

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

By Sr. Alison Van de Voorde, SHM

I have always loved in the liturgy of Advent where it says: “Our God will come to save us.” He Himself, our God, comes personally to look for His lost sheep. He does not stop searching until He has found us. He does not grow weary of seeking out His lost sheep. **At the Clinical Hospital in Valencia, we were able to accompany a soul that God rescued in the last weeks of his life on this earth. His name was Marco.**

Marco was a young man from Ecuador, around 40 years old. We met him when he was already very sick. A few times we saw him seated in a chair, but after a while, he was always lying on the hospital bed. We met him for the first time because we coincided with his family in the hallway of the hospital. They had dark skin and we could tell they were not from Spain. When we asked them where they were from, they told us they were from Ecuador. Since I have so many Ecuadorian Sisters, I always feel like they are my people! Overjoyed, I asked them which part of Ecuador they were from, and that is how our conversation began. They told us how their brother was in the hospital and that he was not doing well. As always, we offered to ask the chaplain to visit him and they accepted. I do not remember if we visited him before or after the visit of the chaplain, but that is how our relationship with Marco began.

He received the “triple crown” as Fr. Henry would say: **Anointing of the Sick, Confession,**

and Communion. That is when he began to receive Communion daily. We often brought him Communion, and little by little we learned more about him and his story.

From a human point of view, his life was a disaster. He had been living in Spain for a few years at that point. He was separated from his wife and had a child who was 10 years old. He was an alcoholic who drank abundantly at all hours. He told us how he had reached the point that he did not even eat, but only drank. He would spend his days drinking and throwing up, day after day. His body could not handle it anymore: He contracted alcoholic hepatitis and his system began to fail. There was no cure, and he knew it. Every day he was worse. He suffered with strong pains, and his skin and eyes began to take on a yellow color. In the middle of this apparent disaster, God was working. He was clearly a man who had suffered and had made others suffer as well, but he was very sorry for it all. His family was not normally there with him, so he spent a lot of time alone. He suffered a lot, both physically and interiorly. I believe that our Lord permitted him to have this time as a purification in order to go to Heaven.

I remember the last time we saw him. The chaplain, Fr. Luis Torregrosa, was visiting him and brought him Communion. He then called us, asking us to visit him because he was doing very poorly. We saw how he was suffering immensely, and we were sad to see him this way. **Fr. Luis spoke**

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to him tenderly about Heaven. I asked him if he would like us to sing him a song. Marco asked for the song "The Lord is my Shepherd." The two of us Sisters and Father began to sing, and Marco's smile was unforgettable. We were two Sisters and a priest around the bed of a man about to die after having lived a disastrous life, but the Lord had searched for him and rescued him at the last moment. Wow! I was moved to tears halfway through the song and I could not continue singing. Later, commenting on this moment with Fr. Luis, the three of us said that it seemed Heaven was closer in that moment. It was as if we could almost touch it. **There are moments when you can perceive that Heaven is more real than this earth, and eternal life is comprehended in all its greatness.** I thought, "The ways of God are so mysterious!"

Marco passed away shortly thereafter. After a life of much suffering, the end was filled with abundant light and peace. The Good Shepherd was faithful to His promise. **"I Myself will go... I will be their God, and they shall be the people of My inheritance."**

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