

The Discovering of Love with Mary
Father Marcel of the Virgin of Carmel
(1887-1966)

In the penultimate year of his life, Father Marcel, a Hungarian Discalced Carmelite, being near death, leaves in writing a brief account of his life in his *diary*.

“February 11, 1965: a sweet awareness of the “end.”

The profound water of the small stream of my life runs serenely and in peace: ready to “empty itself. “

Where are the steps?

Fourteen years at Kiskomárom – Keszthely: childhood

Four years at Nagyszombat: the Virgin Mary

For twenty years: Hades – the underworld

For forty years: the heavenly paradise; the fight for God!

I am in my 78th year. O well! What will follow? I searched for happiness. In summary, I have not found it. Not even in the ideal women... It was no where to be found? And then I found it. I was still very young; I fell in love with her. It was a celestial love. I abandoned her. But I searched for until finally I found her once again. From then on I am very happy. Who is my love? The Immaculate!

Why am I blessed? Because I have a mother who is Blessed. Even her son is blessed. I am a baby. I had become a child again... She is the secret of my happiness!¹”

There are few lines that summarize an entire life lived searching for happiness. Like Father Marcel refers to himself, “from adolescence, no search of her, it was a gift.” He was able to experience a love that he terms a celestial love. This happiness however did not last long soon after having found her he lost her. But marked by this experience of love he never forgot her again. He searched untiring for this happiness that he had tasted only once. Yet, in the end we know because his diary gives witness that he did eventually find her.

As Fr. Marcel describes his interior journey, his daily situation would certainly make his reader assume a state of being or sentiments entirely contrary to his reality. In fact, Fr. Marcel when he refers to finding happiness finds himself in a particularly difficult and painful situation: for fifteen years he is in the world, as if in exile, being forced to leave the convent due to religious persecution of which no end seems near. He lodges in a makeshift dwelling behind the Carmelite church in Budapest. It is in shamble. For years now he has suffered greatly due to several grave infirmities and he feels helpless even to provide for his daily needs. He must depend and be cared for by strangers even if some of his confreres live nearby. Finally, he is misunderstood by some of his confreres who neither accepted him nor esteemed him; and finally he feels

¹ Diary entry is taken from February 11, 1965.

death is close. It is a truly shameful and miserable situation. Yet, in all of this Fr. Marcel lives and grows not so much in resigning himself or in serenity, but in happiness, that happiness which a child who is loved experiences or that happiness that the young husband living with his beloved spouse experiences.

Comparing the sentiments expressed by Fr. Marcel in the aforesaid situation with those the human psyche would ordinarily impose on a similar situation, it can be reasonably deduce that we are in front of man out of the ordinary. If then we examine his life in the light of faith, it can be said that it deals with a concrete incarnation of the spirit of the beatitudes. Fr. Marcel was seduced by the Beauty of Love reflected on the Immaculate Virgin Mary. Embracing her in his life like a beloved disciple (cf. Jn 19, 27), even though he assimilates the criteria of the Kingdom of God. Being reborn in the Spirit, he becomes a child again like the young child of the Gospels (cf. Mt 18, 3) that lives and yearns always and exclusively for God.

Thirty-eight years as a layman in the world (1887-1925).

1. Fourteen years at Kiskomárom – Keszthely (1887 - 1901): childhood

Fr. Marcel, Boldizsár Marton, was a man of great human and spiritual qualities. He had a profound sensibility for beauty and an immense thirst for true happiness that derived from love. He was born in a time and environment that he classified as follows:

“I was born in 1887, at the end of 1800’s. That era, at the time of Millennium festivities², was not known for its Christian fervor. In that region the people “loved” the land, the money, and riches. God was not spoken of, if rarely... I correct myself: God was not spoken of unless to say: God does not exist.”³

Atheism existed also in his own family.

“My maternal grandfather was an atheist. He abandoned the Church, after losing the faith. He attained a copy of the book by Renan⁴. He preached it, with an incomparable

² At the end 19th century, precisely in 1896, the Hungarian nation celebrated the millennium of the nations birth, that is the grand event when the seven tribes that arrived there from the east through the Carpathians conquered the Great Hungarian Plains.

