon. Yet even the heaviest blows did not really weaken him. Exhausted, she asked the Lord, *“My God, what shall I do? I have employed every means, I have used all the weapons, even the strongest, to chase away the devil, but I have not achieved anything.”*

“You have not used all the weapons,” he responded. *“You have to use a little ax which you have disregarded. Touch Satan on the forehead with this ax, and he will fall.”*

The sister saw the ax, grabbed it and went after her enemy. She barely touched his forehead with this little weapon, and he fell down dead. *“Lord,”* she called out, *“what is this little ax that has such power?”*

“It is the ax of humility,” he answered her.

Especially when we are entrusted with a cross which seems to crush us, we are helped only by humility which, in our awareness of our own inability, awaits everything from God. Without it, man rebels or falls discouraged into depression which breaks him. Mariam saw this truth too in a visual comparison.

She was still a novice when she had a vision of a flying ant and a giant. The ant, symbolizing humility, happily carried the weight of a whole house; whereas the giant, symbolizing arrogance, groaned under straw. A voice said, *“I love this ant because it is so small; therefore, I build a big house on it.”*

In her simplicity, the novice called out, *“I do not know who the ant is, but I want to be like it.”*

*S*o we can put aside all our reservations about humility and sincerely desire a humble heart. In other words, we should strive to be like a child who, especially in temptation and need, awaits all strength and help from the Divine Father. The fruit of such a humility will be a deeper peace and a supernatural joy which this world cannot give.

A Ticket to Heaven

Claudio Canali was born in 1952 in northern Italy, close to Lecco. His devout parents recognized his musical talent early on and encouraged him to learn various instruments. With great enthusiasm, he started playing the trumpet in a youth band. Next, he became a passionate guitarist, played the drums and the bass.

His nice solo voice was discovered while he was still a student, and so he was taken in by a Rock band. It became everything for him. He started skipping class because the group traveled throughout Italy, playing as many as twenty nights a month; there was not much time and energy left to study.

At home, his parents tried in vain to bring him on the right path. He explained, *“We lived very modestly. My father had five children to feed. In other words, ‘You either study or get a job. There is no lounging around.’ So I made music my ‘job’.”*

At the age of eighteen, he started a rock band with one of his friends, *“Biglietto per l’Inferno”* – *“Ticket to Hell”*. They were not professed Satanists as the name of the band might imply. It was more like life here on earth seemed like Hell to them, so much injustice and suffering, terrorism, drugs, isolation and crime. They wanted to sing about it. In their songs, they sang about how we—from their point of view—are “damned” in this life.

They also had anticlerical themes in their songs. Claudio wrote many of the lyrics himself, like their famous song “Confession”, in which a scared sinner comes to Brother Isaiah and asks for absolution because, for a good cause, he stole from a rich person and committed a murder. Yet the confessor, whom Claudio played on stage dressed as a monk, shook his head and answered dryly, *“What did you say, brother? You killed? Remember the fifth commandment, it’s forbidden. I cannot save you from the eternal*

fire. Here is the one thing I can give you: a ticket to Hell.”

They started going abroad in 1973, and in 1974, they released their first album titled, “Ticket to Hell”. It was a huge success. Claudio sang the godless, blaspheming texts so passionately, that he became known as the “Voice of the Devil”. The rock band made an incredible tour with unexpected success and enjoyed growing in popularity with exciting concerts and inebriating applause from the more than ten thousand fans a night. They appeared with the most famous bands of their time. Claudio Canali was their lead man; extravagantly dressed, he determined how they appeared on stage. Yet, when he went back to his room after the high of a concert, he was overcome with a depressing loneliness. *“Even relationships with women couldn’t fill my emptiness,”* he later recounted. *“We sought freedom by setting the limits of the sexual taboos aside and letting ourselves be carried away into another world by alcohol. As soon as I was alone though, I felt awful.”*

Claudio was only twenty-five when he believed he had finally found a true friend whom he could trust. This person took him to India, the trend at the time. *“We went to a lot of parties. During one of them, somebody mixed drugs into my food. Rather than reveling in a great high, however, it made me nauseated, and I felt really, really sick. My friend started to worry and disappeared. He just left me there. Then I was robbed and, as a result, I was even forced to sell my guitar. I stayed there for three months before I was able to return to my homeland through the Italian embassy.”*

Looking back, the Cardinal wrote, *“In the abyss of my sufferings ... I never shut anyone out of my heart. ... When I was unable to pray anymore because I was too sick and my*

nerves were gone, I simply said: I think about the testament of Jesus ... He left us his Word, his Mom, his Body, his Blood, his Church, his priesthood. Jesus left me everything! I am so rich! ...

