

The Lord is my Shepherd

SUNDAY, August 11, we celebrated Maria Teresa's homegoing in our church in Rome,

with over 280 fellow-believers and friends. Maria Teresa had left two instructions:

- 1) Her funeral must not be sad and dreary but one of rejoicing for the Lord's grace and mercy in planning for the salvation of believers who will be forever with Him. (To be sure, she chose the hymns several years ago!)
- 2) That there be no praise of Maria Teresa but all praise and glory to her Lord.

Sons Dave, Dan and Steve, spoke of spiritual truths that Maria Teresa taught and displayed in her life. Two grandsons, Luca and Federico, read Psalms.

Bill spoke of two facts. First, that Maria Teresa had a very special conversion experience, during World War II, without the presence or the witness of other Christians, but only her reaction to reading the Bible for the first time. Then and there, she gave her life to the Lord and to sharing her faith with others, carried out in her writings and in her ministry in children's camps, youth camps, university camps, women's retreats, radio and internet, as well as women's ministry in the local church. She believed that no one had to go through intellectual battles or comparing religions to understand the simple gospel. Her simple message of salvation I repeated to those present.

Many persons had sent letters of memories, one lady who was present and has served the Lord for over 40 years, remembering as a girl sitting by Maria Teresa and praying to accept the Lord, and a man who was saved as a boy, sixty years ago in a children's camp, gave his testimony of a life of Christian service. We received many more similar letters.

The second point of Bill's message was that Maria Teresa believed, taught and modeled the fact that no one has the right to profess to be a Christian, without using their talents and time to the glory of God and the blessing of others. Many were saying, "What a loss to Italy!", "Who could take her place?" But, she believed that all women have gifts to develop and use for the Lord. So the question posed by her life was simply this: "Will you, man, woman or young person, consecrate your talents to the Lord and begin using them immediately in any way and place that God may show you? No excuses accepted!"

That was last Sunday.

Today, August 14, Bill spoke in another funeral.

An 18-year Ukrainian came to him some time ago, who said he read the Bible every night and prayed to God, but that he did not really understand what God wanted. Bill immediately loved him as Christ had loved the rich young ruler, for his youthful enthusiasm, his sincerity, his humility.

Bill took time to explain why we need salvation, and a holy substitute, whom God has given in His Son, dying on the cross and rising again. God is ready to accept and will never cast out anyone who comes to Him sincerely, confessing his sin, believing in Christ as his Savior and desiring to follow and obey Him. That boy, Victor, said he understood. He prayed in his own language to say just those things that he had in his heart, to God. He went away skipping literally.

He was killed in an auto accident the same day that Maria Teresa was called from a hospital room in a small Swiss town, to meet her Lord (I believe that they met Him together). About 20 of his Ukrainian friends, who used to spend their weekends with him, in drugs and minor criminality, were gathered around the corpse, laid out on a simple metal table in a tiny mortuary room, as I spoke to them, by interpretation from Italian, on John 5:24. Only God knows if any of them understood, by the conviction of the Holy Spirit, what I said, and if they believed. Several said they wanted to come to church.

I believe that you were praying for me, and my family, in these past months, as we cared for Maria Teresa and saw her body slowly weaken as she was strengthened to enter that place and that company, that is, as Paul has confirmed, "far better". Now, the Lord is preparing me for a month or two of peace and work on texts and projects which Maria Teresa and I had planned over a long period, but were never completed. I am counting on the Lord bearing me up, and on my friends in Christ bearing me up as well, with their prayers. I will try, as possible, to answer some of the many letters I have received in these past months. My goal is to continue serving God in Italy as long as He desires.

Bill Standridge



The simple burial plot (to be improved later) in which we placed Maria Teresa's body, to await the Lord's triumphant resurrection call.



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