

How Firm a Foundation

The Testimony of Former Roman Catholic Nun Carmen de Torres

“I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” (Rom. 12:1)

Can anyone be saved by wearing a habit, by displaying false pretensions, or by worshipping images? We know the answer which sacred Scripture holds in readiness: “Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness.” (Eph. 6:14) “Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.” (Exod. 20:3,4) “Lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female.” (Deut. 4:16)

Inside the Cup

One more question: When a man is full of hypocrisy, how can he be saved? Again the Lord’s admonition gives the answer: “But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.... Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.” (Matt. 23:13, 23-25)

As a Franciscan nun of the order of St. Francis of Assisi in Caracas, Venezuela, not once did I experience a taste of that joy and peace that has gladdened my heart since the day I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour.

I had entered the convent of nuns with the fervent desire to become a saint. Meticulously I tried to follow the ways and suggestions laid down in the “holy rule”. In order to achieve this end, I had first started out with the months of postulancy, a period of preparation required by the Roman Church to reveal the traits of my personality and character to the mistress of novices, whom I learned to love dearly and who loved me in return.

Subsequently I was admitted into the novitiate of the order. After termination of two years of training and pious exercises, I was then allowed to pronounce my vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in what is commonly referred to as religious profession.

The Unexplainable Void

All this had appeared to me a glorious and noble goal, which at that time seemed to embody the realisation of my dreams and fondest aspirations. In reality, however, I felt that in my heart there had remained a great and unexplainable void.

Now I know the explanation for what in those youthful days I was unable to comprehend. The guiding principle and motivation of my life as a nun had been obedience to human beings, to superiors and superioresses, to the extent of going down on my knees before them innumerable times in order to win the favour and pleasure of God. The Mother General used to tell us: “If you are in good standing with your superior, you are in good standing with God Himself.”

Unversed in God’s Word, I was ignorant of the injunction that even the angels in heaven are

forbidden to allow men to kneel before them, for they consider themselves fellowservants among God's elect and not their overlords, as we learn from the Bible: "And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God." (Rev. 22:8-9)

Wickedness Within

A priest who was called our extraordinary confessor, because at certain intervals only he came to hear our confessions, once attempted in the confessional to lead me into serious sin. I was obliged to take him seriously to task for the shameful suggestion which so flagrantly disagreed with what his cloth and calling were meant to represent.

Can you realise my frustration when in a convent and even in the confessional, where such great emphasis is placed on chastity, I was invited to commit deeds that are a veritable abomination in the eyes of God? Does not the Apostle Paul warn the Corinthians: "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness: but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators"? (1 Cor. 5:8-9) Does not the same apostle admonish us in the same epistle, chapter 6, verse 18: "Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body"?

There can be no doubt that religious poverty is amply evident in a nun's cell. However, many times I walked the streets of Caracas begging alms under the pretext of soliciting contributions for destitute children. To my shame I must confess, in utmost humiliation, that the alms I begged under the pretext of assisting needy mothers, were for the most part used to enrich the coffers of the clergy.

Today I give thanks that I am firmly founded in God: "The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." (II Tim. 2:19)

My Refuge

Finding myself in a state of spiritual dejection for some time, I felt that I needed something real, something that in all truth would satisfy the longings of my life, something strong enough to transform my whole being and able to still the pungent hunger of my soul. Like a lost child, I was seeking refuge with Christ, and I found shelter with Him. I found peace and security in living for Him, and for Him alone. To Him I owe the transformation of my life and the abiding privilege of enjoying a serene happiness in Christ such as I had never experienced during my years in a convent. Paul beautifully expressed this when he said: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (II Cor. 5:17)

God has performed in me the miracle of miracles, leading me through difficult experiences to the realisation that in Christ it is possible to live a life of holiness, joy, lasting peace, and happiness, even in the midst of the persecutions, deprivations and changing fortunes that are our human heritage.

I have written this testimony for the glory of Him who loves us and who has delivered Himself for us.

Although there are a few expressions above which are not as biblically accurate as they could be, allowances must be made for the differing levels of spiritual growth and knowledge in all believers.

The Gospel means the glad tidings, or good news; and truly, the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is “good tidings of great joy” (Luke 2:10), the greatest news ever heard on earth: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”! (1 Timothy 1:15). And “He is able to save them to the *uttermost* that come unto God by Him”! (Hebrews 7:25).

All men and women are sinners, and sin is a terrible thing: it is the transgression of the perfect and holy law of God, and it has separated all mankind from God. Those who die in their sins suffer the torments of eternal fire. Jesus said, “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13,14). The Lord Jesus Christ Himself is that strait gate, and narrow way, that leads to life! “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” Jesus said; “no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

If you, then, are asking, “What must I do to be saved from my sins?” here is the answer: “*Repent*”! (Acts 2:38); and, “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved*” (Acts 16:31). Forsake your sin, repent of it, turn from it, and believe, with all your heart, in Jesus Christ! To believe in Him is *to cast yourself upon Him, by faith, for salvation*. He is the Son of the living God, holy, harmless, undefiled, sinless, the *only* Lord and Saviour. He died on a cross, He was crucified, not for His own sins - for He had none of His own - but for the sins of His chosen people, those given to Him by His heavenly Father to save, paying the penalty for sin in *their* place, shedding His blood to redeem them. And after dying in their place, the wrath of God being poured out upon Him, having satisfied the justice of God and having put away the sins of those He died for by the sacrifice of Himself, He rose from the dead, victorious over death, sin, and Satan; and He gives eternal life to as many as the Father has given Him. *Eternal life cannot be earned, and it cannot be bought; it is the gift of God through Jesus Christ the Lord*. He alone is the One who can save the soul and set the spiritual captive free! Forsake your sin, forsake the false religion of Rome and all other false religion, turn to the Lord by faith, and be saved!

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If you have repented of your sins and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, or if you would like to know more about Him, His Gospel, and the true Christian life, please contact us.

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