“Even if you have lost everything, but the Holy Eucharist remains, then you have everything. ... Your heart will be overfilled with consolation and courage.”

*B*ack home, he was plagued by guilt and depression. He sought to overcome it by asking everybody for forgiveness: his family, friends and associates. They all thought he was crazy though. Only his mother felt intuitively that a change was taking place in him. How much had she prayed for her “prodigal son”!

The other band members pressured him to stay with them, but he no longer wanted to have anything to do with them. *“One evening in February 1976, I stepped down from the stage and told the others that I would never return to it again. I could not endure this world any longer, the concerts and the people who wandered around like zombies between smoke and alcohol. I was searching for answers.”*

For years, he plunged himself into all sorts of endeavors. First, he opened a leather shop, but without success. Later he landed in the Hare Krishna sect, which was popular at the time. He shaved his head, dressed in an orange habit and came back a “new man”. For a year and a half, he lived as a member of this sect in Tuscany, led by an Indian Guru.

*T*hrough the “spiritual” life in this sect, he became so aware of the full weight of his guilt that he could not handle it any longer. Reminding himself of his Christian roots, he went into a Catholic church one day for confession. *“After receiving absolution, all the darkness disappeared from my soul, and in an instant I was healed from the depression which had tortured me since my visit to India,”* testified Claudio with great thankfulness. Now, he even went occasionally to Holy Mass, in his orange outfit.

He also loved hiking up to the Marian shrine at Valmadrera, to pray before a miraculous image.

Once the sacristan wearily checked him over from head to toe and then handed him the address of a monk with the remark, *“He came from Valmadrera like you. Go visit him sometime.”*

Claudio took her advice, drove to Minucciano in Tuscany and asked for a monk named Mario Rusconi. At first, the monk was skeptical and hesitant when he saw the other monk dressed in orange, and on top of that, he even asked to go to confession. However, as soon as he found out that behind the Hare Krishna brother was an Italian from his hometown, the spirit of hospitality overcame him.

“Strangely enough, I immediately felt at home here, and after a few hours, I asked if I could stay,” Claudio recounted in an interview with an Italian television station. Brother Mario, to this day the superior of the hermitage, is an experienced monk. He told Claudio first to leave the sect and go home. He should find a job, and if he still had the desire to return in two years, then he would be more than welcome.

*T*he Hare Krishna brother did just what he was told. His mother, who had prayed for him for years, embraced him with tears of joy. He started going to Holy Mass every day, prayed the Rosary and regularly went to Holy Confession. In this way, the Lord could give him much needed strength in his vocation since he was heavily persecuted by the members of the sect.

Accompanied by many people’s prayer, he returned to Minucciano two years later. *“I was overjoyed to finally be here, even though the beginning was hard for me. My past weighed on me like a millstone. It was hard to come to terms with how worthless my former life had been. Yet, with time, I understood that God has forgiven everything, and he also forgets.”*

Claudio found in Brother Mario a monk who is deeply united to God, and to whom he could entrust himself and receive guidance and help in his spiritual fights.

*I*n solitude, he prepared himself nine years for his solemn profession which he promised before Bishop Tommasi from Lucca in 1999. If someone asks him today if he has ever regretted

his decision, then he only denies it with a smile, even if it has not always been so easy.

In the meantime, people have found out that the former rock star now sings Gregorian chants to God and honors Our Lady with his flute. Young people often come to him out of curiosity or for some musical advice. *“It is the Lord who sends*

them, I think.” The question about God, which is hidden in every heart, comes to light here.

Today, Brother Claudio shows people how they can obtain a “Ticket to Heaven”. Many others have already found their way to God and their encounter with the hermits frees them from their false ideas or ideals.

For many people, Brother Claudio Canali is living proof of God’s existence. Many doubting visitors who have visited the hermitage, “Our Lady of Refuge”, have said to him, “If you’re here, God must really exist”.