

Triumph of the Heart

FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

Family of Mary

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“Say a prayer to want to do God’s will and a prayer to know God’s will.”

Pope Francis, January 27, 2015

Forgiveness – The Greatest Gift

Formed in the Old Testament way of thinking, Peter was undoubtedly shocked to hear Jesus’ answer to his question if he has to forgive seven times, i.e. often. *“Not seven times, but seventy-seven times,”* which means—always! In other words, *“If you want to be my disciple, then learn to forgive everyone for everything.”* No other religion gives such a command because

it completely surpasses man’s natural capacity of love. And yet precisely the unlimited readiness to forgive here on earth is the key to happiness and peace. The stories in this issue of *Triumph of the Heart* should encourage you, dear readers, to ask for forgiveness and to grant it to others. *“If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you”* (Matthew 6:14).

“Forgiving” God

As missionaries, we frequently encounter Christians who, in difficult situations, call out in pain, *“How can God let that happen? I cannot forgive Him for that.”* The death of a young mother, for example, might shake her children’s or her husband’s trust in God so much that they are unable to forgive God for allowing such a tragedy. They begin to despise, even hate Him, and they leave the Church. Although they live in peace with their families and even reconcile with their surroundings, they are at war with God. They are unable or unwilling to forgive what He painfully permitted to occur. Only through the consoling assistance of a deeply faithful, prayerful friend or a caring priest is it possible to lead such people, in

view of the crucified man-God, to accept their own suffering from God’s hand. This newly awakened faith through prayer as well as humility help the tried person to trustingly continue his relationship with God, just like Job, suffering in silence.

The hardened heart of the suffering person experiences this newfound relationship of trust in God as reconciliation with Him, and at the same time, he understands that there is not really anything for which he has to forgive God. For only now, when the soul is reconciled with God, can peace, the first fruit of reconciliation, return. The result is that the person is filled with happiness!

Forgiving yourself

*F*orgive yourself? We encounter this difficulty at the latest when we, despite our best endeavors, commit the same mistakes and sins in our weakness over and over again. Even if they are not grave in nature, these mistakes and imperfections can make family life and the workplace very trying and can present many obstacles for us on the way to Christian perfection. That is why we have to resolutely fight our weaknesses.

When, despite all our efforts, we fail, Jesus consoles us with His words to St. Faustina, *“This firm resolution to become a saint is extremely pleasing to Me. I bless your efforts and will give you opportunities to sanctify yourself. Be watchful that you lose no opportunity that My providence offers you for sanctification.*

If you do not succeed in taking advantage of an opportunity, do not lose your peace, but humble yourself profoundly before Me and, with great trust, immerse yourself completely in My mercy. In this way, you gain more than you have lost, because more favor is granted to a humble soul than the soul itself asks for...” (Diary #1361).

We are able to grant forgiveness always anew to the others only when we repeatedly forgive ourselves. When we accept our own misery, we will be able to be *“merciful, just as your Father is merciful”* (Luke 6: 36).

How beneficial it is for us to be good; the mercy we grant to others becomes balsam in our own heart.

Forgiving everyone

*S*ince man is created in God’s image, he is also called to love as God loves. That is what makes him truly happy. One is most similar to God when he imitates God’s merciful love by forgiving and also by asking for forgiveness. We have to ask God always for this forgiving love. By praying for this, the soul opens to the gift of forgiving. Naturally, God wants to give this grace to everyone.

Part of forgiveness is also the determination not to bear a grudge toward the other person and not to repay evil in any shape or form. How much healing can take place!

A weight falls from the soul which, in many cases, is the cause of psychological and physical illness. An irreconcilable person makes himself incapable of accepting God’s forgiveness for his own sins because his heart closes and hardens in pride. If with God’s help of grace, however, he takes the first step and reconciles with his opponent, the hardness of heart melts away. Even the experience of being far from God, which often

haunts people because they distance themselves from others through their irreconcilability, disappears. *Forgiveness* is truly the most precious gift we can *give* to one another.

When two people meet with humility and love, it produces *unity*, one of the noblest fruits of forgiveness. The great Ukrainian Apostle of Unity, Archbishop St. Josaphat Kuntsevych (1580 – 1623), is a radiant example. He forgave his assassins and everyone who was after him for preaching faithfulness to the pope although he was an orthodox monk and bishop. God worked the miracle that everyone who shared in the guilt of this pastor’s martyrdom, without exception, converted before his incorrupt corpse. Had St. Josaphat not forgiven, his prayer for the unity of Christians would not have been heard. The more we forgive, the more our prayer will be heard. Forgiveness can make everything good again. It transforms hate into love, a “hell” into a “paradise”, at first in one’s own heart, but then also in family and society.

Forgiving and forgetting?

*E*ven when someone wants to forgive, it can happen that he remembers time and again the wounds, especially when the consequences are visible or continually felt, like when a doctor makes a mistake.

Our good memory can become a problem for us. In order to imitate Jesus' love in such an instance, one has to react as if nothing serious ever happened, even if his feelings are calling for revenge. He who *wants* to forgive has just forgiven. We have to give our nature time, however, until the pain heals emotionally.

Remembering the inflicted injustice and suffering can nevertheless cause frustration, anger or even aggression, and one might think that he

has not really forgiven. Yet he has! *Wanting* to forgive means forgiving! Once one has forgiven, this frustration or anger is more a pain than a sign of irreconcilability. This pain does not reduce the forgiveness; on the contrary, it offers the possibility of renewing and deepening what has already been granted. Through this, your humility and love grow and mature. Then we will experience the miracles of love, and in our hearts and our families, Easter will take place.

When we let ourselves be forgiven and forgive everybody, the grace of Redemption can work in us, and we will experience the joy of the Resurrection: forgiven guilt becomes the source of joy, unity and peace.

If someone finds it difficult to forgive, they should ask Jesus after receiving Holy Communion, "Lord, forgive in me this person because I am unable."

St. Stanislaus Kostka

On November 13, the Church celebrates the Polish saint Stanislaus Kostka.

This Jesuit's feast was placed on the day of his brother Paul's death.

Paul converted and died as a holy Jesuit himself, because St. Stanislaus loved him with a merciful love and offered up acts of expiation for his conversion.