³ The Beautiful Love, p. 2.

⁴ Joseph-Ernest Renan (1823-1892) was educated at St. Sulpice Seminary in Paris. He left it in 1845 after suffering a religious crisis and then continued philosophical and philological studies with a particular interest for the Semitic – Oriental Civilization. His major work was *The Story of the Origin of Christianity*, of which a chapter includes *the Life of Jesus*, for he gained his fame. Renan, like Kant, upheld that religion goes inserted in the limits of the reason. Of which derives his conviction that the figure of Christ, interpreted in the rationalistic school of thought, identifies with the ideal of the moral man.

zeal, widely among the people of the land. My grandfather had no impact on me. When spoken of him, my child heart would stop beating. My parents would not allow me to meet him. My uncle, the brother of my mother, also had a profound aversion against priest, in fact against God. His great stature and ingenious nature along with his uncommon talent in oratorio attracted many inhabitants of the land to become adversaries of the Church.”⁵

Fr. Marcel when speaking of his parents does not emphasize their religiosity, but points out instead the honesty and wisdom of his father and the love of his mother.

“I think that I was the only treasure in their life. They seem to venerate me, even though they educated me with intelligence, severity, naturalness and goodness... My mother was happy with everything that regarded me. There was only one thing that was important to her: her son. She was a perfect mother. The Virgin Mother lived in her for me...”⁶

“My beloved father had an entirely different disposition. I would not be incorrect to present him as the model of a wise man. He was incomparably honest man. When I was to leave for school, he would always give me the same advice: ‘My Son, be honest! This will suffice’.”⁷

Remembering his childhood, he describes the impression that nature’s beauty left had on him:

“On September 1, 1897, I was taken for a carriage ride in Keszthely near the Balaton Lake in order to register at the gymnasium governed by the White Fathers, Norbetines. It was there that I saw for the first time the lake which left an unforgettable impression in me... There I forgot everything. She spoke to me in secret and I, a little scholar, understood the language of eternity. In the evening, under the moonlight, I ran along the shore of the lake and for hours and hours enjoying the beautiful and splendid reflection that the moonlight, this graceful celestial body, produced on the mirror-like surface of the water. I stretched out my arms embracing that Beauty. I sensed that even that Beauty loved me. At that time, I still did not know his name. I did not know that she was entering my life through this medium and that she already possessed my soul”.⁸

2. Fours years at Nagyszombat (1901 - 1905): the Virgin Mother

⁵ The Beautiful Love, pp. 2-3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 3 and 27.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

A distant relative, priest and professor, led the youth to Nagyszombat for the four years of high school in order to watch more closely his studies and his interior development. It was there that he discovered for the first time the love of God in the daily reception of the Eucharist and he also discovered the smile of the Virgin Mother. I discovered that the “majesty and the beauty of God radiated onto his Mother, who is all beautiful, without any defects”⁹ and that the love of God gathered in the Eucharistic bread “quenched all his desires.”¹⁰ This celestial love or as he would call it *Beautiful Love* makes him participate in a life of love:

“I loved and sought this in all... The Virgin illuminated all. (...) It was as if I lived in the Immaculate, my mother. I felt neither hate nor any aversion; I felt affection for all creatures, I did all for the good of everyone. I was absolutely knowledgeable of my nothingness. ... I allowed myself to be loved, I let myself be guided. I was a child, a true child. I had no assumed goal, I only resigned myself, I abandoned myself to *Beautiful Love*.¹¹”

However, this experience of the life of Divine Love was only a fleeting moment, yet it remained a definitive moment for his whole life. Later in his autobiography, when he would write the main events and people in his life, he would refer everything to the love present in Christ Jesus, which he termed the *Beautiful Love* in order to distinguish it from all other affection: “Who is Jesus? He is the *Beautiful Love*. And who is Mary? The Mother of Beautiful Love. And I? I will become the son of Beautiful Love.”¹² Naturally, he needed time and many life experiences in order to reach a clear level of awareness. He makes this known later at the age of 63 when he writes: “At that time, I did not understand it fully, only now do I truly understand. I rejoiced in it.”¹³

