



Humanum

Issues in Family, Culture & Science

Issue 4

A Credible Witness of Mercy

SUZANNE TANZI

The Sisters of Life, *Regaining Sight: Stories of Hope* (2017).

To hope, my child, we must be very happy. We must have obtained, received a great grace.

—Charles Péguy

The Sisters of Life are unwaveringly clear about what they want to communicate to the world, as they state on their website: “We believe every person is valuable and sacred. ... In fact, we give our lives for that truth.” Drawing upon their contemplative home life of prayer, adoration, and intimate community, they are well known for the joyful charisma with which they impart God’s tenderness in their varied realms of service, even in the darkest circumstances.

The Sisters’ main media tool is *Imprint* magazine, whose educative method is dynamic storytelling. And they do not just tell any story. As the magazine title reveals, these are stories in which the “imprint” of the Lord’s gracious hand is evident. Each issue unpacks its dedicated theme—such as freedom, hope, joy, wonder, prayer, and silence—through real-life narratives. *Regaining Sight: Stories of Hope* is a captivating compilation of some of these *Imprint* stories, whose archive has been growing since the Order was founded in 1991 by New York’s John Cardinal O’Connor, just as the Congregation’s numbers have been growing, to now more than 100 Sisters.

Regaining Sight is a testament to the profound evangelizing power of the “credible witness,” as the editors unmistakably intended: “May these stories bring hope to all who read them, giving each a new vision to see the Presence of Jesus close by our side, always at work for our good.”

There is much to share from the Sisters' encounters because of the wide reach of their missionary work, which includes assisting pregnant women in need, offering post-abortion hope and healing, spiritual retreats, intercessory prayer, and outreach on college campuses, never mind their "chance" meetings on the streets, in airports, and anywhere they are going about their business. Welcoming and infectious smiles and Dominican-style habits tend to attract attention...

Taking not only its material but also its thematic approach from *Imprint*, the book is organized in a sort of instructive series of seven steps, delineated by chapters, from "Letting Go of Control" to "Acceptance of God's Love and Mercy," ending with "Stepping Out of Our Comfort Zones." Each chapter offers four to seven miraculous anecdotes that elucidate the given step. These stories reveal much about the universal human desire for a deep and sustaining love, for purpose and fulfillment, and for true community—which come as gifts from the eternal God.

Such gifts, the book assures us, can be granted in every trying circumstance, not only in facing an unwanted pregnancy or seeking healing after abortion, the two ministries in which the Sisters have invested the most. Indeed, there is no lure, pitfall, or disability found in daily life and in today's cultural milieu that is outside of Jesus' mantle of ardent love. The book's protagonists attest to this truth in their lives, buffeted as they are by illness, death, addiction, crime, handicaps, abuse, loneliness, agnosticism, and more. Through these gripping reflections, the reader encounters the extraordinary abundance of God's generosity found in accompaniment, maternity and paternity, humility, chastity, compassion, self-gift, and other fruitful manifestations of His mercy—a mercy to which the Sisters of Life have introduced so many.

One woman recounts how she was freed from the painful resolution to abort her son with Down syndrome when she contacted the Sisters of Life, even though, "in my heart, fear was winning." Her happiness for this decision resounds in the sweetest of tones: "It is important to talk about how a child with a disability... strengthens us. ... I can't imagine how I would be the person that I am today, as strong as I am and knowing God the way that I do, if it wasn't for Angelo." An older child with Down syndrome who was interviewed for another story explains, "I have an extra chromosome and that chromosome belongs to God. It is from God. It is between me and God." In a different submission, the brother of one of the Sisters communicates the challenges brought on by his muscular dystrophy, leading to "temptations to despair" and cultivating "habitual mortal sin." This young man's moving experience of God's intervention through an attentive priest and other events led him to learn that "God allows suffering for a greater good to come from it." There is not one of the 35 brief *Imprint* stories that does not attest to the redemptive value of suffering and a total surrender of love on new paths of hope.

Other incisive and surprising vignettes describe an "intense desire to love others and be loved by others, but that did not translate into me loving myself." Whether through an unexpected pregnancy, a regretted abortion, a retreat, or a random encounter, the Sisters of Life and others in the Church enabled these interlocutors to discover and live "authentic love":

"I made bad decisions every day for years. ... [N]ow I help heal the hearts of many women, so they can become the women that God

created.”

“I told myself the way I was living was normal, but deep down I knew it was a lie. ... God is gentle and patient and will wait for us as long as it takes.”

“The little kid in me who used to play ‘Mass’ was jumping for joy because the adult in me had said ‘yes.’”

“God is love, and he doesn’t go back on His love. We do; we forget, but He doesn’t.”

“It took me 29 years of silence, fear, regret, and pain to get here, but as scripture reminds us in Joel, God restores the years ‘eaten by the locust.’”

“Joy and sorrow are like two vines growing together. If you try to cut out the sorrow, you will also cut out the joy.”

“I thought God could not forgive me for my past. ... But... when God calls you, He doesn’t just call you. He dwells in you. He changes everything. I love my new life.”

In this simply written and thoughtfully composed book, the new vision, through which sight is regained, is proffered not only by the men and women the Sisters have served, but by the Sisters themselves, their founder Cardinal O’Connor, and the priests and “co-workers” all over the country who assist their mission in myriad ways. This range is a testament to the broad reach of their ministry, whose healing power radiates far and wide.

It is perhaps fitting that they are first known for their support of pregnant women and their unborn children, for it is through contemplating the model of the child that all can be inspired to recognize their own worth, born of God’s steadfast love:

God is not only a Father; he is also an Eternal Child. [I]t is the child’s strength which enraptures me. ... [T]he purity of the child stands firm and triumphs. Even in our own lives, no matter what they might have been, it is possible to discover that triumphant purity and reawaken it.

... God declares to all that they must become as little children to enter the Kingdom. The sanctity of childhood is what most resembles God. This is what must be redeemed in every human being.

—François Mauriac

Suzanne Tanzi, a mother of five living in Kensington, MD, is Media and Promotions Manager at Theological College, the national seminary of The Catholic University of America, and a contributing writer for Magnificat. Her daughter is a Sisters of Life postulant.

www.humanumreview.com