Therefore, the barely eighteen-year-old Stanislaus is a saint who has a lot to say to us!

Stanislaus Kostka was born on October 28, 1550, the second son of a noble Polish family living in the Rostkovo Castle. His parents wanted their children be raised according to their social class and deeply religious convictions.

Stanislaus loved silence from his earliest years, and he liked to pray for long periods of time. His mother planted a Marian piety in his heart, and this made a life-long impression. He was especially loved by his relatives and servants because of his purity and modesty.

The worst thing for him was when guests spoke boisterously at the table or used vulgar language. He would blush and tears ran down his face. If his father did not put an end to the unfitting conversation, then the boy fell off his chair unconscious. With the Kostkas' hospitality, the lord of the house often had to steer the conversations at the table in another direction.

Paul, who was just one year older, had a completely different character; he loved living life to the full.

Under the guidance of the Jesuits

A mentor at home was sufficient for the parents until the boys were fourteen years old. Then they started looking for a school which would offer a comprehensive formation for Paul and Stanislaus. The only guarantee they could find was the recently founded Society of Jesus. Since there was not yet a Jesuit school in Poland, the Kostkas sent both of their sons to Vienna in 1564, under the watchful eye of their mentor, Bielinski.

The Jesuits had a very positive influence on the boys' development. The priests founded the "Brotherhood of St. Barbara" for the studying youth, with the goal of promoting Eucharistic Adoration in the spirit of expiation, and a Marian Congregation to work against the Protestant criticism of Marian devotion.

Stanislaus joined both groups, and in these

his desire for Eucharistic and Marian piety unfolded. He was in his element: he could study and yet he had enough time to pray. He knelt for hours before the Blessed Sacrament and could occupy his mind with heavenly things.

Through Eucharistic piety, the sensitivity of his conscience grew, and he decisively avoided anything which hindered him from loving God above everything else, without isolating himself from the others. Whatever hurt him, he entrusted to Mary who, after leaving home, became even more of a mother for him. And so, his natural nobility was enhanced by the nobility of his soul.

His fellow students loved Stanislaus because of his gracious character traits; he was always ready to help, modest and reserved. Some of the students liked being around him because of his

piety; when he prayed, the others felt he was completely with God. Some even witnessed how he was surrounded by light during prayer. They liked

to kneel close to him because his deep meditation helped them to be less distracted and to think about God with more love.

Vienna, the place of great suffering

Unfortunately, changes soon came about which caused great suffering and persecution for Stanislaus. Emperor Maximilian, unlike Stanislaus' father Ferdinand, was not well disposed to the new religious order. Therefore, he confiscated the Jesuit's boarding house and the students had to find private places to stay.

Paul, being the older of the two brothers, decided with their mentor Bielinski to rent an apartment in Vienna's most lively quarter, something fitting for aristocrats. It was the property of the Viennese politician Kimberker, who was a fanatical follower of Martin Luther. Stanislaus would have much preferred to live in modest quarters with a Catholic landlord, but he had to go along with his older brother. Although Paul and Stanislaus had always had a good relationship, the new living conditions were the cause of a constantly increasing conflict.

Paul and the other residents started living a rowdy student life. There was one celebration after another, and if it became too boring, they went to the theater together. Bielinski, only there to watch over the boys, was, at the age of thirty, also excited about the worldly lifestyle. Out of

His love for Our Lady strengthened him and helped him to tolerate everything and, above all, to always forgive Paul. Yet Paul's attacks increased until they became unbearable. Wild temper tantrums alternated with accusations and threats. Worst of all, it influenced Paul's friends living in the same house, and everybody unboundedly tortured Stanislaus with words and walked

respect for the Lutheran landlord, neither Paul nor the other classmates living in the house wanted to openly express their religious beliefs.

Stanislaus resolutely rejected this lifestyle. He took advantage of every opportunity and any free time to go to Holy Mass and to adore Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament. He even often woke up in the middle of the night to pray and do works of penance especially for Paul because he knew the way his brother was living was displeasing to God. Although he was only fifteen years old, this youth was more mature in the spiritual life than many adults.

For Paul, nevertheless, Stanislaus was a living reproach who continually held his leisurely life before his eyes and nagged at his conscience. If at the table jokes of poor taste or mock speeches were held which resulted in arguing and swearing, then Stanislaus would stand up and leave. That, in turn, caused his brother to boil. He became ever more often aggressive, lost his self-control and even hit his brother. Stanislaus endured it all with amazing patience, offered up the humiliations and false accusations for the conversion of his brother and did penance for this intention.

all over him. Even their mentor reproached him, *"A Kostka has to understand how to get along with people. Your father sent you to a foreign land to learn this, not to become a beggar or a monk."*

Stanislaus answered him with admirable calm and meekness, *"I have to obey God more than man."*

In the face of death

*A*lthough the young student wanted to accept everything in a spirit of expiation, after a few months his fragile body and delicate psyche could no longer handle the tension. In December 1566, he had a break down and became so sick he nearly died. The doctors gave him no chance of surviving. Stanislaus was aware of his condition and, therefore, begged his brother to ask the landlord to call for a Catholic priest in order to administer the Sacraments. Yet Paul and Bielinski were both terrified of being kicked out of the house should a Catholic priest come.

In his great need, the deathly ill Stanislaus turned trustingly to St. Barbara, the patroness of the student brotherhood to which he belonged. One of the following nights, the saint appeared to him with two angels who gave him Holy Communion. Bielinski, who was keeping watch at the bed of his protégé, was deeply shaken when Stanislaus

reported the apparition to him and with authority told him to kneel down next to him.

Unfortunately, his condition did not improve until Christmas Eve, when a further miracle took place. When Bielinski entered Stanislaus' room on Christmas morning, he found him sitting up in bed. He announced with a clear, strong voice, "*I'm healthy.*" The doctor's diagnosis confirmed, as a matter of fact, that all the symptoms of his illness had disappeared.

Stanislaus told a friend later during his novitiate what had happened. During the night, he suddenly noticed a soft light in his room, and in it the Mother of God appeared with the Child Jesus in her arms. Mary laid the Divine Child in his arms so that he could press Him to his heart. Then she told him to do what he had understood a long time ago; namely, he should join the Jesuits. We know all this from the mouth of the saint.

