

# *Triumph of the Heart*

THROUGH HIM,  
WITH HIM AND IN HIM

*Family of Mary*

*2018 (III) / No. 85*

*“A Eucharistic Celebration may be flawless on the exterior, very beautiful, but if it does not lead us to encounter Jesus Christ, it is unlikely to bear any kind of nourishment to our heart and our life.”*

*Pope Francis at the General Audience on February 12, 2014*

## *Living Entirely for Jesus*

Dear Readers, in this issue of *Triumph of the Heart*, we would like to share with you the stories of our brothers and sisters whom God called into our spiritual family and who were ordained to the priesthood or made their solemn promises as apostolic sisters this past year. For the glory of God and in thankfulness for your support in prayer, they would like to share with you how they found their vocations.

In these difficult and confusing times, living with a priestly spirit is so important. The priestly spirit, so treasured by our community, can be lived in all forms of life: in the priesthood itself, through

On June 3, 2017, two of our Slovakian novices gave their solemn promises. It was the first time this ceremony took place in the parish church of Stara Halic, right next door to our Motherhouse. Bishop Stanislav Stolarik of the Diocese of Roznava presided at the beautiful liturgy, and several hundred parishioners, deeply touched, reverently participated inside and outside the church. The whole village was involved in the preparations.

spiritual maternity for priests, in families, in the sick and suffering, in the youth and it can even be lived by children.

May the stories in this issue encourage us all to pray with greater Faith, thereby enabling us to make conscious sacrifices for vocations and for priests. It is disconcerting to see how difficult it is for young people to take the first step toward offering their lives completely to God or remaining faithful to the path which they have chosen to the priesthood or consecrated life. We underestimate the incomparably powerful protection which Our Lady gives to vocations!

Cakes and other baked goods arrived from every house for the joyful celebration afterwards, and many people made other contributions. So, with the parishioners here, we thankfully received our two new apostolic sisters, Sr. Janka and Sr. Maria Afra, into our community.

The Motherhouse started very small. In December 1993, the first four sisters of our community moved into an old cantor and teacher

house in Stara Halic, Slovakia, which the Bishop of Roznava let us use. Since then, many things have changed in this little, hidden village in central Slovakia. The old house, through the diligence of many friends and benefactors, has changed into a stately Motherhouse surrounded by several smaller buildings. Until now, 126 sisters have received their formation here and have made their solemn promises.

The ordination to the priesthood, on the other hand, took place in Rome on December 8, 2017—in the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls. The four young men consecrated themselves to the Immaculate Heart at the moment of their ordination because they want to live their priestly life

with Mary. They spoke, for the first time, the words, “Through Him, with Him, and in Him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours Almighty Father, for ever and ever!” What a solemn moment! When the living Jesus is offered up to the Father through the priests’ hands, we are also called as a priestly people to place our offering, even the smallest sacrifice, on the paten so that through HIM and with HIM and in HIM it receives an infinite value. That is the mystery of the priestly vocation of every person. Read now for yourselves how these young men and women decided to give their lives entirely to Jesus, so that, in a celibate life, they may become fathers and mothers for souls in a spiritual way.

## *Hidden in the Immaculate Heart*

*On December 8, 2017, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception,  
in the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls,  
Cardinal Mauro Piacenza ordained to the priesthood  
four deacons from the Family of Mary:  
Niall O’Riordan from Ireland, Dongkyu Shin from Korea,  
Johannes Häuselmann from Switzerland and Matteo Tosi from Italy.  
From nearly 20 countries 1,500 believers came to celebrate this event.*

**B**efore the relics of the Apostle to the Nations, St. Paul, Cardinal Piacenza spoke about the greatness of a priest’s vocation in our time. Together with Our Lady, the Immaculate Conception, it is the priest’s task to crush the head of the serpent. The Cardinal enumerated the most important means which the shepherd has at his disposal in this spiritual fight:

Through the **Sacraments**, in which God Himself works, the priest snatches those entrusted to him from Satan’s power. Let us just consider Baptism, in which one is freed from original sin, or Holy Confession, where the chains with which

the sinner lets himself be bound to evil are broken, and above all the Holy Eucharist, through which God Himself is present in His Church.

Yet the priest also crushes the head of the serpent by **unmasking** peoples’ **erroneous way of thinking** and healing them through the proclamation of the truth. The Cardinal named our society’s essentially faulty dispositions: man believes that he is **a being independent from God** and that he can define his own norms. Through this, his **reason is dimmed** and he makes **moral decisions** which contradict God’s laws. Without expressly mentioning it, the Cardinal was surely considering

gender ideology, euthanasia and abortion. Only when man is aware that he is merely a creature will he have a clear orientation for his ethical actions. Most of all, the priest is called **to testify to God's existence** and to declare to the people in all his exterior activities that everything he does comes from God and is done for God.

The Cardinal said, *"The priest is a man who is called with his whole existence to testify before the others to the deep sense of life which is comprised of the relationship to God. ... When somebody encounters a priest, who can be recognized through the supernatural nature of his words and actions, but also through the clerical attire which he wears, every person*

*is inevitably forced to ask himself about the real meaning of life. One is reminded of God's existence and the fact that it is possible to renounce everything for His sake, by living only for God and only from God."*

*His Eminence concluded with wishes which came from his heart, "I do not want to finish without reminding you, dear Dongkyu, Johannes, Matteo and Niall, that the Church remained especially faithful to the Lord when it was fully hidden in the Immaculate Heart of Mary. May that heart, from this day forward, be your certain dwelling place! That is my greatest and deepest wish!"*

## *From Veterinary Surgeon to Shepherd of Souls*

*Fr. Niall O'Riordan, a very talented and successful veterinarian from Thurles, Ireland said "Adsum" – "Here I am" at his ordination to the priesthood.*

*From now on, he will be a shepherd, not for animals in the fields, but for the souls whom Jesus entrusts to his priestly heart.*

*Fr. Niall Maria tells us how this all came about.*

*F*or as long as I can remember, I loved animals. My father is a veterinary surgeon; and so around the house we always had cats, dogs, cows and, for my First Holy Communion, I even received a pony. My father was such a great example for me that, from the time I was little, I wanted to follow in his footsteps. Although I studied hard at school, I preferred to spend my free-time outside with the animals or playing hurling.

We were a normal Catholic family. With my three brothers and my sister, we often prayed the Rosary as a family and went to Holy Mass to-

gether on Sunday. My mother taught us to pray the Rosary when we were scared which was always the case with me when there was thunder and lightning. The thought that the animals might be struck and killed caused me to panic and I readily knelt down to pray. I experienced firsthand how Our Lady quelled my fear through praying the Rosary. This made an impression on me for the rest of my life. Teenagers are always interested in other things besides Faith, and I was no different since I was always with the animals. So, when I was seventeen, my mother sent me on a pilgrimage

to the Holy Land. It was interesting to see Israel; but, in the end, it was especially beautiful because I met people who helped me renew my Faith: Fr. Patrick, Sr. Edel Mary, Sr. Perpetua and Sr. Veronica were all young people full of joy and enthusiasm. Through them, I met Fr. Paul Maria Sigl at Christmas in 1998, and he awoke in me a desire to attend Holy Mass more frequently and to pray more fervently. Even thoughts of the priesthood were not out of the question.