3. *Twenty years (1905 - 1925) Hades – the Underworld*

He did not live long in this life of love in which he was immersed without any personal merit. At the University of Budapest, ambition fueled with his natural ability and the modern ideology of the time proved themselves stronger than love. The young university student soon realizes that he is talented beyond most students. He becomes a man of culture and allowing himself to be blindly guided by his thirst for beauty and happiness seeking always new experiences even traveling to Switzerland, France, Italy and Germany. Alluding to this episode of his life, he would later write in his diary, “I

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 10; 11.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

felt that it was beauty that made me feel alive.”¹⁴ Providentially, however, it was this unquenchable thirst for beauty that impelled him to seek her and admire her in nature and in works of art and simultaneously protected him from completely identifying himself with the mentality of the time.

Finishing his studies, he becomes a professor in literature, of Latin and Greek. His studies and his travels gave him ample opportunities to learn German, French and Italian, but simultaneously assisted in weakening his faith more and more. For at least sixteen years he did not frequent the church. During that time he neither visited the Sacrament of Reconciliation nor did receive the Eucharist. He wrote in his autobiography, “If there is anyone who knows what it is to live without God, it is me!”¹⁵

Fr. Marcel served during the First World War as an officer in the Hungarian Military. He volunteered willingly and chose to be sent to the front lines taking the place of a soldier who was a father to two children. On the Albanian front, where he was sent, he demonstrated great human virtue: He sought to defend his soldiers, prohibited theft and violence among his men, respected his enemy and he never allowed himself to act ruthlessly.

After the horrors of the war, he wrote a novel entitled *On Muslim tombs* that recounted his adventures. It was inspired without a doubt on his own experience and on those soldiers that fell and were buried on Albanese soil, but also on a muslim girl of whom he had totally fallen in love with, to the degree that he wanted to bring her home with him.

According to what he recounts in his novel, his troop was in-charge of holding the second front line along the Skumbi River. The young official, being endowed with common sense, soon realized the insanity of such an order. At first he is quiet, but then fearing for the lives of his men, he begins to contest, shout and reprimand his superiors. The Austrian Generals court seemed to him as pretentious, obtuse minded and simply crazy; rightly so. The events of 1918 clearly confirmed officer Marton’s suspicions. He rightly intuited the catastrophe of the Austrian – Hungarian army:

“Those big and small losses impacted me greatly; the sight of the many dead Hungarians massacre painfully consumed my soul: fathers, husbands, fiancées and sons killed in a foreign land, on the cold muslim tombs. They were all victims of imprudent superiors. The wounded Hungarians also awaited death on the muslims tombs, infectious wounds and missing body parts.... Why? Why? He had asked himself hundreds of times, thousands, without finding an appropriate answer.”¹⁶

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹⁶ *On Muslim Tombs*, pp. 36-38.

One day when he was commanded to lead fifty soldiers on a mission to capture a local rebel, Hasan, and to eliminate his gang which had terrorized Albania for thirty years. This inexperienced officer was no longer responsible only for himself, but for those valiant men under him. During the course of weeks they searched for the bandits becoming victims to treachery, to ambushes, to being followed, to fire traps, to deadly threats with poisonous blades, and to hand to hand battle.

It often occurred that during a mission, covered in blood with malaria running rampage and poisonous snakes roaming all about the young officer Marton would find himself contemplated the Infinite, and even becoming inebriated with the beauty of nature. Regretfully, he was brought back to reality by the bullets whistling pass him. Somehow, he was convinced that he would finish his tour of duty unharmed from any situation even the most dangerous. In fact, trusting blindly on his luck he feared more for the life of his soldiers than for himself.