I want to be a Jesuit

*A*fter he had fully recovered, Stanislaus had no other wish than to become a Jesuit. At the same time, however, he was certain that his father would never allow him to join the order which was so poor. Still, Our Lady's words gave him the courage and strength not to allow anything to hold him back from doing the will of God. But how?

It was a Sunday evening in August 1567. Paul was in a bad mood and once again let out his aggression on his brother. Since Stanislaus, praying like always, did not defend himself, Paul's fury escalated, and he threw him to the ground and started kicking him. When his rage subsided, Stanislaus stood up and said, gasping but calm, "*Your behavior forces me to leave. You can answer to our parents for it later.*"

Paul had never heard such words from his younger brother. Ashamed, and at the same time

furiously, he yelled, "*Then go wherever you want—all the better!*" Stanislaus took these words as his family's acceptance, and fled.

When Stanislaus was nowhere to be found in the residence and Paul became aware of what he had said in his tirade, he was gripped with fear of his father. He took his horse and hurried out to look for his brother. Stanislaus, however, had dressed as a beggar and, through God's protection, remained unrecognized, even when Paul saw him face to face.

The refugee planned to pass straight through Austria to Germany. That is where the well-trained Jesuit Peter Canisius was, and everybody spoke of him as a saint. He could surely help Stanislaus.

On the way from Augsburg to Dillingen, where Fr. Canisius was, Stanislaus met a Jesuit priest early one morning at a church. They went

in together because it seemed like Holy Mass was beginning. They understood right away, however, that this Catholic church had become Protestant. Until this point, Stanislaus had courageously endured all difficulties; now, however, tears came.

*F*r. Peter Canisius recognized something special in this boy and took him under his wing. Cleverly, he sent him with highest recommendations to the novitiate in Rome, far away from his family, where the holy superior general Francis Borgia accepted the Polish nobleman.

Fr. Borgia understood Stanislaus better than anyone because he too, twenty years earlier as the Viceroy of Catalonia, had to keep his decision to join the Jesuits a secret for a few years. Back then, the founder of the order, Ignatius, had personally advised him to do so since *“the world does not have the ears to hear such sensational news.”*

At first, the superior general kept the sixteen-year-old close by so that he could get to know him better. Francis Borgia, a strict ascetic and yet good toward the others, quickly recognized the sincerity and spiritual maturity of the Polish

How he had desired to receive Holy Communion, and now it was kept from him. God helped him through a miracle. Angels appeared and gave him Holy Communion. His companion witnessed this event full of awe.

aristocrat. Stanislaus always sought out the lowest, most difficult tasks because he wanted to imitate Jesus, who as God humbled Himself and became man. Since the young novice spared himself neither with work nor with prayer and penance, the superior had to curb his fervor in order to preserve his health. Stanislaus obeyed. The news that their son had entered the Society of Jesus without their permission upset the family and made his father furious. His only thought was to seek revenge against the Jesuits. He wrote his son a threatening letter in which he accused him of heartlessly abandoning his parents. Stanislaus’ eyes filled with tears as he read the letter. He did not cry because he was hurt but because of his parents’ blindness. The Kostka father, however, decided he would do everything within his power to get his son out of the order and back to his family.

Rome – preparation for Heaven

*A*lthough Stanislaus suffered much from his father’s disposition, he fully forgave him. It was painful for him; but at the same time, he had peace and was able to continue his novitiate. He loved most to meditate about Our Lady, and since the mouth speaks of what the heart is full, he used every opportunity to talk about her.

Fr. Emanuel Sà, one of the most famous theologians of the time, told of how on August 5, 1568, he invited the novice Stanislaus to accompany him to St. Mary Major where he wanted to pray before the miraculous image. On the way there, he asked him if he really loves Our Lady. Moved, Stanislaus answered, *“Father, Father! What can I say? She is my mother!”* These few words contained such a strong, true, supernatural love that even the well-trained theologian was enflamed.

Stanislaus also entrusted to him his desire to celebrate that same year the Feast of the Assumption—ten days away—in heaven. Fr. Sà thought it was just a pious desire; Stanislaus was healthy and only eighteen years old. Yet God fulfilled the wish of the ardent soul. Stanislaus contracted a light fever a few days before August 15, and early in the morning of the solemnity, Our Lady came with holy virgins to take the young novice to heaven.

The Jesuits were very sad. Some of the novices were convinced of their companion’s holiness and immediately started praying to him for intercession. They did not have to wait long before they could ascertain, *“He answered me!”* *“He helped me.”*

Miraculous conversion

Shortly after the saint's death, his brother Paul arrived in Rome. His father had sent him to the Eternal City with the task of bringing Stanislaus back to Poland at any cost. Now he stood dumbfounded at the tomb of the young, consummated Jesuit.

Deeply shaken, he recalled all the brutal things he had done to his brother in Vienna, and with great contrition, he started to cry bitterly. That was the day of his conversion! The prayer, the forgiveness and the pain carried and offered in love by his younger brother finally softened Paul's heart.

Stirred, he returned home and gave a report. The news struck his parents as it had Paul; they were unexpectedly touched by grace. The father's opposition and anger melted, his mother's sadness vanished and every reproach changed into tender love and inner joy. They recognized that the ap-

parent disgrace which Stanislaus had brought upon the family would, in reality, become their fame. Their son, who ran away from Vienna as a beggar, would be venerated as a saint still in the lifetime of his parents.

Even when tears stifled his voice, Paul testified under oath during the beatification process in 1603 to the virtuousness of his brother but also to the mean abuses which Stanislaus had to endure from him. He never forgot how much Stanislaus had forgiven him and offered for him. Several people witnessed how Paul, when he thought he was alone, sobbingly prayed, "*My holy brother, forgive me, forgive the one who abused and persecuted you!*" He radically changed his lifestyle and, following the death of his parents, asked, as his brother had done, to be admitted to the Jesuits.

Translated from: Augustin Arndt SJ,
Der heilige Stanislaus Kostka, Pustetverlag

The Saint of Nagasaki

Dr. Takashi Nagai (1908-1951), a Japanese doctor and convert, lost almost everything when the atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. Yet, he was not bitter in the face of the unfathomable devastation or his fatal illness. Rather, he led thousands of broken Japanese from resentment to reconciliation and peace of heart.