At the same time, however, I was busy studying veterinary medicine at *University College Dublin* and dreamed of a family with children and plenty of money. When I met Fr. Paul Maria anew one week after graduating in June 2003, he invited me to come to Rome. God knocked on the door of my heart once again with the grace of His invitation to become His priest. Before making a final decision though, I wanted to work at least one year as a veterinarian.

During this year—I was twenty-two years

The day I decided to become a priest was the happiest day of my life. I spent five months working in New Zealand where I read a book by Sr. Emmanuel Maillard, “The Hidden Child of Bethlehem”, which my mother gave me at the airport because she suspected I was having a big spiritual fight. What touched me the most was what I read about St. Joseph. What a powerful saint he is! So, I wrote him a little letter: “*If you want me to become a priest, then please end my relationship with Maria because I am not strong enough to do it.*” I prayed a novena to him for the first time in my life. Two days after I finished it, Maria called me crying and asked, “*Why aren’t we getting married? Are you thinking about becoming a priest?*”

When I said yes, she immediately responded, “*Then I will let you go.*” As painful as the conversation was, I nevertheless felt great relief.

I returned to Ireland in January 2010, and, since I had promised, I worked for another six months as a vet. In this half-year, I felt anew how difficult it was for me to give up my work, my family and my friends. I turned again to St. Joseph. Following another novena to the saint I

old—I fell in love with Maria, a classmate from Malta. On top of that, a very attractive career was unfolding before my eyes. I loved meeting new people, being able to help and learning a lot besides. I was working with outstanding veterinarians, and we looked after the most valuable horses in the world. I loved my job so much that it did not bother me a bit to be on the go from six in the morning until nine o’clock at night. My income reflected my efforts.

I saw Maria regularly, but in my conscious, I always carried the thought that I actually had been called by Jesus to be a priest. Nevertheless, I just couldn’t break up with her because I didn’t want to hurt her in any way. The thought of quitting my job was also beyond my strength. I visited the Family of Mary once in a while, but particularly in these times, the inner struggle became stronger. I was not distracted in the spiritual life there by my work or worldly friendships, and I felt like I was actually leading a double life.

had grown so fond of, I told my boss on March 19, 2010, (the Feast of St. Joseph) that I wanted to leave everything behind and become a priest. He looked at me puzzled and said, “*I support you, but I think you’re crazy!*”

I finally arrived in Rome on June 25, 2010. I was overjoyed in my soul that I had taken this step, but my nature needed a seemingly long time before it became accustomed to this new life. Italian was difficult for me, and going back to school at the age of thirty and learning Greek vocabulary did not excite me either.

How often my thoughts turned to my horses and my work which had so fulfilled me and which was so beautiful, particularly in spring when the animals have their babies. I thought of my friends, my family and my freedom—going out at night, having money to spend however I desired and enjoying the outdoors. Although my first months in Rome were not easy, it was, nevertheless, a very grace-filled time. I learned a lot. As a vet, I was accustomed to having somebody assisting at my side and that everybody was waiting for me. Now, I learned to be the one who serves. That is what a priest should be—a servant of the Lord and

his neighbor. Although I really missed my family and looked back on my work with a certain melancholy, my relationship to Our Lady grew always deeper. The fights began to dissipate, and the look back gradually disappeared from my conscious.

Today, I can only thank God that I made it, because one soul could never be compared with even the most valuable racing horse. And I thank God already for each person He chooses to entrust to my priestly work. It has been my experience: you are happiest where God places you! There-

fore, I am very excited to be working in Uzovska Panica, Slovakia. There, I care for street children and families saddened by our Fr. Ignazio's nearly deadly accident on October 8, 2017. He was hit by a motorcycle during a pilgrimage with teenagers to Amsterdam and due to serious head injuries, will still need a lot of time to recover.

Please accompany my apostolate with your prayers. With my whole heart, I send you my First Blessing and promise to remember you in my prayers and Holy Mass.

## Thanks to my Mom

*With his two siblings, Johannes Häuselmann had a beautiful childhood growing up in Urdorf, close to Zurich, Switzerland. Although his father is Protestant, he regularly went on Sunday with the family to Holy Mass in the Catholic church. Accordingly, the parents impressed on their children's conscious that Faith has an important place in family life. Fr. Pascal Maria, as he is called now, tells us how he found his vocation to the priesthood.*

*E*ven as a child, I always wanted to become a priest. I liked to "play" Holy Mass, using lasagna noodles as a substitute for hosts. Once I became a teenager, however, this childhood dream came to an end; I was much more interested in playing soccer and going to parties. After high school, I decided to train for a very interesting job in the banking industry. When I finished though, I didn't want to start working right away at the age of nineteen. I wanted to travel the world and admire the beauty which our planet has to offer.

Reality hit hard however when, just a few months after my successful training, my mother, who had already been sick for a number of years with cancer, was taken to the hospital. She had already undergone various chemotherapy and radiation treatments, but this time we knew that she would not be coming home healthy. I visited Mom every day until on December 1, 2005, at the

age of 41, she went to her eternal rest.

This event caused a great about-face in my life. I had been confronted with death and so also with the question about the actual meaning of life and for what life is worth living. I had pushed these questions off to the side for many years through a superficial existence, but now I could not get them out of my head. Visiting night clubs had lost its charm because I was searching for existential answers.

It was clear to me that you can die from one moment to the next, for example in an accident or through a heart attack. And then what? A big help for me at this time were my visits to grandma and grandpa because they had already lost both of their children: my twenty-nine-year-old Aunt Isabelle through a car accident in 1996, and then my mother ten years later. To my great surprise, they did not fall into depression despite all this



suffering. I recognized that their solid Catholic faith gave them the strength to carry and endure these painful losses. In talking with them, but even more through their example, my Faith became more important to me.

*T*oday, I am certain that my mother stood close by me from heaven in this time; she had already prayed a lot for vocations to the priesthood here on earth and offered up her suffering for priests.

I started reading the numerous Catholic magazines to which my mother subscribed, including *Triumph of the Heart*. My interest in the Family of Mary grew, and I was able to meet them at various Days of Prayer in Switzerland.

Since the faith was becoming more important to me, I asked myself what I wanted to do with my life. Actually, I was quite content with my work at the bank, but a certain “something” was missing. I wanted to participate in all of Holy Week for once, and so I took vacation in 2008 to fulfill this wish at the seminary of the Family of Mary close to Rome.

The days there were wonderful, but the greatest grace from this visit was that Jesus’ call resurfaced. After this Holy Week I was sure: *I want to become a priest and nothing else!* Understanding this was like a great liberation and the answer to many of my existential questions.

One question remained: *Where* did God want me to be a priest? After I visited a few other religious communities which were out of the question for me, I had to decide between my home diocese and the Family of Mary.

It was a very difficult decision because, on the one side, I love my diocese but, on the other, found the charisma of the Family of Mary very attractive. Looking for clarity, I started with the introductory courses at the diocesan seminary in Switzerland. I prayed a lot and asked several priests for advice.

Then I remembered what Mother Teresa once said, if you do not know what God’s will is, then go before the Blessed Sacrament for twenty-four hours and He will make it known. I took her advice, but the Lord allowed that I still did not recognize where He wanted me to be.

After going back and forth in this difficult time, I finally decided for the Family of Mary on August 15, 2010, after praying a novena to Our Lady; and I have never regretted it. I am thankful and happy to be a priest in this community!

*M*any people have helped on my way to the priesthood; I would like to sincerely thank them all. In particular, however, I would like to thank my mother, because I think that without her and the suffering she offered up in love, I would never be here where I am now.