After much reconnaissance, they manage to locate Hasan and it was he himself who went after that elusive leader. This time, Hasan managed to escape again, but left behind a trap in the form of a beautiful girl. The girl was ordered to seduce Officer Marton and assassinate him during the night. Yet, even in this situation his good luck did not fail the Hungarian officer: the poisonous knife fell to the ground and the seductive Albanian begged him to spare her own life. The Hungarian officer listened to her plea and allowed her to go free... continuing the tracking for Hasan. The next counterattack brought success concluding with his soldiers annihilated Hasan and his bandits. However, Boldizsár Marton could not be happy: he saw only blood and that left him dishearten. Man felt the other.

“Hasan was dead, but even Hasan was a man and Szendrey could not rejoice in it. When, at the muslim cemetery in the village of Karucak, the graves were dug and eight cadavers were buried, he did not speak, but bade his men to kneel, by now calm and united they recited the Our Father. The soldiers were men and understood...”¹⁷

Soon afterwards, while doing rounds with ten soldiers, they witness a rich merchant Muslim abusing a girl whom he had moments before bought for his harem at the marketplace. Officer Marton could not witness the scene without reacting; so he intervened liberating the woman by sending forcefully away the merchant without his purchase. Then he took the girl back to her home town. That young lady, with blond hair like the sun and blue eyes like the sea, made his soul ache for love. As they walked, Marton spoke to her in Hungarian, and she responded in her own language, but yet they seemed to understand each other. Arriving at her house, he restituted her to her family. That same evening they met again.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

“The young man contemplated seriously saying to himself, ‘I will take my angel to my far away homeland, I will teach her the sweet language of the Hungarians songs, persuade her to be a Christian and then marry her’.... Szendrey had holy intentions and was serious about his decision because after all he had rescued her. And now, perhaps now, he had found the lady that was meant for him, the only one on earth, the one created by God for him.... The blue bird of Maeterlinck, the one he had hunted for so many times with such great ardor and now finally she was in his cage. He will not let her escape, but take her with him and this shall be his life, his new life....”¹⁸

The next morning, an officer informs Marton that Leila, the Muslim girl, fell victim to a personal vendetta. A relative stabbed her to death because she dared to offer her love to a foreigner, “an infidel.”

“I could not believe it. I did not want to believe it.... He had been with her and she could not be dead. It was impossible to imagine that his sweet bird of happiness had spread open its wings and flown away for all time. He felt an immense pain, the torments that afflict the mind and the heart only when true happiness is ripped away.”¹⁹

The blue bird of happiness had only now allowed itself to be seen and it had already flown away. The new life only just begun was now finished... He swore vengeance against the murderer, but the elders of the village explained to him that her crime was punishable by death according to their laws, the law of blood. The officer, heartbroken, demands that her body be given to him. He prepares it for burial. He has the honor guard escort her to the grave. That evening, she was buried. “The entire platoon formed a square around her grave. He placed her head in his hands while his tears dropped onto the tomb.”²⁰

After the war, he returned safe and sane to his beloved homeland. Perhaps, in order to forget those painful memories he quickly dove into the responsibilities of his social life, writing articles for newspapers and magazines, giving lectures and conferences and so consequently gaining a greater popularity. Later, he would confess in his autobiography, “I allowed myself to be praised by the vain flame of fame and glory.”²¹

It seemed that he could no longer escape the lifestyle that his delusions had conducted him. But the Mother of Beautiful Love, who one time had given him Jesus, the *Beautiful Love*, continued to be faithful to him. Fr. Marcel would rediscover her

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 110-111.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

²¹ *The Beautiful Love*, p. 37.

presence and ask, "Does she continue to interlock and knit the thread of my fate, my future? Yes, but how? In such a way, that most good can come out of a terrible fall."²² His conversion was not all at once, but gradually as the result of Mary's maternal pedagogy that used all his various experiences of life.

