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The Call for Mercy in Our Midst

By Lori Eckstine

On Tuesday, July 16, 2002, employees of All Women's Health Services in Eugene, Oregon arrived at work as usual. They were unexpectedly told to turn in their keys because the abortion clinic was permanently closed. They were stunned. The group of vigil pray-ers who'd been praying the rosary for eight years outside the clinic were also stunned. With joyful gratitude the words "Mary did it" came from many of their lips and all praised God. They thought of the many times they had known discouragement and had felt deep sorrow for the abortion victims—only to be restored to faith and hope by the presence of Mary's promises in their hearts. During the vigil an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Protectress of the Unborn, was held up which brought Mary's strength and courage to the pray-ers. It comforted them with that visible reminder of her motherly love and protection.

"Am I not your Mother who is here with you? Of what do you have to be afraid?" Mary, Our Lady of Guadalupe, had tenderly reminded a vigil pray-er who was in need of her words one day. For years, he had sacrificially come to the clinic at 7:30am every Saturday to be there when the clinic staff arrived. On most Wednesdays, the other day that abortions were performed, he came again. His wife prayed to, both of them a tremendous encouragement to others to remain committed.

With confidence in God's mercy and the power of prayer, each Saturday morning two to ten faith-filled people converged in front of the clinic from 9:00-10:30. In quiet and peaceful ways each person would pray. Most prayed the fifteen decades of the rosary interspersed with the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. Some prayed silently, some prayed as a group adding prayers from the booklet, *Our Lady of Guadalupe Book of Prayers to End Abortion*. Some walked and prayed, others stood still. One woman sidewalk counseled, giving pamphlets and rosaries away and an 87-year-old woman wore on her back the heart shaped sign, "Love Them Both."

"The individuals in the vigil had unity of purpose that was expressed in their different ways of praying," a middle aged woman affirmed. She spent additional time praying her own way. Everyone was welcome to come and pray.

Did the vigil pray-ers have an idea that the clinic was going to close? No, no sign had been detected. The steadfast pray-ers had observed many women coming and going from the clinic over the years who seemed to be unaffected by the experience. Even then, there was continued trust and hope in prayers being answered one day. Occasionally, women or couples had spoken to them, who because of the vigil, had changed their mind and decided to save their baby. Those cases were uniquely precious and humbling. From the onset of the vigil, with heartfelt concern, many supplications had been focused specifically on changing the hearts and minds of the clinic workers and the four or more abortionists.

“ I pray for people that work there that they will see what they are doing killing babies and for the grace to change the minds of the women and the workers,” an elderly gentleman resolutely prayed.

The first known fruit of those prayers was witnessed earlier that year when a young married couple who had formerly been clinic escorts, converted to being pro-life, began praying at the vigil and eventually became Catholic.

Is the closure day significant? As business closures go, closure on a Tuesday with appointments scheduled, doesn't make good business sense. But that chosen Tuesday, July 16 was the Feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. Our Lady, the Mother of Mercy seems to have been chosen by God to offer a special message of mercy on that day—a message of God's love and mercy for each victim of the clinic—the babies, the families, the post-abortive women and men, the clinic workers and abortionists. Yet, in considering the history of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel it appears that this message of mercy had within it a special call, publicly and also intimate and privately. From the light of God's mercy shone a prominent ray meant to penetrate the hearts of the clinic workers, inviting them to be healed of their painful past. Severance from their jobs has become an opportunity to be set free from the bondage of their sinful choices and actions.

Elijah and Baal on Mount Carmel

The clues that lead to this conclusion being in the book of 1 Kings chapter 18, which recounts the spiritual battle on Mt. Carmel of Elijah's God against Jezebel's prophets of the god of Baal. This altercation between Elijah and the opposing 450 prophets of Baal combined with the 400 prophets of Asherah (Baal's mate) was to prove which god was the true God. There were various Baals worshipped during that period of history and their worship could include sacrifices of animals, children of both sexes offered in burnt sacrifice, cult prostitutes and other abominable practices. In Elijah's challenge the prophets of Baal were to prepare a holocaust of a young bull on the altar and then call upon Baal to consume the sacrifice with

fire. When Baal didn't respond after hours of ritual praying and dancing around the altar, the prophets continued their rite of homage to Baal by frenzied shouting and slashing themselves until they were covered with gushing blood. For us, in the present age, the prophets of Baal could be represented by the abortion clinic workers around the altar of sacrifice erected inside the clinic where the blood of the slaughtered innocents figuratively covers them, piercing and causing *their* very body, spirit and soul to bleed too. In the end of the story of Baal's prophets, Elijah kills them all by a brook.

In the present battle, Mary, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, is revealing and extending God's mercy to the "prophets of Baal"—the clinic workers. Here though, God doesn't execute capital punishment, He executes mercy as Mary's words proclaim in the Magnificat, " My soul magnifies the Lord...His mercy is from *generation to generation*." Pope John Paul II gives hope in his words, " [God's] love is more powerful than any kind of evil in which individuals, humanity, or the world are involved...For mercy is an indispensable dimension of love; it is as it were love second name..." (The *Mercy of God* #7).

Mary is the perfect illustration of living God's plan of love and mercy. As the Mother of Jesus she holds a singular place in her Son's saving mission to preach the Good News to the poor. Jesus teaches the essence of the Good News in the Beatitudes which includes a promise of blessing for those who are merciful, for in doing so they in turn shall obtain mercy. It is the Church's privilege and calling to believe in and bear witness to God the Father's forgiveness and mercy that conquers evil with good (Romans 12:21).