*A*t the age of twenty, Takashi Nagai, the eldest son of a respected country doctor, left his little village to study medicine in Nagasaki. In a world of science, the ambitious, talented young man left the Shinto faith of his ancestors and completely succumbed to atheistic materialism. The final penetrating gaze of his dying mother finally shook the worldly view of the twenty-two-year-old atheist. *“I, who had denied the existence of the soul, looked into those eyes and instinctively felt that the soul of my mother really did exist.”* That was the beginning of his restless search for God.

At the end of 1931, the medical student finally settled with a deeply faithful Christian family in Urakami, a suburb of Nagasaki, to learn about the faith firsthand. Takashi had no sooner finished his final exam than, as a result of a severe inner ear infection, he became deaf in his right ear. That was the end of any career as a doctor of internal medicine, because he could no longer use a stethoscope.

It would be providential for his life since it caused the young doctor to turn to a completely

*I*n 1937, Dr. Nagai was once again on the front in China, this time as the division’s head doctor and as a Christian who for three years indiscriminately cared for Japanese and Chinese alike, soldiers and civilians. Back in war-torn Japan, the prized professor spent up to eight hours a day at the x-ray machine in the fight against tuberculosis. As a result, he himself was finally diagnosed

new discipline in radiological research, the study of atoms and x-ray diagnostics, where he no longer needed a stethoscope. Takashi became an assistant in the radiology department at the University Hospital of Nagasaki.

On Christmas Eve 1932, the twenty-four-year-old met the only child of his host family. Midori was the same age as him, and she worked as a teacher in a different part of town. Takashi was very impressed by her grace and modesty. The very next day he saved her life by intervening to prevent a ruptured appendix. For her part, Midori started praying right away for the doctor’s conversion. When he was drafted a short time later for the Sino-Japanese War against China, she sent Takashi a Catechism, which he eagerly read.

Following a heavy year at war, the twenty-six-year-old doctor returned from Manchuria and, well prepared, was baptized in June 1934. He chose Paul Miki, the Martyr of Nagasaki, as his patron saint. He married Midori a few weeks later. The young wife consciously and readily accepted the high health risk to her husband who could not sufficiently protect himself from the x-rays.

with an incurable Leukemia in June 1945. *“Life expectancy: two to three years. Death: slow and painful.”* Takashi reproved himself that he had plunged into such risky work for thirteen years and now would soon leave his thirty-seven-year-old wife a widow with their two children. Midori, on the other hand, listened to the dreadful news with composure, knelt down before their altar at

home and remained there in prayer until the first storm of her feelings had passed. Then she said, *“Before our wedding, we spoke about living for the glory of God. You put everything you had into a very, very important job. It was done*

for His glory.” Nagai was overcome that Midori stood by him without the slightest criticism. He later wrote, *“Midori’s one hundred percent acceptance of the tragedy without any accusation made me free.”*

You have to forgive

On December 7, 1941, Japan had declared war on America and air attacks had long been a part of the daily life in Nagasaki. On August 6, 1945, the Nagai Family heard about a bomb with a destructive power never seen before that had leveled Hiroshima. Concerned, they brought their children, ten-year-old Makoto and three-year-old Kayano, to a mountain village three and a half miles (six kilometers) away for safety. It was close to the Feast of the Assumption, and many believers were preparing at the cathedral through the Sacrament of Confession. Midori also wanted to go to Confession on the morning of August 9, while Takashi planned to go in the afternoon. When the sick doctor left home, he did not suspect that he would never see his beloved wife again.

Dr. Nagai was sitting in his office when the atomic bomb fell on Nagasaki at 11:02 a.m. A flash abruptly flooded the room in blazing light, the windows shattered and a huge shock wave whirled Takashi through the air and buried him in rubble. Blood squirted from his right temple

because a glass splinter had severed an artery. Takashi later wrote about this moment, *“I was aware of my sins, especially the three that I wanted to confess in the afternoon, and I asked the Lord, my judge, for forgiveness.”*

Although the concrete construction of the hospital, which was only 750 yards (700 m) from the explosion, initially withheld the shock wave, fire and smoke soon threatened the few survivors. Dr. Nagai gathered a small group of doctors, nurses and medical students to help bring the surviving patients up a nearby hill to safety and in order to care for them there. They were scared stiff when they realized that the sea of houses from the densely inhabited residential area of Nagasaki had disappeared and given way to a desert of flames. Horror, wherever one looked! To the point of unconsciousness, the injured and ill professor selflessly cared for the wounded for two days before help arrived. Only now could he make his way home, although he knew well that his beloved Midori was no longer alive.

Takashi found the slightly charred bones of his wife where the kitchen used to be. On his knees, he sobbingly gathered her remains from the ashes into a bucket. In doing so, he discovered between the bones of her right hand the cross and melted beads of her Rosary. Shattered in pain, he suddenly felt, nevertheless, consoled and prayed, *“Dearest God, thank you for allowing Midori to die in prayer. Mother of Sorrows, thank you that you were with her in her hour of death. Oh, gracious Jesus, you once carried the heavy Cross up Calvary. Now you have shed a peaceful light on the mystery of suffering and death, on Midori’s and on my own.”*

As he dragged himself with the bucket to the cemetery, he thanked Midori for all her prayers and asked her forgiveness for having taken for granted her countless acts of love. *“Please forgive me!”* Then it was for him as if Midori would answer, *“You have to forgive! Forgive!”* Takashi understood! He forgave in deep mourning, yet without resentment, all those who had caused this mass destruction.

The next morning, Takashi woke up with a great desire to pray the Rosary. He had lost everything except his two children. With good reason, he had learned during the war to find inner peace in the midst of all danger and horror through the

continual prayer of the Rosary. *“When I stood up after praying,”* Nagai later testified, *“I was refreshed in spirit and ready to do whatever God had planned for me before I would be reunited with Midori.”* Slowly, the peaceful certainty formed in him that everything was okay! He did not want to accuse anybody. Midori had merely completed her path earlier than him.