He likens the rebirth of his desire for beauty and purity in the darkness of his soul to the blossoming of a cherry tree. He uses this analogy in his autobiography:

"All the branches were covered with white flowers, so nicely aligned that it seemed as a breath of wind. It was impossible for me not to think of the great Artist Creator. I remained among the branches enjoying the thousands upon thousands white flowers. It felt as if I had ceased to exist.... After having contemplating those white petals, even I felt purified. Or rather, I did not feel dirty. I was pure. I was white like snow. I was innocent? It was as if I had become a child again. People, vanity and the deceiving world had disappeared."²³

During this gradual conversion in which he rediscovered himself as a child and he opened himself to the mystery of the Kingdom, he found unexpected help in St. Therese of the Child Jesus' autobiography, *Story of a Soul*. He would later confess the following, "That 'lady' conquered me".²⁴ From that moment on he was able to intuit: "I am not in charge of my life, but 'someone' guides me, takes my hand and leads me."²⁵ He sensed this particularly at a representation of the Passion in a small Hungarian village. During the play, like the beloved disciple, he found himself beneath the cross, son of Mary, and was deeply moved to see Jesus, derided and humiliated, pierced on his side: "This scene remained deeply engraved in me. It remained in my memory? No, it remains in my soul, in my heart."²⁶

It was mostly thanks to this experience and other similar ones that he came to be conscious of being a sinner, in need of pardon. He found himself in need of welcoming the mercy of God in his life: "I wept sincerely for my sins because I had offended the Lord, Infinite Goodness, Love. I wept not only for myself. My soul was discreet, innocent like that of a child. At least, that is how I felt."²⁷ Nonetheless, even after having felt remorse and going to confession, he did not readily feel peace in his heart: "It was as if something was missing, as if my love for God was not yet complete."²⁸ I felt a

²² *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.40.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.44.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.44.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.45.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.64.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.74.

strong desire to withdraw from the world and be alone with God: "I wanted to be hidden in silence, in the desert, so that God may speak to my heart."²⁹

Taking the advice of a colleague, he decides to visit the friars of the Society of the Divine Word in Mödling, Austria. He spent 40 days with them immersing himself in the desert that he had so desired. He writes at a later moment: "a foolish love, a holy inebriation, this was Mödling for me; the crucible in which the Virgin Mother threw me into and from which I came out as a Carmelite."³⁰ During this retreat he lived an intense time of intense interior purification, so much so, "the celestial wisdom of poverty of spirit became for me life. In fact, only God suffices. He led me to the desert and spoke to my heart. I understood, or better yet, I found him definitively."³¹ Renouncing everything and abandoning himself totally to God, he once again found the happiness he felt as a child, "Truly, I had given all. The fact that I still possessed all was secondary; my soul, my will, all my being and above all, my heart belonged exclusively to God. In my heart, poor but immensely happy, there was no, not even a corner, that was reserved for someone or something else."³² He discovered again *Beautiful Love*, once lost, but now he knew how not to lose him again: "We must allow Jesus to live in us, at whatever cost. At the cost of one's "ego."³³ At the same time, he also found a very practical and discreet way to live in the presence of God with a consciousness and trust of a child: "Voila! All the difficulties are resolved. I only need to say in every situation: *Sis Benedictus! Be Blessed!* If we are in joy or in trial: *Sis Benedictus! Be Blessed!* If we carry the cross of if we are successful: *Sis Benedictus! Be Blessed!* This means that I do not only receive all from the hands of the Lord, accepting every occasion as it may come; not only to give praise to God for everything, but also it makes me grateful for everything."³⁴ During the same retreat, as he read the autobiography of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, he understood that he too was called the life of *Beautiful Love* under the mantle of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel.

Thus, handing over his personal library to a priest, the future Cardinal Mindszenty, and distributing his property, he left it all and followed the call of the Lord and entered Carmel at the age of 38.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.75.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.81.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.108.

³² *Ibid.*, p.101.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.102.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

For forty years: the heavenly paradise; the fight for god!

a. Twenty-five years (1925-1950): Religious life in Carmel

Once accepted to the Order of Discalced Carmelites, he became familiar with the three great masters of Carmelite spirituality: St. Teresa of Jesus, St. John of the Cross and St. Therese of the child Jesus. Through prayer and reading of their writings he entered more deeply within the science of love that is proper to the saints. He was ordained a priest in 1930, the vigil of the Most Holy Trinity, and celebrated his first mass the following day, the Sunday honoring the Most Holy Trinity. He chose the following wording for the holy cards commemorating his first mass: "God is Love" (1 John 4:16).