# Come and See!

*These words, with which Jesus invited Andrew and John to follow Him, were also the decisive answer for Matteo Tosi from Riccione, Italy to his question about God's will for his life. For eight years, he received formation in our seminary to be a priest and missionary, and he is really excited about his pastoral work. He tells us how he discovered his vocation.*

The oldest of three children, I grew up in a Catholic family. My parents were active in the parish, my mother as a catechist and my father was a musician both for the liturgy as well as in the family circle.

As long as I can remember, I have had a living relationship with Jesus, Our Lady and my guardian angel. I remember exactly how our grandmother tucked my brother Andreas and me into bed when our parents were not at home. She sat down between our two beds, told us a story and prayed with us.

On one of these treasured evenings, I experienced the presence of Jesus, Mary and my guardian angel. Since that moment, it has remained in my conscience that they are always with me. That's why I would like to say that I have my grandmother to thank first and foremost for the gift of my Faith.

Actually, I always wanted to have a family. My mother remembers that as a little boy I sometimes said that I wanted to be like our parish priest, Don Giorgio, when I grow up. This thought completely vanished when I became a teenager. I

After graduating from high school, I was interested in just one job—I wanted to become a physical therapist because I had the impression I was gifted in that field. Unfortunately, from 600 hundred applicants, only 60 were accepted each year; I was not among them. What should I do now? Physical therapy was the only job I could imagine.

So, in nearby Rimini I started studying kinesiology, in other words, everything that had to do

spent most of my free time working with a Catholic youth program and playing music.

Already at the age of eight, I wanted to be a drummer because there was a band in our parish, and I was especially fascinated with the drummer. My parents helped me pursue this wish, and so I played in various bands as a teenager—in the parish for the liturgy, but also worldly music in a band at school and anywhere the opportunity presented itself.

When I was about twenty years old, a heavy metal band approached me because they wanted to record an album. I gladly accepted their invitation since it was a chance to make a break. It may seem contradictory, but whenever I played rock music, I always did it with Jesus.

We rehearsed in the basement of our parish, and so I had a key to the church. Before I went downstairs to practice, I always said hello to Jesus first in the tabernacle, prayed a little bit and asked Him to help me play better and more skillfully. The same year that our band "Silver Lake" released its first album, I entered the seminary. How did that happen?

with the movement of the human body. I thought it would be a big help for physical therapy and it was a useful way to pass the time until the next admission's exam. Besides that, the university was so close that I could live at home and save my parents the money of putting me up somewhere.

That year, 2004, I heard that Our Lady was appearing in Medjugorje, and in order to check it out, I participated in a pilgrimage to Bosnia Herzegovina. When I returned home, I felt the desire




to go to weekday Holy Mass, to pray the Rosary and to follow Jesus more seriously.

When I told my friend Marco about this, he shared with me that he had started saying the prayers of St. Brigid and enthusiastically counted off to me all the promises Jesus attached to the recitation of these prayers. It was obvious to me—I had to pray these prayers too!

I have prayed them every day for the last thirteen years. Since they are prayed every day, I had to reserve a certain amount of time for Jesus. I could not cut back on my studies, so I had to give up less important activities which, however, used up a lot of time, above all computer and music. Without me realizing it, Jesus entered more concretely into my life.

On top of that, I started up a prayer group with a few friends like Our Lady wished in Medjugorje. We prayed the Rosary together and

 One and a half months passed when one morning somebody from the University of Bologna called: “A few students didn’t enroll and so you qualified to come! The last one!” It bordered on a miracle. What a joy!

Additionally, I could live with my friend Marco, who today is a Franciscan in the Holy Land. We had everything that was important to us close by: the university, the church, the gym and grocery stores. It became routine for me to dedicate one hour every day to the Rosary and Holy Mass for my soul and one hour for my body with sports. Of course, we also had physical therapy practice in the hospitals while we were studying. This constantly brought me into contact with people who were suffering, and I experienced how many of them entrusted themselves to me. Therefore, I had to ask myself: *What do I really want, to help people physically or do I want to bring them consolation and joy through the faith?* I realized that, until now, Jesus had given me everything that I had asked Him, with the exception of the woman of my life, despite the many nice friendships I had had with girls. He knew what my greatest joy would be. And so, the desire grew in me to know God’s will for my life.

For the first time, I asked Him, “*What do*

spoke about our Faith. Although we started out with just five students, we soon grew into a group of twenty people. We strived to live Our Lady’s message: daily prayer, regular Holy Confession, Holy Mass, fasting and reading the Bible. All this quickly lost the character of an effort and became for us a daily necessity.

I studied kinesiology in Rimini for two years before a friend talked me into taking the admission’s exam for physical therapy again with him in Bologna. The night before, I prayed to Jesus, “*Please let us both pass tomorrow, but if you have to choose, then choose my friend because I at least have You and the Faith—he doesn’t. It would be easier for me to accept being turned down again than for him.*” Jesus answered my prayer. For the 60 open spots, Michael finished 35; I was number 73. I missed it again! So, what did Jesus want from me?

*You want from me?”* Right away, I thought, He might be calling me to the priesthood. And I thought to myself, “*If I, who have a deep relationship with Him, won’t follow Him, then who will?*” Only one question remained: *Where?*

In our parish, we often invited people to come and give witness to their Faith. At this time, sisters from the Family of Mary came, including one whose family had brought a little statue of the Queen of Peace from Medjugorje to Civitavecchia where it cried tears of blood. We wrote all about this event in issue 61 of *Triumph of the Heart*. The miracle was recognized by the Church because the responsible, Bishop Grillo, declared under oath that on March 15, 1995, at 8:15 a.m. that statue he was holding in his hands cried tears of blood, and Pope John Paul II put his own signature at the bottom of the document.

The Holy Father had the statue brought to the Vatican at the time so that he could venerate, kiss and bless it. Finally, he crowned her with a golden crown which Bishop Grillo had brought with him.

Through their presentations, the sisters answered a lot of my questions, and that was a sign for me to learn more about this community. I drove to Rome for a weekend with a few friends, but this visit did not help me to decide anything.

## *My invitation to the seminary*

*D*uring another pilgrimage to Medjugorje, I met Fr. Maximilian, a young, completely happy priest from the Family of Mary who fascinated me with his well-balanced charisma and his spiritual depth. I thought, *“I would like to be like him. I can imagine being a priest like that.”*

And since with God nothing happens by chance, meeting Fr. Maximilian was the answer to the question of where God wanted me—in the Family of Mary. When I had the opportunity to meet the founder of the community, I told him about my desire and asked him if I could try the Family of Mary. Fr. Paul Maria answered me, *“Come and see! You can come tomorrow, in a week, in a month or in a year.”*

At that moment, I felt not only great freedom but great joy as well. It was a confirmation for me that this is where Jesus wanted me. On top of that, He gave me a special grace, making it easy to leave behind everything I was doing at the time—my studies, music, sports, etc., in order to follow Him. The following week, on June 19, 2009, Pope Benedict XVI initiated the Year for Priests. It was a sign for me. At the beginning of that year I wanted to start my priestly way as well.

Life in the seminary in Rome was a very new world for me. Seminarians from many other countries lived together here—completely different, strange cultures and habits for me. Some

things were a challenge which were made easier by prayer. I found in the seminary the spirituality for which I had been searching: Marian and Eucharistic.