Mary, Spiritual Mother of Humanity

From the cross, Jesus gave the gift of his Mother as spiritual mother to John the disciple, to humanity, to each person individually—not excluding the clinic worker and abortionist. To those in moral and physical evil, Pope John Paul II writes in *Mother of the Redeemer* #47, " Mary...takes part...in that 'monumental struggle against the powers of darkness...' [She] helps all her children, wherever they may be and whatever their condition, to find in Christ the path to the Father's house." Bostius, a Carmelite theologian, praises God for choosing a woman for His mother who would not be proud or harsh, but indescribably gentle and able to sympathize with those who are suffering, one who adapts herself to everyone to meet them at their need. For that purpose, every title of Mary has a deep meaning in its distinction.

Simultaneously from the cross, Jesus completed His plan of Maternal relationship, by entrusting humanity to Mary. From this mutual entrustment has come Marian devotion and practices, special feast days for the titles or apparitions of Mary and many religious orders. A predominant amount of the Eugene vigil pray-ers who

united to pray for the abortion clinic had affection for the spirituality of the Carmelite Order and trusted in the brown scapular.

The Carmelite Order and Our Lady of Mt. Carmel

The spirit of the Carmelite order is one of Elijah and Mary. In Elijah the spirit is of silence, contemplation and justice. In Mary the spirit is of silence, contemplation and mercy. Above all, their spirituality is spirit and *life* with an essential longing for prompt union with God.

On a mountainside located close to Eugene evergreen trees softly embrace a Carmelite nuns fervently and lovingly pray without ceasing. From there, prayers have been offered for each vigil member, for the end of abortion, and everything pro-life. Often, a phone call from a vigil member to the convent was uplifting and edifying, reinforcing them to return with vigor to the battle knowing that the nuns were "right there with them on the street."

"The Carmelites had so much to do with vigil pray-ers perseverance and people [clients] coming out and changing their minds," one individual gratefully acknowledged.

The feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel was first celebrated around 1376 in thanksgiving for obtaining papal approval of their name and constitution after much opposition. July 16 was chosen as the feast date in commemoration of the traditional date that the Blessed Virgin gave St. Simon Stock the scapular, "the vestment of the Blessed Virgin Mary."

Father, Forgive Them; For They Know Not What They Do

In 1974 and 1989 two studies had surprising features in the results that showed a significant amount of abortion clinic staff had experienced symptoms of negative behaviors and trauma indicators; "depression, fatigue, anger, lowered self-esteem, and identity conflicts" and "nightmares, images that could not be shaken, and preoccupations (Rachel M. MacNair Ph.D., *Achieving Peace in the Abortion War*; Online book fnsa.org/apaw/ch2.html). A significant number of clinic workers have experienced their own abortion. Testimonies by former clinic workers add even more symptoms to the list: morbid dreams, alcoholism, drug abuse and suicidal thoughts. Most workers deny any adverse effect are often suppressing their feelings or may truly be in denial.

The reasons vary why people—almost exclusively women except for the abortionist—work in the clinics. There are two worth considering:

The first is based on falsehoods accepted as truth: our society fails to understand, teach, or believe in the value of life and the inherent rights of personhood from natural conception to natural death, therefore there is a deep ignorance of what constitutes "helping" another human being. Sincere efforts to do what is perceived as helping women with unexpected or crisis pregnancies has culminated in abortion now entrenched in America's love affair with the right-to-choose. From this root comes many abortion supports and clinic workers whose goals is to help women to grow and blossom from choosing to abort their children. But the root is poisoned and not only causes the death of the child; it causes the slow destruction of the mother.

Another reason is based on pain, which is a powerful motivator: past, present or anticipated; real, perceived or projected; physical, emotional or psychological; one's own or someone else's –pain makes decisions and pain produces effects that can last a lifetime. The wounds that are borne, whether insidiously or obviously, can impel the search for consolation, healing, control of their lives, and a safe place away from what or whom has hurt them. Many clinic workers have been victimized and used as children, destroying their sense of self worth and personal dignity. Trust in others, mostly adults and especially adult men, is shattered. Without healing, children simply don't outgrow trauma, they continue to be affected and live in reaction to it.

Whether from reasons rooted in these two classes or from reasons rooted in the weaknesses and evils to which all humans are prone, this eclectic group of clinic workers likewise has rooted within their soul the human longing for unconditional love, acceptance, and reconciliation. They need to see the face of mercy in each of us.

An Eugene area Catholic priest and vigil member, calls to our attention, " We often forget how much mercy has been shown to us—indeed we don't even know how much."

In imitation of Mary who leads all to the heart of Jesus and in imitation of Jesus who reveals the love of the Father, we must readily lead others to discover the mercy of God. His mercy reveals a forgiveness no sin can limit (*The Mercy of God* #13). What God is still asking for is a change of heart in all of us.

O Mary, Mother of Jesus and Our Mother, together with St. Michael the Archangel and the heavenly army of angels, protect the unborn. Ask our Heavenly Father to forgive and convert those who would advocate or practice abortion. Instill in them respect and reverence for all human life. Give this world that peace and justice that can only come from following your Son, Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. (From Rosary for Life—One Hour with God).

For abortion clinic workers who are distressed over their work and/or are interested in leaving their work at abortion clinics, contact Centurions c/o Pro-Life Action Ministries, PO Box 75368, St. Paul Minn. 55175 (651) 771-1500.

For healing after abortion: Rachel's Vineyard 1-877-HOPE-4-ME or www.rachelsvineyard.org

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