After his ordination, he was appointed novice master. He held this office for thirteen years educating the young men who asked to be part of the order. According to their testimony, Fr. Marcel was everything for them: father, mother, brother, spiritual director, teacher, educator and model. His religious idea, contrary to that practice widely diffused at the time period which concentrated heavily on external rigors, presented the love of God and the love of neighbor. But in order to discover the radical exigencies of *Beautiful Love* and be able to identify oneself to the model of Jesus Christ, one must accept early on the trials of being misunderstood and insulted.

His teachings on the spiritual life offered to the novices were collected and reorganized for publication in the province Carmelite digest and then were compiled in two volumes under the title: The Monastic School of Carmel. However, his view on contemplation was not shared by some of his confreres which only approved the publication of those articles that dealt with Carmelite asceticism. Thus he would write: "It was considered exaggerated, too pious, especially all that regarded recollection and practice of the presence of Mary. They were not aware that their criticism was like a boomerang that returns and hits the sender, that is to say that the critic's soul was insensible and in all truth practiced nothing...."³⁵

Regarding the unfortunate affairs of incomprehension a most grave fact must be highlighted. Due to a misunderstanding some confreres spread the news that Fr. Marcel had contracted syphilis. Even after receiving the blood test's results which his superiors insisted he take proved otherwise. His reputation and his authority were compromised, at least for some time. In addition to this farce, they desired to revoke his office as Novice master, but Father General, who precisely at that time was fulfilling his pastoral visit to the province, defended him and reconfirmed his appointment. One of the many witnesses recall Fr. Marcel's behavior during this dramatic time: "Fr. Marcel suffered

³⁵ Memoires of Miklós Gyula Hajós, ocd.

humiliation with patience, without letting a single lament leave his mouth.... He treated all with love. He was humble like a child."³⁶

Regarding this period of his life, Fr. Marcel remains silent. Only after his death the situation was clarified by some eyewitness accounts on how much he suffered had due this defamation of his character. Few sentences were written on the final pages of his autobiography that alluded to his pain and to his interior disposition. Yet, it was during this hard trial that he comes to live a particular union with Christ and Mary.

"That I may be Jesus! On the holy mountain of Golgotha! Between two thieves, on that wood of infamy, halfway heaven and earth... It was there that she becomes the Queen of Martyrs, Mary, the Virgin Mother and it was there that I became her Jesus, the Jesus of Mary."

Having survived this time of trial, Fr. Marcel becomes famous throughout all of Hungary either as a preacher or as a confessor. Various ecclesial personages become his spiritual children: among these are Blessed Vilmos Apor, bishop of Győr, martyred by Russian soldiers in 1944 and the primate- cardinal of Hungary, Cardinal József Mindszenty.

In 1950, a few months before the suppression of all religious Orders in Hungary, Fr. Marcel received the mandate from the provincial, under of holy obedience, to write down the story of his life up to his entrance in Carmel, with special consideration of the following question: "What impact did the Virgin Mary have on your soul?" To this end, he was given a month of vacation. Fr. Marcel takes a step back and relives his youth. Thus, he was able to discover with what marvelous love and with what motherly ingenious he was lead by the Virgin Mother. The work, The Beautiful Love, his autobiography is a tribute of praise to the Mother of Beautiful Love or better put a Magnificat sang to the Trinitarian love that has accomplished great things in Mary and through her even in Fr. Marcel who is her son:

"All is a marvelous work of your love. Great things you have done for me; my heart sings a festive song. My queen, my mother, my wife, for I sing my song, the song I have learned from you: Magnificat anima mea Dominum...."³⁷

Meanwhile, he wrote his autobiography Fr. Marcel already foresaw the harms that would be done by the communist dictatorship such as the closing of the convents and monasteries. Perhaps for this reason, after some reflection on fidelity and on the loving presence of Mary in his life, he found solace in a firm trust and in an unlimited

³⁶ In Memory of Monsignor Doc. József Bánk, archibishop of Vác.