The sacrificial lamb without blemish

On November 23, 1945, the Bishop of Nagasaki decided to celebrate a Mass for the Deceased next to the devastated Cathedral. He asked Dr. Nagai as a respected member of the laity to give a speech. Takashi wrought a long time in prayer for light about what God wanted to say to the surviving Catholics in Nagasaki. Many of them saw the bomb as a “punishment from heaven,” or even said, *“there is no God!”*

Then Dr. Nagai heard about nuns and a girls’ school who died singing *“Mary, Mother! I give myself to you, body, soul and spirit...”* They consciously made a sacrifice of their victimized bodies and thereby gave a meaning to their violent death. That was exactly the message they needed to hear: the value of offering up suffering, which should remove all grudges and doubts from their hearts!

So, Dr. Nagai presented the two thousand Catholics participating on that November day an amazing picture made up of facts which probably few people knew. In the very hour in which the atomic bomb exploded over Nagasaki and called eight thousand Christians to eternity, the highest war council in Tokyo was discussing whether or not Japan should surrender. At midnight, the cathedral, which was destroyed but had escaped fire until that point, suddenly burst into flames. And in the same moment, the Emperor decided to end the World War. He declared it officially on August 15, Our Lady’s feast day to which the cathedral was consecrated.

“Was this chain of events by chance?”

Great responsibilities awaited him—his children and Nagasaki’s reconstruction. *“I am going there and will live there again,”* he affirmed in order to give his devastated fellow citizens new courage and hope. Dr. Nagai set up a miserable little hut in the middle of the atomic desert from Nagasaki close to where his former house had been, and lived in it with his children.

Dr. Nagai asked urgently. He further explained that the actual target of the atomic bomb was not Nagasaki but the city of Kokura. A thick cover of clouds prevented dropping the bomb, so the aircraft proceeded to its alternate target—Nagasaki.

Here too, however, clouds and technical problems caused the bomb to fall not as planned on the arms factory but in the residential area of Nagasaki not far from the cathedral! *“I believe that it was not the Americans flying the airplane that chose our suburb but God’s providence. Is there not a deep connection between Nagasaki’s annihilation and the end of the war? Was Nagasaki possibly the chosen lamb which as a burning holocaust was killed on the altar in order to expiate for the sins of all the nations during the Second World War?”*

At this point, some of the mourners stood up angrily. What? Providence? Their charred relatives a chosen burnt offering for peace? People were responsible for their deaths! In an uproar they shouted, *“Don’t you dare try to justify the atrocity that was committed against our families with pious words, Dr. Nagai!”*

Unwavering, he continued, *“The Christians from Nagasaki who remained faithful during the three hundred years of persecution and prayed untiringly for peace, they were now the spotless sacrificial lamb that had to be offered. And in this moment God inspired the Emperor to end the war. We have to go the way of reparation! Let us be thankful that Nagasaki was*

the chosen one and that the world was given peace through this sacrifice. When we accept the sacrifice, grace and peace will inundate Nagasaki.” A deep silence followed. The speech had a tremendous effect, not only on the Catholics,

but also on the non-Christians in Nagasaki and throughout Japan. Takashi never took back any of these words for as long as he lived. *“I was admonished for using the word ‘holocaust’. Yet it gave us peace in our hearts.”*

For three hundred years, Nagasaki had been the center of the clandestine Catholics in Japan. When the atomic bomb exploded over Nagasaki of all places, 8,000 of the 12,000 Catholics living there died. Altogether 72,000 people died from the bomb, 44,000 in a matter of minutes. The explosion of the atomic bomb produced radiative heat of 16000°F (9000°C) and a shock wave with a velocity of roughly 3600 mph (5800 km/h) which flattened the suburbs.

The bomber pilot, Charles W. Sweeney, justified dropping the plutonium bomb his whole life long with the argument that it put an end to the war. He never showed any remorse in public nor did he ever ask the relatives of the victims for forgiveness. Should Dr. Nagai, whom the Church already venerates as a “Servant of God”, be canonized, he would be the first non-martyr saint of Japan.

One month after the atomic bomb was dropped, Dr. Nagai was showing clear signs of radiation poisoning: high fever, exhaustion, etc. Above all, the wound on his temple broke open again and started to bleed hopelessly. Nagai soon recognized that he was dying, and so he received the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. His mother-in-law made the sign of the cross on his lips with water from the Lourdes grotto at the Hongochi Monastery. The monastery had been built fifteen years earlier by Fr. Maximilian Kolbe, and Midori had made many pilgrimages there to pray for her husband. In the moment she made the sign of the cross Takashi heard a voice which said to him, “Ask Fr. Maximilian Kolbe for his intercession.” He did so, and instantly his temple stopped bleeding. For the rest of his life, Takashi was convinced that he had Fr. Kolbe to thank for the miraculous extension of his life. Back in 1935, Dr. Nagai had met the holy Franciscan several times when he x-rayed his lungs and urgently advised him, “You have to stop with all the work!”

Our way to peace

*D*r. Nagai’s main concern in the last five years of his life were his children Kayano and Makoto. In July 1946, he collapsed because of the advanced Leukemia and radiation poisoning, and he had to lay continually on his back because of his abnormally enlarged spleen.

To make a living, he started untiringly to write: reports of his experience with the atomic bomb and the treatment of its victims. He did it also as a passionate appeal for peace and charity and as a contribution to the spiritual rebirth of his homeland.

He wrote twenty books before his death, and they were read throughout Japan. They revealed the Christian sense of suffering to many Buddhists. Additionally, in his 40 ft² (4 m²) hut where he slept with his children, prayed and worked, Dr. Nagai received always more people seeking advice or consolation, beginning with former

students who were still calling for revenge, up to Emperor Hirohito, *“to pour a little joy in everybody’s heart and to tell them about our Catholic religion.”*

Everybody was impressed by the selfless cheer of this great man of prayer who radiated so much hope and peace of heart and whom they declared a national hero, even though he was a Christian. He wrote his son and daughter, *“God asked the three of us to accept a bitter cup. This is our way to peace. Through it we can participate in his great plan, the one plan which Jesus had in sight.”*

In April 1951, shortly before his death, Takashi spoke about the importance of peace movements. Since the demonstrations in Hiroshima after the war were very aggressive and loaded with rage, Dr. Nagai warned his fellow citizens of Nagasaki: *“Before you take to the streets to*

demonstrate, you should fulfill two conditions: carry peace in your own heart and also see to it that your family is at peace. Without peace in your hearts, you are hypocrites when you cry for peace!”

