

Testimonies

A REDISCOVERED FRIEND

It had been more than twenty years since we had seen or heard from each other, both enraptured by our lives and our stories. I was in Loreto (Ancona) for an English course, when one day, in that very cold March 2012, as I watched the sun set and its warmth reassured us of the imminent spring, it occurred to me, for no apparent reason, that Raffaele, that old friend with whom we had started our first Prayer Group back in 1986, lived in those parts. We would gather at his aunt's house every Friday evening for saying the Holy Rosary. We were together with joy and simplicity and we all grew up like brothers in one family, with a special mother: the Virgin Mary. I thought of contacting him but I didn't have his contact details, so I asked my father and got his number. I wasn't sure if he was happy to hear from me again... after so many years. sometimes you change. But the risk of rejoicing together again, seeing each other again, made me overcome this fear and I called him! I called him several times, at his home, on his mobile phone, but without an answer I thought then that perhaps we were not meant to see each other again. But before resigning myself completely, I left one last "SMS" on his Facebook page. A few days later, a couple of weeks before the end of the course, Raffaele contacted me and, to my pleasant surprise, conveyed the same enthusiasm with which I had sought him out. We arranged a meeting at his house for the following weekend. On Sunday I showed up at Raffaele's house and, despite the twenty years and more of absence, as soon as we looked at each other we seemed to have said goodbye a few days earlier. What a profound feeling of joy, what a feeling of serenity! I have a little plant with me, and this is where the laughter starts: Lello wanted to get rid of it forever, so I bring one. I also meet Enzo, who is very nice, and we are immediately in tune. We have lunch together, we tell each other a bit about each other, then we decide to go to a place nearby, where there is the founder of the neocatechumens. A sunny day is the background to one of the most beautiful moments of the last few years of my life. Sitting on the grass, on top of a hill, you tell each other a little about your life. We share our experiences, emotions, joys, and sorrows. A real Tabor, where the three of us felt the living presence of Jesus, who shared everything with us. At the end of the day, in spite of my insistence, they even kept me for dinner, which ended a day of joy, friendship and smiles. I thought that who knows how many years would have passed since that wonderful meeting of three friends

to see each other again, but I was wrong. Shortly afterward, we would hear from each other again and a gentle but decisive movement of a general meeting of all the old friends would begin, which gave rise to a real general mobilization of all those who are now part of Mary's army, the "Mary's Pilgrims" Group. ... Sometimes I think about my insistence on seeking contact with an old friend, and I don't know how to respond, because it really isn't like me. Then I see this group growing more and more, in prayer, in faith, in joy, and I smile, happy not to have stopped at the first obstacle.



(by Salvatore Mellone)

BACK TO YOU

My name is Salvatore. I was born, grew up and still live with my family in Grumo Nevano (Na). I have known Raffaele Ferrara, my fellow countryman since I was a child, but our relationship was strengthened at the beginning of June 1986. It was a short time since he had begun to have this direct contact with the Virgin Mary when one evening, while four friends and I were gathered for a chat, we approached him to ask him about what was happening to him since there was so much talk about him in the village. From here, the idea of forming a Prayer Group for young people was born and we began to meet every Monday evening. We started with 8 and grew to over 100 people. The bond with Raffaele has always been very strong, so much so that he has always been there for each of us, even in difficult times. It was in November 1987 that I left for military service, where I was sick and was diagnosed with tuberculosis and two holes in my left lung. I was admitted to the military hospital in Caserta where my mother came to visit me every day. I was already a week in Hospital when one day, together with my mother, Raffaele came to visit me because he had something important to tell me and to do. He told me that at twelve o'clock that same day, while he was praying, Jesus appeared to him and told him to take off his vest and bring it to this very sick son of his. Upon hearing this news, I put on Raffaele's vest. The next day they made me take an X-ray and the doctor, with great amazement, told me that something incredible had happened: the two holes in my lung were healing and would heal in a short time. I looked at him and