³⁷ Beautiful Love, p. 158.

hope in which he nurtured the certainty that nothing would be an obstacle to the completion of the initiated work in him by the Virgin of Beautiful Love:

“Dear mother, may it always be so as your maternal hearts yearns it to be: that I may be Jesus, your Jesus. Because all is ordained to that end. You have led me to you so that I may find life, Jesus. You have given him to me. It is Jesus’ Will and the Will of the Father that you be my mother and I your son, Jesus, your Jesus. Dear mother, this is the ordained end! You will give me even this; I know all will be fulfilled as ordained.”³⁸

b) *Sixteen years (1950- 1966) again in the world, but living in God.*

The suppression of all religious orders occurred in the summer of 1950 which brings an end to all public ministry for Fr. Marcel. Together with his confreres, at the age of 63, he was forced to leave the convent and wear civilian clothing. The strong confidence that he demonstrated during this time of hardships particularly surprised his spiritual children and his confreres. He was convinced that nothing could separate him from the love of God. His conviction was so firm that he would eventually make a vow of love to God confessing his firm belief.

Some confreres, due to his personal relationship with the prior and other people of authority were allowed to remain in an apartment nearby the Carmelite church, which was taken over by the diocese. Fr. Marcel, the oldest of the community, had to locate lodging elsewhere. Eventually, he was taken in by a former student. After twenty – five years of living in a convent, he found himself readjusting to living in the world. In such a situation, he had to practice a poverty much more radical than that at the convent, even from the one practiced in Carmel, at least in the fact that every religious had his own cell. Now, living with a family, Fr. Marcel does not have his own cell but shared a room day and night for eight years with the bread winner. Fr. Marcel wrote the following sentences in his *Diary* on March 15, 1955 revealing his interior disposition with which he faced the events of his new life outside of the convent:

“Jesus is bound with chains of love. He voluntarily lets himself be tied, tormented, dragged. Even I am a prisoner of love, at home and everywhere... this is the world. The convent was the house of liberty. The X station of the cross is the realization of the complete stripping of Jesus, total spiritual poverty. Jesus conforms himself to everything.”

Since Fr. Marcel did not incardinate into the diocesan clergy, he was not allowed to exercise public ministry without specific restrictions: he could not preach or say mass on the main altar in front of a congregation. However, he could confess. He would

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

awaken every day at four in the morning and by six he was at Carmelite Church in Budapest. He would celebrate Mass at a side altar and then be in the confessional until evening. Many would confess to him, especially the men and woman religious who like him were dispersed throughout the city. He gave spiritual consolation to Cardinal Mindszenty freed from prison during the 1956 revolution.

1956 was the year of the revolt against the Russian occupation and the communist regime. The revolt brought a chance of hope for the Hungarian people, but the Russian counterattack soon silenced all illusions of hope. After the defeat of the revolution, which lasted only a few days, Cardinal Mindszenty was forced to find refuge in the United States Embassy where he stayed until 1971.

“October 23 – November 4, 1956: Inter arma silent musae. Among arms the muse silences.

November 6, 1956: Hungary is a prison. The Pope’s appeal: God to Cain: the blood of your brother cries to the heavens!

November 18, 1956: There is complete desperation with the political situation. The United Nations? Nothing! Satan threatens and is very present. Deportations. Limited food supplies. A horrible situation!... But the Hope comes!”

November 19, 1956: All malice is abandoned. Satan’s furor is satisfied. We deserved it, but the Parvula Dulcissima keeps vigil. (O Dear Jesus, O Clement Jesus, O Jesus, son of Mary! The Son of Mary will not be lost. The kingdom of Mary will not be defeated). Deportations continue.

November 30, 1956: Who can resurrect us? The United Nations? Only the force of God. “I am the resurrection and the life... Veni, Domine! Cito venio”.

After the painful events of 1956, Fr. Marcel takes up again his visits with Cardinal Mindszenty. When the cardinal requested his presence, notwithstanding the risk this might entail, Fr. Marcel would heed the request.