There is no peace of heart, though, without reconciliation. Therefore, he reminded his home-

town, “Do not blame the Americans, because we all dropped the bomb. The problem is in the hearts of man!” As a matter of fact, people listened to him, and to this day, both cities have very different views. The Japanese themselves speak of Hiroshima as “Hot-Tempered”, but Nagasaki as “Peaceful”.

Translated from: Paul Glynn, S.M.,
Ein Lied für Nagasaki, Illertissen, 2016

At the age of only forty-three, Dr. Nagai died on May 1, 1951, with the words, “Jesus, Mary, Joseph! Into your hands I commend my spirit.” He was holding in his hands the Rosary which Pope Pius XII had sent to him two years earlier.

He Broke Down in Tears

We recently had the opportunity to speak on the telephone with Fr. Luis Alfredo León Armijos, a forty-seven-year-old priest from Ecuador. He is the treasurer for the Diocese of Loja and concurrently the pastor of the parish “Our Lady of Peace”. As in other interviews, Fr. León Armijos told us also very openly that the story of his life started with a rape which cried out for forgiveness for a long time. “I could have ended up in a trash can, but I was given life.”

*M*aria Eufemia Armijos Romero, my mother, had to work hard doing domestic work when she was just thirteen years old in order to support her father and seven siblings back home. One day, her lurking employer brutally raped her, leaving her pregnant. The girl’s family was adamantly opposed to the baby due to the disgrace and violent nature of the crime. Her relatives even punched her stomach, hoping to cause a miscarriage. Pressured and abandoned by her own family, Maria Eufemia prayed; and in her heart, it was as if Jesus said, “*Defend the child you are carrying.*” Practically a child herself, the thirteen-year-old protected her unborn infant and fled to Cuenca. Somehow, she fought her way through until, with complications, her

son Luis Alfredo was born on October 15, 1971. I was that baby boy! Penniless, she returned to her family in Loja where she continued to live as a single mother. She never did marry, but her rapist, my father, presented with the facts by my mother, recognized me as his and paid child support. Naturally, I did not know any of this, I just noticed how my father came to visit every now and again. I had a distant, respectful relationship to him, but my parents themselves never reconciled. No, it did not work out at all between the two of them. At the age of sixteen, I had my first lively encounter with Jesus and his wonderful love at a meeting of the Charismatic Renewal. Then, at eighteen, I followed God’s call to the priesthood and, despite my father’s resistance, joined the

seminary in Loja. My studies and my spiritual formation were so successful that I received a special dispensation from my bishop in order to be ordained a priest at the age of twenty-three.

Two years later, my mother, who had in the meantime broken off all contact with my father, entrusted to me for the first time the violent circumstances under which I had been conceived. It was a turning point for the two of us, the beginning of the path to forgiveness.

As her priest-son, I was able to help her overcome her hate for my father and to accept God's invitation to slowly accept her dramatic past. In the end, however, it was God's merciful love which opened her heart. She started attending prayer meetings and catechism, and in personal prayer she understood always deeper Jesus' divine way of forgiveness—how the Crucified Lord consciously forgave his torturers who caused Him such terrible suffering and even died for them. Moved by this realization, my mother found the strength to forgive her rapist and finally show her readiness to reconcile. However, experiencing God's personal love for her in Holy Communion helped her the most to want to forgive.

After six years of being a priest, suddenly my father called me one day on the phone. He was scheduled for a risky surgery, and he was afraid. "*I*

want to go to confession to you," he requested.

Moved, I was able to grant absolution to my own father for all his sins; and, repentant, he returned to the faith after thirty years without the Sacraments. When I said to him, "*Dad, now in this moment you deserve heaven, just like the Church lets me see heaven in this moment,*" he broke down in tears. He asked me, and then my mother as well, for forgiveness. Today, he lives in inner peace, which is the fruit of sincere reconciliation.

I, personally, had to go my own way of reconciliation, because I had condemned my father so much for everything. God, however, made me His priest, not to judge, but to forgive and to be an instrument of his mercy. I understood this in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament and while meditating on Holy Scripture.

I can only thank the Lord for everything that has happened and how it is now. If someone asked me if I would change my story if I could, then I would say no, because through my life I have deeply understood that the mercy of God is greater than any sin. I am a fruit of God's mercy because He intervened to save my life. My past helps me in my pastoral work, to love mercifully and to have compassion and understanding for others' suffering.

Telephone interview with Fr. León Armijos
on January 24, 2018.

After Forty Years!

Monica Milán, a fifty-three-year-old from the Parish of Cosmas and Damian in the town of “25 de Agosto” in Uruguay, is the mother of our seminarian Matías. Monica never could have imagined what God’s forgiveness would work in her.

“After my First Holy Communion, I did not go to church again until the Baptism, First Communion and Confirmation of my two children because God and prayer were never a topic in my family.

“When Matías converted twelve years ago and felt the desire to become a priest, he often invited, ‘Come to Holy Mass with me!’ but I turned him down. With my life full of sins, I felt unworthy to receive Jesus. Besides, daily struggles and difficult twists of fate were mounting.

“‘Forgive Yes! Forget Never!’ was my motto. Even when I pulled myself together again and was civil to those who had caused me to suffer, I was never really able to forget.

“At the beginning of 2016, my son sent me a gift and wrote in a letter, ‘Mamá, I send you this blessed Rosary. If you pray just one decade a day you will be greatly consoled—and pray for me too!’

“‘What is a decade?’ I asked him during our next Skype conversation. After he had explained it to me, I faithfully started to pray one decade every day. Several weeks later, Matías proudly heard from me, ‘Now I pray the whole

“Since that hour, a transformation has taken place in me which progresses day by day, since I am really just at the beginning of my personal relationship with Jesus and Mary. I am so indescribably relieved and feel so free because God has forgiven everything and taken my sins like a heavy backpack off my shoulders.