Although I do not have other seminaries to compare it with, I can say that Jesus really formed us here in Rome. I spent many hours before the Blessed Sacrament; I had time for adoration every day, time to be with Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. The balance during our formation was also so important to me—prayer, music, sports, art, discovering beauty in so many ways, the chance to discover and develop one’s own abilities. All this made the time in the seminary like a little paradise.

*L*ooking back, I can only thank all those who have helped me on my way to the priesthood—my parents and grandparents who always supported me in all my decisions because they wanted me to be happy: my siblings Andreas and Lucia for the love which they unconditionally gave to me. Above all, I want to thank Don Giorgio who was for me the first example of a priest whom I wanted to imitate and who accompanied me from Baptism to the seminary: helping me understand how one can concretely live Faith. Thank you to all those who accompanied me spiritually and humanly with wisdom and love. Grazie! Thanks!

# A Missionary for Korea

*Fr. Damian Maria was born on April 19, 1986, in Kyungki-do close to Seoul, Korea and given the name Dongkyu Shin. He met the Family of Mary thanks to a German missionary, Fr. Anton Trauner, whom we will tell you about after this testimony.*

When I tell the story of my vocation, I always start with my mother's Faith. Like many Korean women, she grew up in an atheistic environment; my father, on the other hand, came from a deeply faithful Protestant family.

My dad worked for Samsung; in order to be successful and maintain a job there, you have to dedicate your life to the company. He only came home every other weekend, and when he did, he was exhausted. My mother was very lonesome and, therefore, took her sister's advice of visiting the Catholic church. She learned about the faith there and was baptized. My parents then married on November 28, 1985, in the Catholic church; and in 2006, more than twenty years later, my father also converted.

One day—I was still a child—a pilgrim statue of Our Lady of Fatima came to our home; and since my mother felt drawn to her in a special way, she consecrated me to the Queen of the Rosary.

As my years at school were coming to an end, I had to start making decisions about my future. I thought to myself, *"You only live once and for a short time in this world, how then can I make this life valuable?"*

Immediately Jesus' words came to mind, *"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."* (Jn 15:13). Jesus not only taught that, but he lived it. And that is precisely the task of the priest who, in the imitation of the Lord, gives his life for his sheep. Yes, I wanted to live for that!

But which community should I join? The most important criterium for me was that the community be Marian. This feature was too little

To ease her inner struggles and loneliness, she sought consolation in prayer. I even saw her praying on her knees for hours at home. Thus, she taught my sister and me to give God the first place in our lives. It was a given for us to go to Holy Mass every day and to pray the Rosary. My mother said to us, *"Not to participate in a Holy Mass is the same as losing a valuable jewel."* It was not important for her that we shine at school; what mattered was that we were good in the eyes of God.

I learned from her that the only thing we have to have in life is God. Therefore, it was already clear to me as a teenager, without God and without prayer I can accomplish nothing. Above all, I will have no peace in my heart. I experienced through prayer how much Jesus loves me. And when I considered whether a person is capable of loving me as much as He does, I was certain that it is impossible.

pronounced in all the communities I visited.

Then I met the "Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary" founded by the German missionary Fr. Anton Trauner, from the Diocese of Augsburg. I found in them this love for Mary in the spirit of the messages of Fatima. So, I joined their youth group which met every Saturday for Eucharistic adoration, the Rosary, Holy Confession and Holy Mass.

We spoke with one another about our difficulties, consoled one another and deepened our knowledge of the faith. This created a strong bond among us, and we had a great love for one another. I also met Fr. Sanghee, my future brother, who at the time was still studying physics.

When I personally met Fr. Trauner for the first time, he was already eighty-five years old. In him, I found a priest who longed for the unification of North and South Korea more than most Koreans and who, with this intention, tirelessly spread the message of Fatima everywhere. I knew immediately that I could entrust myself to him.

With time, I realized that all the good religious practices which I had learned at home, like making the Five First Saturdays of Reparation or love for Jesus of Divine Mercy, could be traced back to Fr. Trauner. In the end, he was also the one who recommended that I join the Family of Mary in order to continue his mission in Korea as a priest.

Although I knew nothing about the community, I had complete trust in Fr. Trauner's advice and I prayed that St. Joseph accompany me on my vocational path. Fr. Paul Maria, who was friends with Fr. Trauner, allowed me to come to the pre-seminary in Rome, but I first should learn Italian and English. So, I prepared for my trip with language courses. From all sides, people were advising me not to study in Europe, but I prayed and entrusted everything to Our Lady.


The day of my departure, February 28, 2007, finally arrived. My family and relatives cried, not only because we had to say good-bye, but, above all, because we did not know if we would ever see each other again. My cousin was among them. As children, we had dreamed of one day being a priest and a nun in the same parish, but now she had to let me go. It did not take long, however, before she found her way as an apostolic sister in the Family of Mary.

The Mother Superior of the Sisters of the

Immaculate Heart of Mary, Sr. Marie Johan, gave me a little statue of St. Joseph as a going-away present. It was a sign for me that he had accepted my request to accompany me. I landed in Rome after a twelve-hour flight. A few sisters from the Family of Mary were waiting for me at the airport, and guess where they took me? To *Casa San Giuseppe*, the House of St. Joseph, and that on the eve of the month of St. Joseph, March.

I could only give thanks to God! I felt at home in the Family of Mary from the very first moment, even though everything was different than back at home in Korea. The atmosphere of prayer, adoration, Rosary and love for Our Lady which I experienced in the brothers and sisters made a harmonic family out of us although we were all very different—completely different!

After two and a half years of spiritual formation, I studied philosophy and theology in Rome with the seminarians of our spiritual family. To my great dismay, I had to interrupt my studies for two years to complete my military service in Korea. Even though this was a very difficult time for me—military service in Korea is truly unpleasant—the experiences I had were very helpful to me. How happy I was to return to Rome, though, with set prayer times and the loving atmosphere of the brothers and sisters around me!

ow, a great responsibility is awaiting me—returning to Korea as a priest and helping the people there to love God and Our Lady. I ask you with all my heart, dear readers, to include our Korean mission in your prayers. We will repay you with our blessing and remembering you at Holy Mass!

# An Apostle of Peace

*On October 14, 2017, a great apostle of peace from our day died in South Korea, the ninety-five-year-old German missionary Fr. Anton Trauner.*

*For nearly sixty years, he tirelessly worked in eastern Asia for the needs of the people and to spread the message of Fatima.*

*More than the Koreans themselves, the deeply Marian priest longed for the reunification of a nation divided by Communism.*

*Unknown in his homeland, Fr. Anton was loved and appreciated as a saint by the Catholics of South Korea and beyond.*

*I*t never would have occurred to the enthusiastic athlete in his youth to become a priest, least of all in Korea. Born in Wertingen, Germany in 1922, Anton loved the mountains and his freedom, but as far as the faith was concerned, he did not know much. His mother, Carolina, on the other hand, deeply desired for her only son to become a priest. Later on, Anton was convinced, *“My mother prayed for and attained my vocation to the priesthood.”*

In 1940, new students came to Anton’s high school because the school of the Benedictine missionaries in St. Ottilien had been closed by the Nazis. One of these boys brought eighteen-year-old Anton closer to the faith, and he suddenly started reading books about Jesus. *“This completely changed my life. When I finished school, I was sure that I wanted to become a*

*D*uring a student pilgrimage to Rome in 1951, Anton also visited Assisi. Touched by the grace he felt in this place, the twenty-eight-year-old prayed earnestly in the church of St. Francis, *“I also want to be an apostle of peace!”* Yet, what happened the next day? On the train ride back to Rome, he met a college girl and they fell in love. His friend advised him, *“Entrust yourself entirely to Our Lady and learn from her if you want to achieve truly great things in your life.”* The inner struggle to end the relationship with this girl put so much pressure on Anton that he had

*priest.”* Yet, Anton Trauner had first to experience the terrors of the Russian military campaign as a young radio operator.

