

THE brief TESTIMONY OF A POOR LITTLE FRIAR



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Who was I before (briefly)?

I can tell you straight off that I was a difficult character. I studied only for a time in a professional institute; my moral formation was careless, and my religious formation was practically nonexistent. I thought that friars were people who practiced Karate or the executioners who chopped off heads to punish bullies. I was somewhat rebellious towards my parents; as if that weren't enough, between the ages of 18 and 25 I smoked "happy cigarettes;" I had two earrings in my left ear; I was a "hothead;" I dated many girls, including one I was with for 6 years and on the point of marrying; I raced at extreme speeds on powerful motorbikes, flying through the streets on one wheel at 120 mph on the main roads and zipping along at almost 190 mph on the main highway from Catania to Palermo; and so on and so forth. In short, I was a "real public menace." But then I put my head on straight (so to speak). I took up various jobs: among others, I was the proprietor of a big pub that had 1500 associates and was close to becoming a nightclub; before that (also with an associate) I was also the proprietor of a big bodybuilding gym; later, at Milan, I was the boss of kind of construction company that had about 10 workers and was building houses etc. But then...

It all started like this...

ONE DARK AND UGLY DAY IN THE WINTER OF 1995 (four years before our community was born), while – as an atheist – I was in Sicily (in the area I was born in, and quite unknowingly – so little did I know of these things! – under the little statue of Our Lady of Tears which is under the *Sagrato della Matrice*), I was wrongfully plotting with one of my friends of the world as to how we could take out several people (and in a bad way) who had aggressively forced us into a corner...for it had come to my ears that, if I wanted to advance my business, I would have to bribe them. There was a violent storm in my thoughts: a storm so forceful that, knowing myself, I was afraid I might really do some damage to some powerful men. But thankfully, together with that storm there also came into my thoughts the image of a mighty flash of lightning...that is to say, there came to mind that famous scene from the movie about Moses which I'd seen when I was young, where the shining lightning bolt of God precisely inscribes the Tablets of the Law with the Fifth Commandment – which says, "*Thou shalt not kill!*" (Ex. 20:13).

As soon as this invading and Spirit-breathed thought came to my mind, I couldn't help saying to my friend, "But imagine, if we do something like this...if God exists, where will we end up?" – "haha," was his sarcastic response: a scornful laugh, which rubbed me the wrong way! I replied, "Ok, tell me, you who are an expert in the world: is it really possible that all the people who go to church are fools? Think about it! Sure, country people and shepherds go to church, but so do engineers, lawyers, builders, bigshot politicians..." And he responded: "They're all a bunch of morons! They're wrong!" And I said, "But excuse me, where is it written? Who guarantees that you're right? I don't have this sense of certainty that they're all wrong! And what if *we* end up being the ones who are wrong? What if it's all true?" – And he responded, with a marked Sicilian swagger in his voice, "*My word's enough for you.*" And I said, "If it's enough for you, fine. But for me, it's not enough." And between one squabble and another, we went to bed around two in the morning!

The turning point of my life

The next morning, I drove my white Fiat 1 past the plaza from the evening before¹. Upon seeing it and remembering our discussion, there sprang up in me – with a lump in my throat and tears in my eyes – a kind of anger against heaven, which finally made my first really heartfelt prayer come bursting out: a prayer which certainly arrived immediately before God, given the events which then followed! The prayer, more or less, was this: *Lord, I don't know if you really exist, since I've never seen you! But if you really exist, now is the time to show yourself. I'm not asking for money, miracles or who knows what. I'm only asking for the grace to give me the mathematical certainty that You really exist, the way one and one make two, and I promise you that at the very least I will change my life for the better; otherwise all are fools including myself, and one strikes back making 'intelligent' moves.*"

It's true that they were rough, these words (and others which I haven't written) which I raised to God with my whole heart, but I am certain that they were no less upright and sincere: words which (as I already said) immediately penetrated the clouds of heaven, and obtained me the foundation of everything – that is to say, the great grace of an absolutely certain faith! As indeed it is written: *"The Lord concedes grace and glory and does not refuse the good to those who walk with uprightness!"* (Ps. 83:12). And so it happened! In short, something so tremendously powerful happened in me that it overturned my whole life. I understood that God truly exists! – But how?

