



Mercy in the Team

Team1 Altamura – Italia

Hi, we are Irene and Diego. Together with our Team members we belong to the Altamura 1 Team. We have been in Teams since 1989. Our friends, Vincenzo and Chiara joined in 2007.

From the beginning our greatest desire was to get to know God through love for others. Since Chiara and Vincenzo came into our lives, love has come to us and has lived in us in a new way. Just as joy descended on the guests at the wedding feast in Cana when the water turned to wine, the new wine brought by Chiara and Vincenzo inebriated us and made us aware of the love and mercy that God has for us.

Vincenzo and Chiara arrived at a time when we were in need of something new and they brought with them their story of great suffering. From the beginning it seemed as though they had always been members of our team. At the meetings, prayer took on a greater role, and with Chiara's illness, it intensified and gave life to our weekly saying of the rosary. (Photo of the rosary)

I am Vincenzo, I am 50 years old, I work in administration. I live with my son, Nicola, who is 14, and with my mother-in-law, Tina, since my wife, Chiara, died. At the beginning of our love story, we lived far apart because of work. We relied on each other and trusted in each other. In December, 2002, after only two and a half years of marriage, an accident left me in a wheelchair. You can imagine how shaken our lives were. Our hopes were destroyed and our love extinguished. Faced with suffering, faith weakens, it is shaken and rage erupts. We were in pieces and we did not know how to face it all. It would have been easy to run from all the suffering. The only thing left for us to do, which nobody could take from us, was to pray. A simple request, to understand how to behave, to know how to go from here. Our story, like a journey of "Passion", lead us to the thrilling knowledge of God, to His intimate life. We were faithful to the promises made before God on the day of our wedding; and with hope in our hearts we placed our lives in God's hands, and like Mary, we replied by saying "Yes". The mercy of God was quickly manifest. In the autumn of 2006, my uncle Lorenzo and aunt Laura, members of Teams in Rome, suggested we join the Altamura 1 Team. The warm welcome by all the Team members again revealed the mercy of God towards us. A new doorway of understanding, dialogue and harmony opened before us. Chiara and I began to notice a change. Slowly that



faith, which was almost completely destroyed, began to emerge again from the ashes. We were able to admire the dawn of the “Third Day”. Our loving relationship became alive again.

Reassured that we had already received our quota of suffering from life, we thought we had reached an equilibrium and tranquillity. Instead, like a lightning strike from the sky, in April 2012 Chiara discovered a malignant tumour. Night engulfed us again. Chiara felt she had no future. We asked ourselves why: hadn't what we had lived through been enough? Pain on more pain. We discovered the illness during Holy Week, making our pain more marked. A weak light illuminated our hope but, once more, we put ourselves in His hands and even during that time we did not feel alone! The fixed point was the new Resurrection. A deep fear pervaded our souls. However, our steadfastness and Chiara's courage, the affection of our families and of our many friends, especially of our team members, all helped to combat that illness. God was with us.

In April, 2014, out of the blue, Chiara discovered a secondary tumour in her brain, which was extremely rare. Again there was nothing to do, except trust in the Lord and offer up our lives. The Mercy shown from the sharing of our suffering was transformed into communion. In Teams we lived a sensation of profound solidarity which filled us with joy. Chiara wrote “... It is strange, but suffering unites!!! It unites when the person suffering with another is pushed forward towards a feeling of love and of service, as Jesus Christ taught us. To serve those who are suffering is to love as God loves. God who has never distanced Himself from us, is manifest in prayer and petition, as a friend and a brother. This reassured us and brought peace to our hearts. This is a gift, and it is a grace!”

In October 2015 the doctors told me that there was nothing more that could be done for Chiara. At the beginning of 2016 her health deteriorated. Despite everything, Chiara never complained of her physical condition, rather, she tried to comfort and give hope to those who approached her. I lived the last months of Chiara's suffering knowing I could no longer help her, but I would not allow myself to be defeated. I immersed myself in prayer, praying to God to be even more merciful with us, to alleviate Chiara's suffering, and even, to take me in her place. Chiara's suffering increased and began to make me angry because I was watching her suffer while I remained impotent to help.