In 1945, he was captured by the Russians and spent nearly four years in a forced-labor camp in Yugoslavia. It was there, ironically, that he heard for the first time from a fellow prisoner about the Marian apparitions in Fatima. *“What moved me profoundly back then was the message that Russia would convert.”*

Back in his homeland, Anton entered the seminary in Augsburg at the age of twenty-six. He used the opportunity to learn more about Fatima. Additionally, a friend introduced him to St. Louis de Montfort and encouraged him to consecrate himself entirely to Our Lady. He gave him True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, in which Anton discovered “his” Marian way.

a nervous breakdown. Yet during his three-week stay in the clinic, he received a special healing, *“Until that time, I was pretty much a slave to what others thought,”* the former athlete admitted. Now, however, down and out, he was able to overcome this non-priestly weakness. Due to his compromised health, however, they refused to admit him for ordination to the priesthood. Consequently, Anton worked as a teacher and catechist back home for four years. It was not until later, as a missionary, that he realized looking back, this “detour” was necessary, *“otherwise I never*




*would have come to Korea.”*

In 1956, it so happened that a German missionary priest, Fr. Sieberz, a survivor of the Benedictine Abbey Tokwon in North Korea which the Communists disbanded, visited the parish of Anton Trauner and noticed his struggle. *“Come to Korea, we need priests there,”* Fr. Sieberz encouraged him. And he arranged that, on April 27, 1958, the thirty-five-year-old Anton Trauner be ordained to the priesthood in Ingolstadt by a German missionary bishop from China.

Soon thereafter, the new priest boarded a Japanese freighter in Bremen and in July, after six weeks at sea, he reached the port of Busan on the southern coast of the Korean peninsula. He had discreetly attached a Miraculous Medal at the front of the ship to make it clear that Mary was leading him to Korea!

He was one of the first German Catholic missionaries to come to South Korea after the Korean War (1950-1953). He found a poor country—there was nothing of today’s powerful economy—and Busan was packed with North Korean refugees. The priest knew nothing about the country or the language. A student taught him the first Korean phrases, the food was more than unusual and the European even fell ill with Typhus. So, the beginning was very difficult for Fr. Trauner who later spoke, thought and even considered himself a Korean. The Church he encountered there was small and weak, but strong in Faith and dynamic; the believers were great people of prayer. After one year, in the port of Busan, his first parish was

 On August 15, 1964, Fr. Trauner founded the World Apostolate of Fatima in South Korea. He understood that Fatima was the key to the reunification of North and South Korea, and this was his heart’s greatest wish. He extended Our Lady’s request for prayer in Fatima for the conversion of Russia to that of North Korea. As a German, he untiringly reminded the Koreans about the miracle of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany. In the hearts of the Koreans, which were threatened to become lethargic from their prosperity, the hope of reunification through prayer had to be kept alive. Fr. Trauner liked to

entrusted to him after one year. He was among the North Korean refugees, of whom only a handful were baptized. Under great hardships, the few Catholics quickly started with the construction of a parish church. *“Many of my believers back then sold their valuables to finance the construction.”*

From the beginning, Fr. Trauner energetically helped wherever he could. He tirelessly organized humanitarian aid from America and his homeland, visited the suffering—believers and non-believers alike, brought the sick to the hospital and paid the tuition for impoverished youth. News of this spread quickly, and the Koreans soon revered him as their *“Father of the Poor”*. With trust and vision, Fr. Trauner founded in 1962 an orphanage for the many orphans of war which later became known around the country as the *“House of Love”*.

When a German manufacturer sent him ten sewing machines in 1965, he saw it as a sign to establish the Han-dok Vocational School for girls. A German-Korean school followed in 1976, and, just one year later, the construction of the birthing clinic in Busan which primarily serves poorer women for next to nothing and in which, to date, nearly 20,000 children have been born. Fr. Trauner was always aware that everything which had been achieved was God’s doing. When asked what most influenced his work, he answered simply and honestly, *“The connection with Mary; I’m her son and have put myself at her disposition. I trust in her guidance and give to her everything that comes along.”*

say, *“Prayer is our only weapon. I believe that through prayer we can achieve the reunification of Korea without spilling blood. It is the will of God that the one Korean nation which is separated be reunited.”* In view of North Korea, Fr. Trauner was convinced, *“This country needs a mother in order to find God. Mary is the mother of the whole world. When we accept her and let her guide us, then she leads us on a way of peace—but through the Cross!”*

So, in 1974, close to Imjingak, right along the border with North Korea, Fr. Trauner started to gather thousands of believers every year on May



13, for a Fatima Mass and for public prayer for the people in North Korea. For forty years, the Fatima Apostle unwaveringly called together his South Korean believers to this outdoor prayer meeting. Finally, on May 7, 2015, he experienced an amazing answer to his prayer—the consecration of the Peace of Fatima Catholic Church close to Imjin-

guk, just a stone's throw away from the border to North Korea. Permission for construction near the demilitarized zone proved extremely difficult until a letter with the desired approval finally arrived from the Secretary of War. *"I had just one dream: that Mary transform this communist country into a people of God!"*

On the Feast of the Annunciation 1986, Fr. Trauner founded, amidst great difficulties, his own community of sisters, "The Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary," who became an indispensable support for him in his Fatima apostolate, especially through their prayer. It must have been a great consolation for Fr. Trauner at the end of his life to see as a priest and as a deacon his spiritual sons, whom he had sent to study in Rome so that they could continue his mission someday.

For Fr. Sanghee Maria, and the newly ordained Fr. Damian Maria, Fr. Trauner was the model of a Marian priest from the start: "If we had problems, it was enough to see how he awaited everything from Mary. She meant everything to him. His way of expressing himself was simple, yet you felt a special power of grace when he spoke from the convictions of his heart. The Koreans from Busan called him, 'the holy man with blue eyes'."

Fr. Anton Trauner died in Busan on the morning of October 14, 2017—his 95th birthday. At the same time, nearly 9,000 miles further west in Fatima, it was still October 13, and the 100th anniversary of the last apparition of the Queen of the Rosary whom Fr. Trauner, as a Fatima Apostle, had consecrated his entire priestly work. At the funeral Mass in the Busan Cathedral, presided over by the diocesan bishop, two additional bishops, more than 200 priests and 4,000 believers participated.

# When I Started to Believe in God's Love

*Testimony of Sr. Janka Maria Rahlová from Prešov, Slovakia*

As I look back, I am amazed and can only thank God that he called me, a weak person, to live completely for Him. Although the vocation to a chaste, consecrated life is purely a gift, it still requires one's cooperation, in other words, their Yes.

In the first place, I have my parents to thank that I could give my Yes to God. My mother, who was called to God shortly before my solemn promise, placed me and my two sisters under Our Lady's protection every day. This prepared me so that, at the age of twenty, I could give my own mature Yes to God by consecrating myself to Our Lady.

