

TOUCHED BY A SAINT, BLESSED BY GOD

by Angela Bourgerie



In 1989, HIV AIDS was at its peak and without any medical advancements. AIDS patients were dying right and left. We had just buried my mother in 1990 after my brother, Martin, who was thirty-four, revealed that he was HIV positive. One year later, after disclosing that he now had full blown AIDS and after many hospitalizations and medical efforts, he was told that

they could no longer do anything for him.

I was in my 6th month of chemo from a recent cancer surgery when my mother died, and I was still recovering when my brother was being released from the hospital. He had been visited by some nuns who invited him to live in their home for men with AIDS. I had no idea who these nuns were but was grateful that he had been given this invitation. I was living in San Diego at the time, and he was in Denver; so, I immediately went to visit him only to find out that the home for men with AIDS was run by the Missionaries of Charity Sisters of Mother Teresa. Not only that, but it was in the building that had been Cathedral High, my school 30 years previously.

The day I arrived was in October, and it happened to be “AIDS Awareness Month.” The sisters were having a prayer vigil for people with AIDS and their families. The prayers were based on the suffering of Jesus and His walk to Calvary and the suffering of AIDS sufferers and their families. It was a candlelight service, and it so moved me that I could not wait to share it with the rest of my family.

From that moment on, my three months stay in Denver and my daily visits with my brother were the beginning of a truly blessed spiritual conversion. I witnessed so many moments of love, compassion, and tenderness, not only from those loving sisters, but also the volunteers who gave up so much to care for those extremely ill patients. The fellow patients, themselves, taught me much about life and death. Every day was a blessing that made seeing the immense suffering, and even the death of so many, possible to endure.

Prior to this, I knew of Mother Teresa, but I knew nothing personal about her. During this experience at Seton House, I experienced so much more than I could ever learn in books. The sisters took such loving care of their patients, seeing Jesus in each of them, which was Mother Teresa’s vision. My brother’s suffering, which was so painful to witness, was overshadowed by a beautiful holy death. In Martin’s last hour, as our family surrounded his bedside, my sister, was called from her brother’s deathbed to her husband’s bedside. Bruce was in a nearby hospital in a coma from a New Years’ Eve heart attack that he suffered just fifteen days earlier. He was just forty-five. While we could not understand how much more we could endure, the

sisters were joyfully singing, "God must really love this family." It would take me much more time to understand the meaning of this. Nevertheless, through all the tears and surrounded by the beautiful sisters, volunteers, and patients, along with prayers, hymns and candles, Martin's suffering finally ended. I was so joyful. I remember saying when I die, I want it to be like this, a beautiful "going home to God."

Back home in San Diego, after discovering there was a Missionaries of Charity Contemplative house nearby, it became my home away from home. God brought me back to my Catholic roots, from which I had become negligent. The spirit of the MC's had become alive in me, and I was thirsting for more. I wanted to give back. My spiritual life began to bloom.

I spent all of my spare time at the convent, praying with the sisters, helping them, attending special Masses with them, working with the poor in Tijuana, Mexico, various MC houses in CA, AZ, NM wherever I could.

God gave me the gift of being able to join the MC family as a Lay MC. It happened on the one-year anniversary of Martin's death. I was at prayer in the chapel, and I was thanking my brother that through his suffering and death, I had received so many blessings. It was then that Martin appeared to me, turning around to face me, and offering me a light from his candle. This was the scene from that prayer vigil in Denver on my arrival to visit him. I could not hold back the tears.

My next greatest gift was meeting Mother Teresa, herself, and being blessed by her, not once, but several times. She came to San Diego in 1995 and again in 1996, a year before she died. Meeting her was the next best thing to seeing the Lord, Himself. Seeing her was seeing Jesus in her. Many, many more blessings God has given me during my fifteen years of working with the Missionaries of Charity. I give Him all honor, glory, and praise that is due His Holy Name for His goodness and love.