At 22.30 on 16th May, 2016, Chiara's heart stopped beating. An inner rage exploded in me. I couldn't believe it! Being without her for the first time, I felt disabled. Chiara, the light of my life, of my eyes, was there, immobile lying in a coffin. I felt abandoned, betrayed by God's mercy. It is indescribable. At that



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time, because of the pain, because of my anger, I fell into darkness and I was without answers. Trying to find them, was like losing my mind. Nonetheless, something was changing. Mysteriously, that feeling of uneasiness and that inner rage began to lighten. While streams of people came and went from our house in order to pay their last respects to Chiara, I began to experience an inner light and peace. I realised that Chiara's Last Passion lived until her final breath had taken her to her New Life. At that moment I realised I was in a deep state of grace and mercy and a radical change happened to me. The rhythm of the last rites no longer appeared to be funeral rites. The church could not contain the multitude of people. There was an atmosphere of peace, as though it were a marriage ceremony. Chiara the bride, called by the Bridegroom, was ready to enter His house and live a Life that has no end. The next day, sustained by mercy and God's grace, I sent my team members and other friends a message: *"Chiara knew many people with whom she left a impression, but I hadn't imagined how many. I was so angry about what was happening and about what had happened but, piecing together all that has happened and what Chiara stood for, a picture has emerged which shows the hand of a great Artist. Suddenly my anger has vanished. Yesterday afternoon's beautiful Mass, more than a Requiem, seemed to me to be a Nuptial between Chiara and the Artist, a welcome to His house together with other husbands and wives. For now it is hard to take in her farewell, but I am convinced it will help me to arrive at another Nuptial".*

Chiara and Vincenzo joined Teams at a time when our life as a couple and as parents was being sorely tested. We, Maria and Michele, were also going through a dark period which we thought would be impossible for us to leave behind. But this new couple who appeared so fragile, entered our hearts bringing with them, in an unassuming way, a new way of looking at life's events through faith. For us they were like an embrace from God in that difficult situation. We supported each other until Chiara's last illness. Firstly hope, then the Calvary of the second fall and the rediscovery of the rosary which united us in imploring Chiara's recovery. God wanted something different to us but the message sent by Vincenzo about his beloved, after her funeral, showed us a miracle had taken place: anger and rebellion has given way to light. We are still here, Chiara! We proceed hesitantly and fearful but you taught us that total faith in the Lord can make miracles happen!

I am Saverio, Spiritual Counsellor of the Team and a father of the Foyer de Charité Fornello. Chiara returned to the house of the Lord at the precise moment when we were reciting the rosary in the Foyer chapel; the prayers that still today, every Monday, continue to nourish and feed our faith, hope and love. Chiara had



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shared with us that she was offering her sufferings for the Foyer that was just beginning. She could not bequeath us a greater gift.

Lord, why did you allow this to happen? Why did you take a mother from her son, a woman from her husband, a fellow traveller in our team? We have silenced the pain and the anguish which we felt. Together with Vincenzo we had shouted at the Lord. How did the darkness of death transform itself into the light of the Resurrection? Indescribable thoughts and emotions were crisscrossing in our hearts. But something was happening to us. Like the seed sown on good soil, Chiara's life was sprouting just as she was dying.

There is a page that cannot be written. It is the blank page that Marthe Robin¹ (so loved by Chiara) spoke about, which described, without words, the presence of God in our lives. It is the silent and invisible presence but real in the breath of the Resurrection. The Gospel writers were able to write about the hours of the Passion but they were not able to describe the Resurrection. They were only able to affirm it.

Today we realise that together with Chiara we have lived the Easter Mystery. And it was Vincenzo himself who was God's voice through his message written the day after Chiara's burial. In a way, the final mission of Jesus Christ on earth was beginning to be revealed; the same regarding Chiara's life, and the same with each of us: the wedding embrace between the *bridegroom* and the *bride*, between *misfortune* and *mercy*. And we have touched and seen that Mercy in what happened to Chiara and Vincenzo that has indelibly marked our being, transforming tears and pain into song and prayer. The road has not come to an end. Every day is a new challenge for Vincenzo and for each of us. We feel the need to support each other. Not for a moment has Vincenzo thought about leaving Teams and we have not for a moment thought of letting him go! Chiara had entrusted him to us and we, who thought we were looking after him, have been healed by him and by the soothing strength of their conjugal love. In the following team meetings we went over the whole journey that the Lord had made us walk. Mercy was woven into the story of our team. It preceded us and waited for us, it let us live our lives, traverse our humanity, fall under the weight of suffering and of sin and then rise up to run towards and melt into its embrace. And the embrace of Mercy today is you!

¹ Venerable **Marthe Robin** was a French Roman Catholic mystic and stigmatist and foundress of the Foyers de Charité. She became bedridden when she was 21 years old, and remained so until her death. According to witnesses she ate nothing for many years apart from receiving Holy Eucharist.