I still fondly remember my First Holy Communion. I was fully aware that I had received Jesus, and I experienced a deep, tangible peace after receiving Him. Therefore, I gladly continued going to Holy Mass and to Holy Confession. Yet, when our mother wanted to pray the Rosary with

Back then, I also had before my eyes Mother Teresa, who had gone to God a few years earlier, and I understood how much the world needs such holy people. Additionally, I felt a great desire for holiness, and I decided: I want to change, I want to be good so that there is more goodness in the world.

When a couple of months later a friend of mine invited me to a youth retreat in Trenčín, which the Family of Mary was organizing, I knew right away that I should attend. I wanted to give prayer another chance and so I decided, I am go-

ing to pray there at all costs!

us at home, I was not interested and protested with the excuse that I was too tired.

As an adolescent, I stopped praying completely; I remembered our dear God only when there were real problems and I called out to Him for help. For years, my efforts were focused on realizing my dreams, studying well, knowing a lot and meaning something to the people in the world. An ever-increasing emptiness reigned in my heart, and I experienced a senselessness in just living for myself. My soul was filled with sadness, and it seemed to me as if it was dying.

I realized that it would not turn out well if I continued like this. It was the time in which Pope John Paul II was dying. His death became a grace of conversion for me. I can still remember precisely the moment in which I found out this great pope had died: In an instant, my heart was pierced with pain. For me it was like not only the whole Church, but all of humanity had lost their father.

ing to pray there at all costs!

At the retreat, I tried with all my strength to pray and listen to the conferences with my head and heart. My sister was there too, and on the train home, we both cried. They were tears of joy because we had experienced such an atmosphere of love with the brothers and sisters, and it opened up a new, unknown spiritual world for us. We understood how much God loves us and that His only desire is that we are happy.

The most memorable part for me was how Fr. Paul Maria explained the consecration to

the Immaculate Heart of Mary according to St. Louis de Montfort. I was impressed by the idea that, through the consecration, one is taken like a child into Mary's womb, where she gives us her virtues. From that moment forward, I did not hesi-

*A*s a good mother, Our Lady simply no longer let me leave her spiritual womb.

After the retreat, there was such desire for Jesus in my heart that I wanted to receive Holy Communion every day and so I went to Holy Mass. It was in these days that I considered for the first time a vocation to consecrated life. I had fallen in love with Jesus and liked anything spiritual. So, I thought to myself, it might not be "so bad" to be a sister.

I opened a little back door for Jesus and said to Him full of trust, "*You know everything, and, therefore, You will give me only the vocation which will make me happy. So, if You want me to be a sister, then I'm ready!*" And Jesus took me for my word.

The daily struggle to be faithful in prayer, especially the Rosary, ensued. Many times, I failed to pray, and then I noticed how, through this, my longing for Holy Communion and for Holy Mass diminished. Only later did I understand

tate to pray every day the consecration I brought home with me from the retreat as my greatest treasure. It was a short but a daily prayer which carried me through the years in which I was searching for my vocation.

that prayer is the foundation on which one builds a relationship to Jesus and that without prayer the power of the Sacraments cannot have an effect. Unfortunately, I again started to dedicate myself to my past interests—my wishes, friendships and studies.

It took a few years before I understood that I had to decide either to continue to lead *my* life or to really begin a life for Jesus alone. An important moment for this decision was when I started to believe in God's love—a love that loves me so much as if I were His only bride and which longs for a response.

It was beautiful and touching for me that two months before my solemn promise, my mother went to God on March 25, 2017, the day on which Our Lady gave her yes at the Annunciation. I deeply believe that in the moment of her death, she also gave her yes to God because she knew that she can help us in the realization of our vocations much more from heaven.

# A Fruit of the Motherhouse

*Testimony of Sr. Mária Afra Malčeková from Tomášovce, Slovakia*

**M**y mother did not tell me about the complications of my birth until I was already in the novitiate. Right after my mother delivered, the doctors rushed me away from her; accordingly, she pleaded full of pain and anxiety, *“My God, I beg You, save my child! I give her to You, I give her completely to You! Just save her!”* When my mother realized what she had said, she nearly wanted to take it back. After several hours, the doctors returned with me and explained to her that I had not been breathing and, therefore, nearly suffocated. Today I understand: Jesus wanted to give me life, and it should belong entirely to him.

Surely, it was guided by God and not by

**W**hen I was thirteen, I met Lenka and Lucka in the youth group from my little town, and they became my good friends. They helped me a lot in the spiritual life because together we learned to faithfully pray the Rosary, and it became very important to me. In the summer and during our breaks, we met every day to pray the Rosary. I am certain that Our Lady was able to preserve me from so much through being faithful to this prayer!

Upon finishing elementary school, I wanted to go to the Catholic high school Sts. Cyril and Method in Nitra where the sisters of the Family of Mary teach since I knew that it is not easy to live the faith in a public school. At first, my parents did not agree because Nitra was too far away for them and I was only fifteen. We drove there, nevertheless, with our pastor, Fr. Frantisek, for an open house, and my mother liked it so much that she permitted me to go.

When I spoke to Fr. Paul for the first time, with the help of our Sr. Margareta Alacoque since I only spoke Slovak, I told him about my desire

chance that I was born in 1993, the same year and in the same parish to which the sisters of the Family of Mary came to build the Motherhouse in Stara Halic. It is as if it was for me! As a result, I grew up with the missionaries of the community. The first sister I can remember is Sr. Teresita because she taught religion at our little elementary school. When I saw her as a six-year-old in first grade I thought, *“I also want to be a sister some day!”*

As a child, I loved her white dress and a desire began to burn in my heart which never extinguished, even though through the years, at times, it had greater or lesser intensity.

to become a sister. He encouraged me to pray to God for clarity about where He wants me.

I asked Jesus to clearly show me if He wants me in a different community. Just the thought of not living in the Family of Mary in the future was hard for me. I always felt a strong sense of peace and joy about the idea of becoming a missionary one day in this spiritual family.

As a child, I had seen the love the sisters had for us and for one another, and I felt the desire to love like they did. I knew their spirituality well, and I could not imagine my life without the treasures like the Rosary, the Hour of Mercy and, above all, the great devotion and deep love to Our Lady.

In December 2010, I was given a very beautiful grace, in which I felt certain and made my final decision. As usual, I went into the boarding school chapel to pray before class. On that day, very early in the morning, I was all alone in the chapel. So, I knelt down before the tabernacle, and it was as if Jesus asked me, *“Do you want*

*to be my bride?*” I could say yes with my whole heart; for me, it was like a personal engagement with Him. I joyfully waited for the opportunity to ask Fr. Paul to join the Family of Mary.

In the final year before graduation, I had a few inner trials because I had feelings for one of the guys in my class. However, I was always aware of the great love Jesus had for me and that nobody else would ever be capable of loving me like Him. Mother Agnes, whom I often wrote in this time, helped me. I was sure that she was also praying for me.

The most difficult thing for me was to tell my family about my decision. For as long as I was uncertain, I did not speak about it with anybody, not even my mother. One day, though, she asked me about my plans for the future, and, after a few minutes, I was able to admit to her that I had

decided for Jesus and wanted to become a sister.

She confided to me that she actually suspected this since my First Holy Communion. Nevertheless, it was not easy for her to let me go, but, together, we accepted the will of God. In reality, she had been preparing my father for this for a long time. My relatives were happy, even though they probably did not know exactly what it meant to “be a sister”.