God really exists, now I've understood!

So: one fine afternoon while I was in a city in the province of Milan, on a bed in the room of a poor apartment, I was having an animated discussion with the God that I still wasn't certain existed (since over the course of the last six months he hadn't made himself known to me), when all of a sudden – after I'd made a bad decision in my heart to do the worst kind of evil to more than one person, because I thought it was the just thing to do – I fell into some kind of faint.

- and instead of falling *"FROM THE HORSE"* as St. Paul did when Jesus appeared to him in a splendid vision with an immense light while he was about to go persecute Christians, I (similarly!)
- "fell down" on *HORSEMEN'S ROAD*, where Jesus also appeared to me in a very powerful vision² in which I saw him radiant with light: a vision which prevented me, too, from harming others.

But the thing which made a powerful impression on me, to the point of helping me believe with certainty (beyond any reasonable doubt), was not so much the vision in itself, but the fact that, 6 months later, I found all the particulars of that dream-vision in the Holy Gospel (and in the spontaneous homily of a Catholic priest, who described it with great precision): a Gospel which – I want to clarify – I didn't even know existed. What an impression that made on me – what an impression! Everything took on a new light. What chills I had – what emotions! I had never experienced anything like it. I only barely remembered (only from hearsay) that there was a book called the Holy Bible – but certainly not that there was such a thing as the Holy Gospel! And so, as a logical consequence, in the face of so many coincidences that for me were incontrovertible and tremendously precise, I understood clearly and with certainty that it was all true: that God exists, that the Word of God is not a fairy tale but a great mystery. Above all, I understood the importance of doing *the Will of God*: not only listening to it, but *doing* it, as Jesus says, *"My food is to do the Will of Him who sent me and to carry out His works!"* (John 4:34). Yes, to do – that is, to **work**, as the Sacred Scripture already explained, saying, *"the Word of God which is **at work** in you who **believe!**"* (cf. 1Thess 2:13b). And now **I believed!** And **I wanted to put this into practice**, because I had promised that if He gave me certainty, I would change my life; because all the horizons were opening up in me – in space, time, and quality; and because I didn't want to get lost at that point – for Jesus says, *"Not everyone who says, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father who is in heaven!"* (Matt 7:21).

So now my work began...or, rather, HIS!

¹ Unbeknownst to me, I was nearby Our Lady of Tears – a figure of the Psalm which says, "Rivers of tears flow from my eyes because Your law is not observed" (Ps 119:136)...there was this danger...

² I had a real, true, and very powerful vision in a dream, in the summer of 1996 in an apartment at Cologno Monzese (Mi) situated precisely on the *Via Cavallotti*, very near Chanel 5. The vision is represented fairly well, in a somewhat figurative and partial way, at the following link: <http://vimeo.com/41323927> [Italian]

What was the “will of God” that I should do, in order to go to heaven?

Together with the dream and other signs that fully satisfied my intelligence, the Good God gave me still others so that I would have absolutely no room for doubts of Faith that my reasoning had yet to grasp. My joy over all this was immense and almost indescribable.

But the problems did not end all at once, because as a consequence I wanted to know: “Now what is Your will for me? In these 6 months I’ve assisted at the Holy Mass every week and have understood that the center and the essence of everything is to do the Will of Him who has sent me to do His Works!”

And so I resumed my intense and heartfelt prayer, where in essence I said: “*My Lord, now that I understand that You truly exist – and I thank You profoundly for this – what do You want me to do? I promised that I would change my life if You helped me believe in You! Here I am, Lord: I promise that I will try to do everything You ask of me, but You have to help me understand it clearly. If you want me to get married, ok, I’ll get married. If you want me to become a friar or a diocesan priest, ok, I promise that I’ll try to do it...anyhow I’ve understood that there will be a more or less difficult cross on either path! **Help me understand clearly what You want from me**, as clearly as one and one make two, **and I promise that I’ll try to do it**. Anyhow, You have been so good as to help me understand clearly that You exist; certainly You will also have the goodness to help me understand what You want from me, because I truly want to do Your will!”*

From then on, my one “obsession” (so to speak) was always the same thought: “Lord, what do You want from me? What do you want from me?” This was my only prayer, made with emotion and relentless insistence, because I truly wanted to understand and do the Will of God, without which Jesus says that we cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven (cf. Matt 7:21ff) – at least if we don’t want to spend some “roast chicken” time in purgatory as long as it suits Him³!