smiled, went back to my room, and started praying. I was discharged after a short time and healed. My friendship with Raffaele allowed me to experience many beautiful, intense and exciting moments, such as the possibility of living in a rehabilitation Community for drug addicts where the days were marked by respect for the rules, hard work and continuous prayer. I was able to experience being a stretcher-bearer alongside the sick, accompanying and assisting them during a pilgrimage to Lourdes. I was able to meet extraordinary people like Mother Theresa of Calcutta. I was able to witness moments of grace and wonders given by Jesus through the presence of the Virgin Mary. Il tempo passa purtroppo e negli anni 1997 o 1998 non ricordo con esattezza il gruppo di preghiera si scioglie. Time passes, unfortunately, and in 1997 or 1998 - I don't remember exactly - the Prayer Group dissolves. But here, once again, Jesus does not leave me alone to live a difficult moment of my life - in this case of my life as a couple -. Following the loss of a first pregnancy and the suffering, that my wife was going through because of this painful experience, I entrusted myself to Jesus asking him to intervene to alleviate this suffering and to hear my prayers. As usual, Jesus does not disappoint. Whenever I prayed to Him and asked Him for answers from the book of the Holy Scriptures, He would tell me: "The woman will bear a son and will call him Emmanuel". I did not understand what he meant, but he would always answer me like this. It was only after two months that I understood because we discovered that a new pregnancy had begun. A pregnancy at risk but protected and blessed by Jesus because, despite the discouragement of the doctors, it went ahead and Emanuele, my firstborn, was born. In order to continue to stay in contact with Jesus from 2002 until 2007, I took part in the "Renewal in the Spirit" Group, but something was already wrong with me. I felt that I was drifting away from prayer and that temptations were taking a large place in my life and thoughts. Over time, these temptations took hold of me, leading me to ruin my relationship with my family, leading me to lose the trust of my wife and children, until I reached such a low point that I decided to end this life tormented by failures and disappointments. I risked renouncing the gift of life because of the guilt I felt towards my family. Every time I experienced these bad feelings my thoughts always went to the memory of the Prayer Group, to the simplicity that existed among us and to the true affection that bound us together, especially with the Mellone brothers from Casandrino. So, in a moment of deep crisis where I believed I had ended up in hell, I told myself that only one person could help me. So I decided to call Raffaele to ask him for help. He ran to my aid, accompanied me to a Priest, who is still my spiritual guide. Through a process of repentance and trust on the part of my family, I started to attend the "Renewal in the Spirit" Group again and take control of my life and my family. But something

was missing, perhaps the nostalgia for the Prayer Group, with which I began my spiritual way to Jesus. Here too Jesus listens to His son's cry. After sixteen years of silence, one evening I receive a phone call: it was Imma Mellone, a friend of my Prayer Group, who invites me to live with her and her family the moment of prayer that they organize every Friday evening. Beyond the joy of hearing her again, I understand that, once again, Jesus called me together with his Heavenly Mother to gather as we did when we were children to pray, to make ourselves instruments in his hands, instruments of peace and love for our families and for all humanity. At present, I try to walk, together with these Pilgrim Brothers of mine, in the footsteps of the Virgin Mary, the way that leads to Jesus.



(by Salvatore Chiatto)

RAFFAELE AND ME

My name is Anna Pucci. I am the only daughter of a believing family. Since I was a child, I have known about the existence of God, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary through the religion taught to me by my mother, who was a great believer, and by the nuns where I studied.

However, this did not make me aware of faith, true faith, the one that surrenders to God's heart, until, years ago, a friend introduced me to Raffaele. This is how my story of faith began. Sometime after our first meeting, Raffaele invited us to his house, and my friend and I decided to leave Rome to join him. On the day of our departure, it was cloudy, but we never thought that it would soon be a deluge, so heavy that we couldn't see out of the palm of our noses. Any human being with a minimum of intellect would have desisted from continuing, but we, driven by an uncontrollable force, went ahead, despite rowing against the weather and not knowing the route, the journey lasted 7 hours.

When we arrived at Raffaele's, we spent two days immersed in prayer, the presence of Our Lady was felt strongly. What an emotion, what a joy, what tears of liberation! Those chains, that had kept me bound until that moment, were breaking.

