

## ***Please take care of my little girl***

*By Fr. Gerard Brinkman, C.Ss.R.*

The man led me down a long, dark alley. I wondered what I was getting myself into as I followed him. I had to keep my eyes on the ground because the alley served as an open sewer for the tightly packed houses on both sides.

He stopped at a tiny two-story house and motioned to me to follow him. We went up a rough, shaky stairway into a one-room apartment. The room was bare except for two suitcases and three hammocks. One hammock held a woman. The woman was in the last stages of some disease, probably tuberculosis. The disease had stripped all dignity from her body and left it a mere bag of bones. She was a ghastly sight.

A little girl about three years old stood next to the hammock. I caught my breath when I noticed her. She was a beautiful child, and her big, soft brown eyes were the kind that would make anyone do anything. What a lovely child; such a contrast between child and mother.

I asked the woman: "She is your child?"

"Sim, Padre," she answered.

"May I help you?"

She said that she wanted help but not for herself; for the child. She knew that she would not live long and wanted to make sure that the little girl was taken care of.

As we talked, I became more and more depressed. This poor woman had been abandoned by her husband, the father of the girl. Since she could not find work she had become the willing victim of several care-free travelers who provided her and the girl with food and lodging in exchange for a few months of companionship.

Then the sickness had come upon her and the men left her to fend for herself. The man who brought me to her was a cousin who did not have enough to take care of his own family.

Her tale was sad. My heart went out to her. But while she was talking there was never any mention of receiving the sacraments and of coming back to God.

I asked her about that. She shook her head. She said that she was too big a sinner to be forgiven by God; the only thing she wanted was to be sure that her child would be taken care of. When she mentioned the child she turned her head toward her and extended her arm as if to put it on the child's shoulder. She quickly withdrew the arm. As if she were saying that she did not want this beautiful baby contaminated by her diseases of body and soul. Her head turned from the child to me and tears streamed from her eyes.

“Please take care of my little girl,” she sobbed.

I knew that I could get a family to care for the baby. That was no problem and I assured her of that. But I was not able to convince her that her sins could and would be forgiven.

She would not listen. I was beginning to think that I had lost the battle for her soul when something happened.

A radio had been playing loud in the house next door all the time I was in the apartment. Suddenly the noise from the radio stopped. Then it came on again with a hymn. It was the first hymn of the Perpetual Novena in honor of Our Mother of Perpetual Help being broadcast from our church. The novena is broadcast every Tuesday.

The hymn brought a little piece of Heaven into the drab and dirty room.

The woman asked: “Is that the Perpetual Help novena?”

I said: “Yes, it is.”

She said: "I never missed the novena when I was a girl. I went every Tuesday for many, many years."

She kept talking, recalling happy days of her teens and always coming back to her devotion to Perpetual Help. As she talked, I relaxed and let her go on. I was beginning to hope against hope that the grace of God would come to this poor soul via His Blessed Mother's novena.

She talked and then listened to the prayers. When the fourth prayer came on, she accompanied it. When the novena was finished she looked at me and said that she wanted to go to confession.

I heard her confession and gave her all the sacraments. After receiving the sacraments she seemed so grateful and peaceful that I could have cried with joy.

Perhaps I could have gotten through to the woman without the help of the novena. Then again, perhaps I could not have. The more I think about it, the more I am convinced that it is really the good Mother of God who worked the conversion; I was merely a bystander.

Once again devotion to Mary brought a soul to Christ.

The woman died a few weeks later and I found a home for the little girl.