



Prof. Michael Ogunu

CHRISTIAN WITNESS IN ILLNESS

By

Prof. Michael Ogunu

Thirty-one years have now passed since October 13, 1984, the day on which Valeria Carta died at the age of forty-three in Torreglia (Padua), after twenty-five years of most painful illness, spent for the most part on a water-mattress and - for a few hours of the day - in a wheelchair.

On the tombstone, under her name, we read in capital letters: CARMELITE TERTIARY

Born at Torreglia (Padua) October 14, 1941, of parents who were poor in this world's goods, but rich in faith, Valeria grew up healthy and robust, dedicated to study, pious and generous in helping the family.

After finishing elementary school she was employed in the service of good families nearby. Early in June, 1960, at the age of eighteen and a half or a little more, she was struck down by transverse myelitis. Paralyzed in the lower joints, she had to give up work, and her youthful dreams. She was obliged to undergo endless examinations and health treatments in different hospitals and institutions, each time far from her family and friends. It was not easy for her - young, beautiful, full of life, and attracted by the ideal of marriage - to accept the cross of suffering which might take away from her forever every beauty, every hope, every joy of life.

After the first moment of understandable human reaction to the misfortune that had inexorably hit her, she clung fast to faith, to prayer, to devotion to our Lady and to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

In 1965 she made a pilgrimage to Lourdes and while praying before the statue of our Lady in the holy Grotto, she felt herself transformed. She was enlightened interiorly to understand that it was God's will for her that He make her an apostle of suffering, and she then accepted this divine will as the "mission of her life".

While she was staying in the Charles Steeb Institute of the Alberoni Fathers in Venice, she made the acquaintance of a Carmelite nun, Sr. Assumpta Maria Antozzi, and formed such a deep spiritual friendship with her that Valeria expressed a desire to belong to the glorious family of Carmel.

The Sister arranged a meeting for her with Fr. Michelangelo Cellerino of the Discalced Carmelites of Venice, who in 1967 enrolled her in the scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. It was a devotional bond. Nevertheless, according to the privileges granted by the Sovereign Pontiff, Valeria like all other members shared in the spiritual benefits of the entire Carmelite Order.

Following upon visits and talks with the Prioress of the monastery and with the Father Director of the Carmelite Third Order Secular (the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites) of Venice, they were led to believe in Valeria's desire to share the life of the Order in a more real and active manner.

Not being able to enter a monastery of Carmelite nuns because of the serious condition of her illness, she gladly accepted the conclusive suggestion that she be enrolled in the Carmelite Secular Fraternity of “St. Mary of Nazareth” of Venice.

At the Clothing Ceremony which took place on April 10, 1969, Valeria took the name of Sr. Imelda of the Eucharist; and on November 10, 1970 she made her profession in the Chapel of the Institute of the Alberoni Fathers. She was happy thus to belong to the Order of Discalced Carmelites, living with fervor according to the Rule embraced by the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites.

She spoke and wrote with deep joy of her consecration to friends, priests, laity, and to sick people. She related it finally to Pope Paul VI in the audience she had with the Holy Father in Rome, on 22nd of September, 1971: “Holy Father, I offer my life of sacrifice and humble prayer as a Third Order Carmelite (Secular Carmelite) for the honour of Mother Church”.

We quote just a few of her writings:

On the first page of her Diary (written from 1971 – 1979), we read: “It is about two months since I made my humble profession as a Third Order Carmelite. I am happy with this gift of God, because I feel I can live my life better by means of a high supernatural ideal. I accept my living on earth in continual physical and moral suffering, for the salvation of my soul and of my dear ones, and in particular for Holy Mother Church”.

On July 4, 1974 she wrote: “Again, I consecrate myself to Our Lady of Mount Carmel” in the novena I have begun, abandoning myself to her with filial confidence, because she sustains me on this way of the Cross along which I walk with such serenity by following my Jesus: to persevere in becoming perfect in everything. Jesus, I will be Thy spouse, a humble and poor Carmelite crucified like Thee. My King, my Life, my supreme Love, sustain me always on this way of the Cross. Without Thee I can do nothing”.

She found in the spirituality of the Carmelite Secular Order as much as was necessary for nourishing her union with God, with Jesus Crucified, with the Most Blessed Virgin, and for daily augmenting her offering of immolation for her neighbour, for the Church, and for the entire world.

The salvific value of suffering united with the sufferings of Christ and offered to him for the salvation of souls was re-echoed by Pope Benedict XVI on the 13th of May, 2010 when he came to Fatima as a pilgrim to the Shrine of Fatima.

After celebrating Mass for the feast of Our Lady of Fatima, the Holy Father blessed the sick with the Eucharist. He said that sick people must overcome their sense of uselessness and discover their great value in the Church, by carrying their sufferings as Christ did for the salvation of humanity. In sharing Christ’s sufferings and passion they become “other Christ”. God’s compassionate love will call them to follow Christ with their cross, producing in them “interior peace and even spiritual joy”. Sinful hearts will be moved and converted by the spiritual effect of supernatural reparation of the suffering offered through Christ to the Eternal Father in an oblation of pure love.

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