After this daily and insistent prayer of mine, I waited for some mysterious sign from on high, the way a person waits for someone’s plane to touch down at the airport – watching the calendar, the day, the month, the information given by other informed people, etc. While I was in the midst of this time of waiting, as one who expected the Holy Spirit to touch down (ever more fully!) like a great dove in the airport of my life, I realized that for one reason or another I was often coming across little images or other things that always had one date in common: the 13th of May!

For example, the first time that I started reading a little book about the story of Our Lady of Fatima, the first words I read in this book were these: “*It was the 13th of May 1917, around midday, when Our Lady appeared to Sr. Lucia for the first time.*” At these words, I said to myself, “*wait wait,*” and glancing as if by instinct at the quartz watch that I always had on my wrist, I realized – with chills – that it was exactly that time: the 80th anniversary of the apparitions, and not only did the month and year correspond, but even the day and the exact hour: *the 13th of May 1997, around midday* (4 coincidences in a single second!).

And there weren’t only these coincidences; often, unbeknownst to many, little images were given to me – once, an image where I then realized that the 13th of May was written on the back; then, another time, I received another image where, to my great surprise, the 13th of May was written once again on the back! – So many coincidences! What ever could they mean? One day, I finally decided to have a vocational experience, and taking a little planner (one from a bank, which had nothing to do with things of the Lord), I opened it at random to check and see whether any of the days lined up with the days of that year (since the planner was almost ten years old). To my great surprise, my eyes instantly fell on the 13th of May. “What?!” – It scared me a little, and if I remember correctly I dropped the planner and the hair on my arms all stood on end. At this point (remembering my intense, heartfelt prayer) I said seriously, kneeling down in front of an image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus: “Lord, what do these coincidences mean? What are You telling me? I beg You, respond to me, Lord! Respond to me!” – and *diing!* An instant after that prayer something switched on like a lamp of the illumination of Christ and I suddenly exclaimed, “the 13th of May! I should check the sources of the message of the apparitions of Fatima – maybe there is a message there for me!” – and so it happened. I went to find the little book on Fatima, and immediately went to read the message of the 13th of May, where (more or less) what I read was this: “*Come here for 6 consecutive months and I will tell you... what I want from you*” (cf. “*Memorie di Sr Lucia*” Messag. 13.5.1917). Now, do you remember my insistent prayer to the Lord? I mean, do you remember exactly what my words were? I asked, “**Lord, what do you want from me? What do you want from me?**” And this was the response of the Holy Spirit that I’d awaited like the

³ (cf. CCC 1022)

plane at the airport: “**Come here for six consecutive months, and I will tell you who I am and what I want from you!**” Truly, the Holy Spirit who is the Lord and giver of life had responded to me, through Mary – for where Mary is, there is the Holy Spirit.

I, interpreting the message almost literally, decided to go to Fatima for 6 consecutive months, in order to understand well what the Lord, through Mary, wanted from me...And so it was! I obeyed without any delay; I had understood, first and foremost, that it was the will of God, and so I went to Fatima for 6 consecutive months, in a context of prayer and of silent sacrifice to understand the prayer, and Our Lady helped me understand clearly (as she promised in the Message of the 13th of May) what God had had planned for me from the foundation of the world, from all eternity. Then, too, I also understood that not everyone necessarily has to go to Fatima to understand God’s will, but that everyone who is looking seriously for God and His will could still dedicate at least 6 consecutive months (through a religious community or etc. that could enable them to live for a time without distractions) to understanding God’s plan for them with certainty: a plan drawn, not by some merely human architect or designer, but by the Designer *par excellence*, who knows what best suits every one of you who have yet to understand what community He wants you in or what exactly He wants from you (whatever your state of life may be).