Soon after graduation, I went to the Motherhouse where, during the four important and nice years of postulancy and novitiate, I was led by Our Lady. And so, on June 3, 2017, I gave my solemn promise, and that in the church where my parents were married! I would like to thank with all my heart those who accompanied me in this time with their prayers and include them in my prayers as well.

# Become a Host!

*Jesus the High Priest teaches us how suffering can be transformed into love. Fr. Filip Maria Antonin Stajner, a Third Order Dominican from the Czech Republic, attends this “school of love” in a very intense way. The fifty-three-year-old priest is very ill and has been unable to celebrate Holy Mass himself for the last fourteen years. Yet for him, life is a gift worth living.*

When Fr. Filip was diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis in 2000, he was only thirty-six years old. This incurable, degenerative disease prevents the brain from controlling the majority of the muscles. It was obvious to Fr. Filip that it was only a matter of time before he would no longer be able to speak, chew and swallow, even breathing would become impossible and he would be entirely unable to move. In the end, he would die of suffocation.

However, his reaction to the diagnosis was astounding: *“I had already thought about illness and death many times as a priest and at church or funerals had often spoke about it to the sick and dying and to their relatives. Yet when I heard my diagnosis, my first feeling was joy! Yes, joy that God had looked upon me. We have an old saying, ‘Those whom God especially loves, He visits with a cross.’”*

Fr. Filip was okay on his own in the beginning, but after about a year, he was no longer able to walk. Problems with balance, difficulty breathing and insomnia made it clear to him that he was going to need somebody to look after him. In 2002, he asked Jaromira Machovcova, a lady who had come to him regularly for Confession, for help. She immediately agreed. *“The doctors had given him only three months to live. So, I took him in, more or less, as a dying man and tried to create a Christian environment for him. I wanted him to have the possibility still to meet his parishioners as a priest in a place that feels like home.”*

However, he had an amazing will to live and did not die. *“In the first years, he accustomed*

*himself to what his body could do,”* said Jaromira, who is a member of the Legion of Mary. *“He gave detailed descriptions of everything the illness was causing in him and, at the same time, gave me clear instructions what I should do in each situation. Actually, he himself trained me to be his caretaker.”* Looking toward the future, while he was still able to speak, Fr. Filip developed a method of communication for him and Jaromira, a sort of “eye language”, and although it takes some time, it nevertheless works. She sees in his eyes, in the truest sense of the word, what he needs or wants and *“is incomparably experienced, level-headed and downright creative in caretaking,”* as Fr. Filip thankfully emphasizes.

Once in 2005, he suddenly choked, causing his heart to stop. He would have been considered clinically dead, but attached to a respirator, they were able to save him. Since that time, however, the priest can really “speak” only with his eyes. Jaromira remembers, *“I asked him in the intensive care unit, ‘Do you really want to live, attached continuously to a respirator?’ With his eyes, he told me, ‘Yes.’ He had only one desire, to be cared for at home. That was key for me!”* A woman of prayer, she quit her job and, since then, has cared for Fr. Filip around the clock with complete dedication. *“I am so touched by the truthfulness of this priest. It is really worth living a life like his. The illness astounded him, but he did not let it get him down. He sees, hears and thinks completely normal; his organs function too. Usually, his*



day starts at 5 a.m. with morning care and then “breakfast”, fed to him through a tube in his stomach. Fr. Filip is able to joke about it though, ‘I have the advantage that fried duck flies right into my stomach.’ When the pains are not too great, he works, prays and reads, often until midnight.”

Many visitors come from near and far during the day such as his parents, siblings with their families, friends, priests and those looking for advice and consolation. Fr. Filip has already translated some religious books from various languages into Czech, dictating them to Jaromira with eye communication. For the last couple years, he has used a computer on which he can write using his

eye muscles through blinking and fixing his gaze on individual letters. The computer “speaks” the words and writes them down for him. In this way, Fr. Filip can compose phrases and e-mails. “I like to write homilies which I send to friends and acquaintances and publish on the Internet since I cannot hold any myself and am unable to celebrate Holy Mass. When people write to me with their intentions, I gladly help pastorally as a priest.”

Jaromira added, “When sick people come with their problems and see how much Fr. Filip suffers, they often become quiet. During the day he prays a lot and listens to CDs of the New Testament or the lives of the saints.”

Although the doctors predicted an imminent death for Fr. Filip Stajner, saying that within six months he would no longer be here, he has lived with that diagnosis now for seventeen years and has never lost his sense of humor!

**F**r. Filip, who has known our community for a long time, was more than willing to answer our questions in an e-mail interview during Advent 2017, even though his physical condition was very poor.

**When you found out about your sickness, you reacted with joy. That’s amazing! Why are sickness and pain a cause for your joy?**

**Fr. Filip:** *We cannot love here on earth without suffering. I wanted to love God with my whole heart, and I saw in my illness the answer to my prayers.*

**What does the Lord’s presence in the Holy Eucharist mean to you as a sick priest?**

**Fr. Filip:** *The worst form of suffering is loneliness. I always have the Blessed Sacrament in my room with me, and I receive a couple drops of the Precious Blood every day on my tongue. The Eucharistic Lord is the meaning of my life and my priesthood.*

**How do you live your priesthood being motionless in bed for the last seventeen years?**

**Fr. Filip:** *I remember often the words of my bishop at my ordination, “Become a HOST yourself!” And so, I pray every day my “Per ipsum, et cum ipso et in ipso”, “Through Him and with Him and in Him”, even if I do not audibly pronounce it.*

**Have you understood more deeply something about your priesthood in these last seventeen years?**

**Fr. Filip:** *Such a suffering is only understandable in terms of “coredemption” and “being a coredeemer with the Redeemer”. But it is also a great mystery of Faith for me. Therefore, I have been trying to learn humility for the last fifty-three years, even if I haven’t quite yet succeeded. They say that pride dies a half an hour after death. I can make great use of illness and helplessness, however, as a “University of Humility”, since it requires a lot more humility to let someone serve you than to serve.*

**What role does Our Lady play in your priesthood?**

**Fr. Filip:** *I have loved the Blessed Virgin Mary since my childhood, especially because of Fatima. I have venerated her under the title “Coredemptrix” since the days of my studies, and today I understand her role as Coredemptrix with Christ even better.*

*Her mission as Coredemptrix is even more clear to me thanks to my caretaker, Jaromira. She has cared for me in her home for over fifteen years; she suffers with me and interiorly and exteriorly offers up my suffering with me. She is always at my disposition. In all these*

years, she has never had a day-off or gone on retreat.