“Being able to toss out the whole burden of my sins, I can also forgive and ask for forgive-

Rosary every day; it gives me so much peace! I even invite the neighbors to pray with me.’

“Then in February 2016, the renovated church in our village, Sts. Cosmas and Damian, was re-dedicated. I felt pushed to go to Confession for a long time, but until now I simply hadn’t found the courage with my mountain of sins. When I saw our gloriously decorated church though, I was so touched, ‘This house is so gorgeously prepared for God; on the inside of me, however, it is so miserable.’

“With a start, I turned to Fr. Paul who was with us on this big day, ‘I want to Confess!’ However, he kindly advised me, ‘Monica, it is better if you prepare yourself well first.’

“The priest was completely right; the preparation for my General Confession was direly necessary! Praying the Rosary, actually Our Lady herself, was the greatest help for me.

“Then the day arrived, the decisive hour, in which Fr. Luis heard my Confession. I was excited, prepared myself and even put on my best dress. Afterwards, completely purified on the inside, I joyfully received Holy Communion for the first time in forty years!

ness much more readily in daily life. Above all, I am now able to place unsolvable problems and seemingly helpless situations in God and trust Him without continually asking why!

“I have a strong yearning to go to Holy Mass as often as possible, to receive Holy Communion and to make my Confession on the first Friday of the month. I often used to speak negatively about others; now, I quickly change the subject when I

hear people speaking about others in this way. At least in my house, no more bad words are spoken. Of course, I secretly wish that my daughter and the rest of my family would soon share my spiritual life. But I do not push them; rather, I silently try to give a good Christian example.

“If something really bothers me and it is again tough to swallow, Matías reminds me, ‘*Mamá, you know where the fount of your consolation is! Forgive! And when it still hurts,*

consciously offer it for me and the priests. If God could give the two of us the grace of forgiveness and conversion, will He not, in His time and in His own way, show the rest of the family the way to reconciliation? Nothing is impossible for Him!’

“I never dreamed that I would one day speak so deeply with my son. God has really deepened our unity, and we help one another on our spiritual path.”

On Divine Mercy Sunday, which has really become Monica’s special feast, it was a distinct joy for her to bring a violet stole symbolizing Confession as an offertory gift.

The Power of a Hug

Ciril Čuš, the oldest of five children, grew up in a modest Slovenian family. At the age of seven, a decisive event changed his life. His father fell off some scaffolding at work and lie in a coma; for a month he hovered between life and death. Wife and children prayed with all their strength for his healing. God did, in fact, answer their prayers, but their joy over his recovery quickly clouded, because, no sooner was he healthy, he started drinking. With the alcohol, restlessness and fighting also entered into the family, and the father took out his aggression particularly on his oldest son. Ciril recalls that he “*received more blows than spoonfuls of food.*” Fourteen times the father injured his son by hitting him over the

head with blunt objects. Worse than the countless beatings for little Ciril was hearing over and over again, “*Nothing will ever become of you!*”

The boy became timid and always more withdrawn, could not sleep anymore and was incapable of learning. He cried a lot. In his desperation, sadness and hate, he even considered taking his life, something which his father seemed to encourage. The only thing that gave him the power to keep living was the loving hugs of his mother. Today, Ciril is a sought-after retreat leader, successful youth minister and pastor. Yet to recognize the call to the priesthood and be able to answer it, he first had to forgive his father. That was not easy—he fought for years as he himself tells:

“*W*hen I finished school, I had no idea what would happen next. Dad drank more and more and, as a result, became more violent. To my relief, I found a job thirty miles from home and hoped that the money I earned and my independence would make me happy. I fooled myself though. Nothing could fill the emptiness in me and drive away my sadness. One day, I bought a Bible and started to read. I experienced that

the words had a power in them which I had not known before. That was my first encounter with God’s grace.

“Then I accepted an invitation to Medjugorje. After we had prayed the fourth Rosary in the pilgrim bus though, I wanted to get out and go home; it was just too much for me. I could not even pray the Our Father, and I was bombarded with a nearly uninterrupted program of prayer. Yet there

was no turning back. When I climbed up Cross Mountain with the group and reached the top, I was touched by Our Lady's peace. It was such a strong grace, that God was able to open my heart from this moment forward.

"Back home, a friend invited me to a charismatic prayer meeting. I accepted the invitation in the hope of experiencing the same peace as in Medjugorje, but the charismatic way of praying was very foreign to me. I impatiently waited for it to end, because I felt somehow that I was in the

wrong place.

"When at the end of Holy Mass, the priest invited the faithful to testify to God's work in their lives, an approximately fifty-year-old woman stepped forward. *'My husband beat me, broke my arm or leg three times, cheated on me with other women, but I have completely forgiven him.'* That touched my heart. Dejected, I asked the priest, 'How can I forgive my father?' He answered me with a single word: 'Pray'. To help me out of my ignorance, he gave me a prayer book."

The first step

"After that evening, I decided to pray an *Our Father* every day for my father. When I heard that he was seeking treatment for his addiction to alcohol, I had great hope that I would be able to reconcile with him. Unfortunately, as soon as he returned from treatment, he immediately started drinking again; and, without reason, he blamed me for everything. In the meantime, I had befriended the charismatic prayer group which was very important to me because they encouraged me not to give up on praying for my father. After about a year, it became clear to me that one *Our Father* a day was not enough to give me the strength to forgive him. Therefore, I decided to pray a Rosary every day in this intention. Regrettably, there was still no positive change in my father, rather it was

more the contrary. I often felt the temptation, *'Prayer is useless. Everything is just getting worse!'* A second attempt to break from alcoholism also failed. I understood in my heart, though, that I should bring my father forgiveness anyway. Yet I always saw the past before me, everything he had done and the horrible things he had said to me. It drained my courage and reawakened the fear of my father. My only way out was prayer.

"After one month, the moment arrived that I had the courage to go to my father. I looked him in the eyes, stretched out my hand and said, *'Dad, I want to tell you that I have forgiven you for everything. I am sorry that I didn't love and respect you because I didn't listen to you and do what you asked.'*"

Dad, I love you!