My entry into community

Regarding my entry into this community of Little Friars and Nuns of Jesus and Mary: this, for me, was among the more difficult things, since the community still did not exist – and much less did I have any intention of founding one! On the contrary, I was told to found one by a young hermit that I simply wanted to live with; I did not, I repeat, want to found a community. But, after I had had multiple experiences with this hermit, one day he clearly told me:

“Listen, if you believe that the Lord has sent you to me so that I can advise you, then you must obey these words:

- First: You must not come here anymore!*
- Second: Go to your hometown and take up a practice of prayer similar to mine, as another spiritual oasis to sustain people there.*
- Third: Seek out another hermit (he even told me the name) and if you manage to find him, have him give you his blessing; and if, along this journey, some other young person should happen to join you in this “folly of love,” then, after about a year or a year and a half, go to the Bishop of your diocese and inform him of what you are doing. If he doesn’t have anything against it, then that’s it: continue! Otherwise, stop.”* When I heard this, I left to carry out, with diligence, these new instructions of the young hermit.

When (after various adventures) I found the old hermit-priest, he gave me advice and I obtained his blessing (though he was a little perplexed); he told me, “Son, **begin; IF THEY ARE ROSES, THEY WILL FLOWER!**” Then, when it was time to go to the local Bishop, as the first hermit had told me to, there was already someone else who had decided to take up this lifestyle with me. That excellent bishop (now emeritus), after listening to us, said: “Sons, I feel that I should not stop you, but rather observe you – like Gamaliel, who did not wish to stop those simple Apostles: for if the thing comes of itself, it will end, but if this thing comes from God, let me never – never! – be the one to fight against God!”

Since then, 10 years have passed, and from only two brothers (and some men in experience) we have now grown into **various young consecrates in more than 5 dioceses in the world**, with many others from various parts of the world who would like to enter our community as soon as possible – and if that isn’t enough, we are also flanked in different parts of the world **by innumerable lay groups of prayer (in Italy, Europe, and other continents)** who offer many prayers (or ‘roses’) to Our Lady, and other groups of prayer that could soon join us. And so, it would seem, in response to the old hermit, the roses have taken up their course of growth, **bursting forth and FLOWERING** –

since, as Jesus says in the Gospel, “*the good tree is recognized by its good fruit*” (cf. Luke 6:44). Naturally, the innumerable roses have not been lacking in innumerable thorns, but with the grace of God and our good will to get through them, we have always overcome these difficulties successfully (as is testified by various letters in our favor, whether from Bishops, priests, or many laypeople, who through our work in the Lord have received many benefits – the proof is at hand! (cf. Is 45:21)).

In conclusion

If the Lord has been able to use a blackened bit of charcoal like me to write (even now!) messages of love on the hearts of those searching for His will, then may the effort of all those who are truly searching for the will of God (for His greater glory, and regardless of inevitable human frailties) be appreciated ever more fully – not only for their own full salvation, but also for the salvation of others! For this is the greatest love, as the Living Word of God concludes in these words of Scripture: “*No one has a greater love than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends!*” (cf. John 15:13) Amen!

BEST WISHES FOR A GOOD MEDITATION & A *SUCCESSFUL JOURNEY TO HOLINESS!*



“COINCIDENCES” REGARDING THIS TESTIMONY:

Without doing so on purpose, **I began to write it on May 13, 2008**. And not only was there this unintentional coincidence, but the next day I finished this letter with the passage of John 15:13, and immediately afterward went to Mass – where in the Gospel of the day Jesus says, “*No one has a greater love than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends!*” (John 15:13). And that isn’t all! – To conclude, regarding the roses which then flowered and the tree which is known by its good fruits, Jesus also says in the same readings for that Mass: “*It is not you who chose me, but I who chose you, and I have appointed you in order that you may go and bear fruit, fruit that will last*” (John 15:13-17). Amen! For all eternity!

Again, without doing so on purpose, this was **revised** on May 26, 2012...and as to the topic of my revisiting my testimony, you can see and hear what the Mass of the day has to say: “*This is the disciple who testifies to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true! Many other things have also been done...*” (John 21:24-25).