**What do you do when you are really down physically or spiritually?**

**Fr. Filip:** *I always pray the Rosary. And if I am unable to pray, I repeat in spirit, "Jesus, I love You. Mary, I love you," and I console myself in any situation with "the Good Lord allowed it." Sometimes I think of the words of St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians, God is faithful and will not let you be tested beyond your strength.*

*I have never wished that these machines be shut off. No, I don't dare to think that I can stand before God's judgement of my own accord. Have I ever wished that the physical and spiritual sufferings would stop? Yes, I have.*

**Do you fulfill an interior mission, an apostolate?**

**Fr. Filip:** *Naturally. Jaromira lifts up my hand many times a day so that I can give the*

*blessing, and we pray a lot together. Also, I really enjoy the quiet hours of the night. I do not sleep so much, so I speak to God at night, and I make a pilgrimage through the world in prayer. It makes me happy.*

**In your eyes, is your helplessness and surrender, the tolerating, the enduring and the offering up of your pain a priestly apostolate that you practice?**

**Fr. Filip:** *Of course! Yes! Although the feeling of absolute dependence is really difficult to bear. Luckily, I have the surety of the love of the one caring for me. To be honest, I've had the desire to stand at the altar again, to preach with my mouth and, in this way, to serve some souls as a good shepherd. But Jesus Christ is the only one who decides how I should serve. I say "Yes" to Him with my whole heart.*

**Please say a final word to our readers.**

*Fr. Filip: I would like to do that in as much as I send all the readers my priestly blessing.*

*Fr. Filip M. A. Stajner*

# A Priestly Family

*Our Lord gives us the only answer to the increasingly dramatic lack of priests,  
“Ask the Lord of the harvest!”*

*The Sievers Family from Germany is an impressive example  
of how naturally vocations to the priesthood mature in a family that prays.*

*Although the parents were Protestants,  
five of their nine children became priests,  
including Fr. Gerhard Sievers, whom we visited in November 2017.*

*H*is father, Dr. Eberhard Sievers, was baptized Protestant, but neither he nor his wife Irma practiced their faith. Without her knowing it, however, he started growing closer to the Catholic faith. Finally, he met a famous convert, Heinrich Spaemann, who led the thirty-year-old to the Catholic Church in 1941. His wife was so appalled that she stopped speaking to him—six weeks of the silent treatment.

The turning point for Irma was July 2, 1943, the Feast of the Visitation. Four-year-old Gerhard, her second child, was climbing on the railing of the balcony outside their second story apartment in Nordhorn, holding on to the laundry line which was strung across it. The line broke and the boy fell head first twenty feet to the ground.

When his mother found him lying in his blood with a broken skull, she prayed, beside herself with fear, *“Dear God, if the boy recovers, I will become Catholic!”* Gerhard did in

*A*fter nine boys, the last of which died young, the tenth child was “finally” a girl; she was named Maria. Fr. Sievers explains. *“God was the middle point of our very simple family. We prayed together at the table. With or without the piano, we sang and prayed the Rosary every evening. We read from Holy Scripture and even formulated our own prayers, something which was very unusual before the Council. We also learned catechism at home. When I started school, I knew the most important*

fact recover, and Irma Sievers converted to the Catholic Church that same month, two years after her husband. The Feast of the Visitation united mother and son for the rest of their lives; they always wrote, called or visited one another on that anniversary. *“I thanked her for the pain she endured during my birth, and she thanked me for the pain I endured for her conversion. The pangs of birth were mutual—spiritual and physical. Yes, that was really a visitation full of consequences back then. With it, the intense history of our family’s Faith began.”*

Heinrich Spaemann instilled in Dr. Sievers a clear understanding of the priestly vocation of all the baptized, especially the Christian family. The family is the “domestic church” where the liturgical year is consciously celebrated and where love and faith are lived and passed on. And the family continued to grow! *“My parents decided to accept every child they were given.”*

*stories about Jesus and of the saints, as well as the order of the Latin Mass so that I could pray along. We never left the house in the morning or went to bed in the evening without the blessing of our parents with holy water.”*

All nine siblings made their First Holy Communion before the age of five. *“That resulted in a very strong devotion to the Eucharist, so that we also went to Daily Mass as school-children.”* Their mother even kept a calendar of their Confessions for them. In order that not

too much time passed between Confessions, she would lovingly remind one or the other, *“You haven’t been to Confession for three weeks. Don’t you want to go again?”*

During their engagement, the parents took a trip in 1936 to Dresden, where the famous “Sistine Madonna” is located. The tender representation of Our Lady with Child made such a deep impression on the doctor that he stood there in the museum alone and motionless for a half an hour. This encounter was surely the first seed which caused the wish to become Catholic to germinate in the doctor’s soul. An image of the Sistine Madonna hung for decades in the Sievers’ home, then over the father’s deathbed and, finally, decorated his memorial card.

*“I never had any other serious wish than to become a priest. It matured in me between the ages of seven and eight, when I was an altar server, and never changed. It developed without great struggles or reconsideration. It was the same for my other brothers who became priests, even though we had never made it a topic of discussion.”*

Ernst, the oldest, was the first, joining the White Fathers, a missionary community to Africa, whom he had met in the boarding school. He served as a priest for forty years in Ghana and Uganda.

*“His vocation,”* said Gerhard Sievers, the second oldest, *“posed the question for me about whether I was also called to serve in the missions. Yet, the answer in my heart was clear, ‘No, stay in the Diocese of Munster!’”* So, Gerhard joined the diocesan seminary in the Spring of 1959.

Around this time, the family had met the

*“My parents were happy. They wanted to live for God and they saw the fruit of this in our vocations.”* Even Maria, the only daughter, became a pastoral assistant in Kev-elaer. *“When Mother celebrated her ninetieth birthday, five of her sons concelebrated Holy Mass.”*

God gave an impressive confirmation of the extraordinary priestly spirit in the Sievers’ home through a special event in 1986. As the father gave up his practice at the age of seventy-five and did not know what to do with their big house, an unexpected request came from the St. Elizabeth Hospital across the street. They wanted to purchase the

In this family atmosphere of Faith, in which the children practiced serving both in love and sacrifice, the desire for the priesthood soon germinated in a number of the boys.

young Focolare Movement with whom Helmut, the third-oldest, was already enthusiastically involved. Just one day after graduation, he joined the lay movement and lives today as a Focolare priest in Switzerland.

Gerhard then just wanted to make sure that his brother had not gone and joined a sect, examined the movement more closely—and he too was touched by the love and spirituality he found! Therefore, he decided to become a Focolare priest one and a half years after his ordination to the priesthood, in June, 1966.

After the fourth-oldest followed in his father’s footsteps and studied medicine, Ludwig, the fifth child, met the Little Brothers of Blessed Charles de Foucauld and became a priest in Japan.

Joseph, the sixth, on the other hand studied Judaism, also became a Focolare priest and works today in Rome in dialogue with the Jewish people. How did the parents react when one son after the other started down the path to the priesthood?

property and open the first hospice in Germany. The family room, where they had spent so much time in prayer, was even used in the beginning as the chapel. *“So far, about 3000 people have died in my parents’ home. Whenever one of us five priests come home, we can celebrate Holy Mass there.”*

It is also very touching that both parents were allowed to remain in the hospice for the rest of their lives, and both of them finished their earthly days there. Fr. Sievers celebrated Holy Mass on his father’s deathbed in 1992, right before he passed away. *“As I put a drop of the Precious Blood in his mouth with a little golden spoon,*

*he looked at me with big eyes. He was fully aware and understood what was happening. A few minutes after Mass he passed away.”*

It was similar fourteen years later with Mother Irma Sievers, on whose bed her priest son Helmut celebrated the last Holy Mass.

The unity of the Christians according to the high priestly prayer of Jesus, “That they may all be one ... Father ... that the world may believe,” was always an innermost intention for the seventy-eight-year-old Focolare Fr. Gerhard Sievers. Therefore, he moved into the ecumenical Ottmaring Meeting Center close to Augsburg eight years ago. He currently lives there with six Focolare priests and one Protestant deacon.

*Jesus, give me the grace  
through the power of the Holy Eucharist  
to offer up myself entirely out of love.*

Prayer after Holy Communion