"At last, I was being forgiven, no one would imprison me any longer in materiality. My being, too distracted in faith, had closed the doors of my heart to Christ. Another

surprise awaited us before our departure, at the end of a profound prayer. Raffaele placed a book in my hands, to be opened at random..... the case....which read: "FINALLY YOU HAVE ARRIVED, I HAVE BEEN WAITING, THE LORD HAS GREAT PLANS FOR YOU.....

In my slow and tormented way of faith, I have had sad, difficult, and ugly moments, seemingly unresolvable, but the Virgin Mary gave me the strength to remain anchored to Jesus, who carried me in his arms in those very moments. Faith is an adventure, it is man's highest adventure because it is walking in step with the living God, who follows us everywhere and accompanies us. Every day, I thank Heaven for allowing me to meet Raffaele, to whom I am grateful for having taught me faith, the true faith, and for having given me the opportunity to witness it. THANK YOU!



(By Anna Pucci)

LIVING EVERYDAY LIFE ALONGSIDE RAFFAELE.

The chance meeting with Raffaele, which I did not immediately understand, I can now say was God's plan. God called me to be an instrument in His hands and I am at His disposal for what little I can do. This call of His has radically changed my life, my habits, and my standard of living. Speaking of material things, I can say that I lacked nothing, even though I always had to deal with my wallet in order to be able to do all the hobbies I liked. So it was all a bit of a chase, but one way or another I always managed to achieve my goals. I had a small boat, I liked scuba diving, I liked skiing, etc. But I was not living life to the full, not even knowing what I was missing. Now I can say what I was missing: to know the love that God had for me. By doing this spiritual way with Raffaele, I have been able to experience more and more how much God loves us and how great His mercy is! Now I want to say that the hobbies that I used to like so much are no longer a priority in my life, but are in the second, third, or fourth order. Instead, I find God's love in the first place.

God has taught me to love everything around us, including the first breath, that we consciously take every morning.

Living in close contact with Raffaele, I experience the cries and despair of so many

people who ask for comfort, support, prayer, and perhaps also of people who, like me, do not know God's love and are searching for it. Clearly you don't need to be close to Raffaele to understand how much suffering there is, but the requests that arrive here are requests for the hope that sometimes, without the gift of the Holy Spirit, you wouldn't find the right words to give. So I pray that God can use me to be a flame of light for others.



(By Enzo Giampieri)

A 30-YEAR FRIENDSHIP

It is not easy to write down the story of a life, especially if in this life you have had Mary, our Heavenly Mother, by your side, who, with her discreet presence, has never abandoned me, and today I can say that I am certain of this.

Raffaele was a gift from her for me and for Fabio, my husband.

I called him Raffaele immediately, as soon as I met him. Not because I didn't like to call him "Lello", as everyone else called him, but only because I saw in that name a Divine sign, a link with me, who was born in a town called Saint Raphael. What more could I wish? What could He donate me, or rather what could He donate us if not an Angel who has been present from the beginning of our story until today, and almost thirty years have passed I remember everything very well, as if time had never passed, how we met. It was about the middle of July 1986 and I was invited to take part in a Pilgrimage to a small village in the province of Salerno, Oliveto Citra, where Our Lady had been appearing for some time. I had just given up a trip to Lourdes, and I told myself that if Our Lady appeared in Oliveto Citra, I could meet her there too. So it was! When we arrived at that place, we were welcomed with great willingness and joy by the dear Parish Priest, Father Peppino, and it was he who made us meet two young visionaries to listen to their testimonies: one of them was Raffaele. With him, his cousins and friends from Naples, and us from the group in Rome, we kept vigil all night praying, singing, and listening to his marvelous experience of life and of a visionary. We were in the little square in front of the gate because the Church was being renovated due to the damage caused by the 1980 earthquake, but to us, it seemed as if we were in Paradise! The next morning we