"That was only the beginning of the path of reconciliation, however, because my father did not react. It was clear to me that, in this case, only God can help; and, therefore, I started praying *two Rosaries* a day for my father. Although I liked going to the dance club and the movies, I had to cut back on them somewhat so that I would have enough time for prayer.

"Still, father drank even more, and fighting

and strife steadily increased. My father often threatened me with a knife or an ax in his hand; in such situations, I usually escaped out the window. At the same time, nevertheless, grace worked in my heart.

"After about two years, I felt I should tell my father that I love him, but that seemed impossible to me because I thought that it would be a lie. I prayed so deeply in this time for Jesus to heal

every lack of love in my heart toward my father.

“I cried a lot; sometimes I even screamed out loud. I was ready for anything; just one thing seemed too much—to tell my father I love him. But the Lord pushed me precisely to this, and after three weeks of imploring prayer, my heart was

ready. I gave my father my hand, looked him in the eyes and said, *‘I’m sorry that I wasn’t good to you. You are my only father, and I want to tell you that I love you.’* What a shocking reaction! Papa grabbed a knife, ran after me and yelled, *‘Now I’m gonna butcher you like a pig!’*”

A miracle of grace

“*F*rom this day forward, the whole situation in the family became worse. A third treatment for alcoholism failed as well. Trusting in Our Lady’s words in Medjugorje, that she will bring peace to the families through the Rosary, I decided from now on to pray *three Rosaries* every day for this intention.

“One day, my father came after me with the chainsaw. I was able to save myself only by locking myself in my room. In my need, I stood before the Cross and, to my own surprise, prayed something unconceivable: *‘Thank you, Jesus, that I have a father who curses me and tells me that I am worthless. Thank you, Jesus, for everything which is so heavy.’*

“From this day forward, my father’s words did not hurt me anymore. Inexplicably, he came up with a new torture: he told people in the surrounding towns that I am homosexual, addicted to drugs, a thief and more. When I went to the grocery store, people circumvented me and the lady at the cash register avoided eye contact with me when I paid. In the church, the believers moved when I sat down so that there were always two empty pews around me.

“I survived this hard time thanks alone to the daily Rosary, Holy Mass, Confession, the prayer group and reading the Bible. After nine months of terrible torture in my soul, I recognized in prayer that I should show my father my love by embracing him. That, however, was something I would never have the strength to do on my own.

“Following his fourth therapy for alcoholism, the doctors diagnosed him with liver cirrhosis. His blood and liver values were so poor that they gave him only one month to live. I panicked because I

did not want my father under any condition to die without being reconciled with me. I was twenty-seven years old at the time.

“One morning around seven o’clock, after I had already prayed all three Rosaries and felt at peace, I wanted to take a walk in the nearby forest. My father approached me completely unexpected. In this moment, I wasn’t afraid of him anymore. I walked up to him and said, *‘Dad, I forgive you. I am sorry that I hurt you ... You are my only father. I love you!’* Then I hugged him. And for the first time in twenty-two years my father also hugged me. We both started to cry. With this hug, I experienced that God is stronger than hate, than every suffering, every torture, every abandonment, every pain and every rejection.

“Now, Dad finally had the strength to quit drinking, and peace returned to our family. He wanted to make everything good again. The miraculous thing was, the liver cirrhosis disappeared. When my brothers and sisters and I saw Mom and Dad embrace, we all cried—it was a feast of reconciliation. Since the day on which I completely forgave my father, I have been able to sleep again!”

“Now my heart was free for love. I met a woman with whom I wanted to start a Christian family, to be a good father for my children and give them the love that I had missed so much. Yet, God knocked on the door of my heart and offered to let me become a father for many people in a spiritual way.

“It was a serious struggle anew to give Him my Yes, especially since I felt completely incapable of studying philosophy and theology. St. Paul, however, encouraged me with his words, *‘I*

have the strength for everything through him who empowers me (Philippians 4: 13). With the Lord's help, I completed my studies; and, today, I am a very happy priest.

“People often come to me and ask, *‘How can I forgive with my heart?’* Then I give them the answer as God taught it to me. First, you have to *pray* for the person who hurt you because we

need God's grace and strength in order to forgive. Then, *tell* that person that *you forgive him*. Tell him that *you love him* and *give him a hug*.

“When you feel the peace and joy in your heart, you will also be able to look that person in the eyes again; and, you will be capable of fully accepting God's forgiveness, which he offers to us uninterruptedly because He loves us.”

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HisqhsG7xb0>

Fr. Ciril Čuš has been working for nine years in Žetale, Slovenia, where he is the pastor of two parishes. His work is especially blessed among the youth, whom he leads to true Christian joy through a sacramental life and through the consecration to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

The Most Valuable Service

What a great gift we can give to those close to us who are seriously ill when we overcome our natural inhibition and speak to them about the impending death and the joy of heaven. What is very important, however, is that we should not let anything deter us from calling a priest who can prepare them for their homecoming through the Sacraments. There is no more valuable or important service which one can show to the terminally ill, because only a soul who has forgiven everybody everything can receive the perfect forgiveness of God and so enter in to heavenly joy.

A Spanish Jesuit Fr. Jorge Loring remembers such an instance. A good friend drew to his attention an elderly man who was in poor health, and so the priest went to visit him. He tells what happened next. “After I had spent a little time with him and his relatives, I said to the others, *‘Please allow me some time alone, because we want to talk a little.’*

“When we were alone, the ill man entrusted to me, *‘I was so happy that you came... I wanted to call for you, but I just couldn't do it because I was afraid of scaring my family.’* We talked for quite some time, he made his confession and I gave him absolution in God's name. Afterwards, he was happy and at peace.

“As I was leaving, his relatives took me aside and thanked me sincerely for coming, *‘We wanted to call you, but we were afraid of scaring him.’*

“Everybody wanted to call the priest, but an unwarranted fear kept them from doing so; as a result, the ill man nearly died without being reconciled with God. The real shock for him would have been if he had passed away without going to Confession.”

May a false consideration never stop us from seeking spiritual assistance for a soul—calling a priest—which can help a soul more than the best medicine.

Translated from: Thomas M. Gögele LC, Valentin Gögele LC (Hg.), *Das ganz normale Wunder*. Köln-Deutz 2013