received a very great grace because Raphael had an apparition of Our Lady. For me, it was an explosion of joy, fragrance, peace, serenity, and of emotion! I was and we were all "in seventh heaven!" Now that I am writing and reliving those strong and profound moments, it seems that time has never passed. I have them inside me and they have accompanied me, and will accompany me throughout my life. I jealously preserve that Message that Our Lady gave us that morning. It is precisely in that Message that the love of our Mother and God the Father for us is enclosed. The Lord gives us certainties and we, in the greatest freedom as children, are free to follow Him or not. I was so impressed, enraptured, and fascinated by this unique and wonderful experience that I never doubted. I was immediately certain that everything was true, and with such ardor, I returned to that holy place a week later. Fabio and my sister and I were guests in Naples at the home of aunt Antonietta, Raffaele's dear aunt, who welcomed us into her family, among her children, nieces and nephews, and friends, as if we too were her children. This is how my friendship with Raffaele and his family began. The Lord does nothing by chance. The basis of our friendship has always been mutual respect, truth, freedom, and above all, we can say today that there has been a Divine plan that has led us by the hand until today. We have always been at Raffaele's side in all the vicissitudes and beautiful situations of his life, just as he has been present in ours. If it had only been a human link, a link linked by interests, it would have ended a long time ago. Instead, we have always had the certainty that our Heavenly Mother has taken us by the hand and has guided us to this day for a Project greater than ourselves, which we are not supposed to know and which can only be accepted through faith. It is not important to understand but only to love as She tells us.

I am sure that the Prayer Group that was formed a few years ago is one of Her fruits, as She announced to us many years ago in a Message.

We could have lost sight of each other all these years, especially when Raffaele went to India, to Mother Theresa. But no, because I always kept in touch with aunt Antonietta, and it was no accident. We could have stopped meeting when he moved to Bari. But no, the thin thread has never been broken. Then there was Acilia (Roma), and then all the sequels that I won't specify here. Each time we met with a phone call and it seemed that we had never been apart. Raffaele is like the Archangel who accompanied Tobias along the way. He is our Guardian Angel, just as I defined him when we met, and so it has been. He has been a discreet but ever-present Angel in my life. He has followed the story between me and my husband even before he was born. He has been present with my children since they were born. I remember how he used to play with one of them when he was little and how they would playfully "wrestle". He is a gift for my parents, simple, loving, honest

people, who adopted him as their son because he is part of our family. And also for my sisters, my mother-in-law, aunts, and the whole family he is one of us. And he is also one of us in the Prayer Group here in Rome, where so many people, through him, await the monthly Message that our 'Queen of the Castle' donates us. He is a real presence of the infinite, of the heavens that touch the earth and becomes its witness.

Nothing can be hidden from him because he already knows, he already knows everything...

And what more can be said if not that this is all a gift?

We love you, Raffaele.



(by Rosita Magliano)

INSTRUMENTS IN GOD'S HANDS





I have known Lello since 1986. I was part of the first Cenacle of Prayer and, with the young people of the Group, I followed him in his various initial experiences. Due to various vicissitudes, our paths parted, only to meet again on 29 June 2013. For me, it was the day of rebirth! As well as finding an old and dear friend, that day I met a special person, Enzo. I call both of them 'my little angels', because from that day on they have taken me into their hearts and supported me on my journey of rebirth, which has been full of joy and graces, but also of difficulties and falls. But they have always supported me and helped to strengthen me in my faith. During this year I have heard Raffaele say several times that he should collect and put in order Our Lady's Messages, and then publish them on the website: "Mary's Pilgrims". Here, I offered in order to help them: it was the least I could do for my little angels! They welcomed my help with joy. I was happy. I could finally feel useful and do something for my friends But I was unaware that, once again, it was they who were doing so much for me; in fact, it was a great grace and support to read and reread all Our Lady's Messages, those Messages which were part of my past, often causing me to dive back in time. But the wonders don't end here, because this collaboration of ours took an unexpected turn and, after a short while, I found myself writing down what was Raffaele's story, in all its minute details. Initially the work was carried out in stages, in those brief free moments when we met for prayer meetings, but we realized that it was much more demanding than we imagined and could not be done in the time available. We had to dedicate some time just for this work. So, taking advantage of my summer holidays and Raffaele's availability, on 2 August 2014 I moved to Loreto (Ancona), to Enzo's house, and we totally immersed ourselves in this project.

(by Grazia Mellone)