Divine Providence did not however ordain prison for Fr. Marcel as it did for the Cardinal of Hungary. Even though, Fr. Marcel lived in hiding for an entire year for fear that someone would denounce him to the police. During the winter of that same year, he found some warmth at the various public transportation depot. This was the way he incarnated a life of martyrdom of love. He carried his cross across the desert of marginalization, of humiliation, of physical and of spiritual torments and incomprehension.

In the last eight years of his life, from 1958 and on, he would return to live in the vicinity of the Carmelite church. He was never received in the apartment in which four of his confreres lived and one ex-Carmelite nun, all blood family. Eventually, he was offered the storeroom in the small courtyard behind the Carmelite church that belonged to the diocese. Fr. Marcel accepted gratefully this possibility of freeing himself from a secular environment and of living next to the church even if the poor condition of the

room would eventually damage his health. Even here for the good of his soul, he sought to offer to the Lord all his sufferings: those stemming from neuralgia and those due to confessional ministry. He wrote in his diary,

“Suffering is a great treasure, even physical suffering. After my consecration, I have offered Jesus my painful neuralgia, with the finality that he may complete in my body that which lacks to the sufferings of Christ, in favor of his Body, the Church.”³⁹

His sickness, which he accepted with humility and patience, drained his strength more and more. At the same time, he grew in awareness of his own personal limitations his confidence increased that *Beautiful Love* can indeed illuminate and fortify his soul.

“June 21, 1962: Until now he had shown me my complete inability to do good. Now he lets me see my physical limitations, my inability to complete almost any movement. My Lord! I have great need of you always and for everything. Precisely for this reason, I love you so much, honest! even this love is yours.”

In 1962, he underwent a prostrate surgery which almost took his life. His chances of survival were slim, but the long treatment of recovery helped him regain some strength. Some months afterwards reflecting on his recovery he interpreted the entire episode as a great grace and as an opportunity to identify himself with Jesus crucified:

“I was stripped of everything: every mundane and vain object. I lived in God. I was crucified. The fact that it was the Will of God gave me strength to remain on the cross and to desire nothing else but his Will... I was victim and I still am. For this “I had become Jesus.” Am I certain? Yes. The sacrifice is true, if so desired by the Will of God. O! marvelous nothingness, O beautiful marvelous rebirth. Truly, I have no need of nothing else. I was entirely Jesus, that is “Jesus himself.” The candle is being consumed on the altar of sacrifice. A piece still however remains. I have become a remaining piece as well on the altar of sacrifice. But it must still be purified. To this purpose my life shall be ordained, from now on my life. Why do I live? For souls! For who do I live? I live for you, O Jesus! With whom do I live? With my mother! How long will I live? O Lord, I shall live as long as you will! How long? For all eternity!”⁴⁰

As the illness continued, the strong medicines administered caused Fr. Marcel to lose his hearing. His hard of hearing created many embarrassing situations with various people, including his confreres, who already considered him a decrepit old man, and now unable to hear. Fr. Marcel wrote in his diary:

³⁹ Diary entry is taken from March 16, 1961.

⁴⁰ Diary entry is taken from January 23, 1963.

"A balanced soul does not pay attention if bad men persecute him. However, he is wounded if ridiculed by loved and respected people whom he knows personally. This hurts tremendously. And the Lord desires this because it is this precise hurt that is destined to detach the soul from any terrestrial object and extinguish any last traces of egoism. This is the execution of the old Adam."⁴¹

Fr. Marcel wrote a poem based on experiences originated from his deafness:

The song of one who is hard of hearing

Lord, I do not hear what they speak,
I do not understand that what they whisper in my hear,
I am hard of hearing! I am deaf!
And yet when you call me, I understand clearly.

I carry written in my heart all your words,
I am united to you: your spirit is within me!
My Jesus, you live in my soul!
You strum all the cords of my soul,
And I resound with you my celestial music,
My hearing is well when you speak:
"inclina aurem tuam," lend your ear!
All is silent upon the earth.
And I sing your Canticle of Canticles...
Infinite goodness! –I have won the prize!
O blessed deafness! O blessed hard of hearing!
"Venni, vidi, e vinsi!"
They say that falling of leaves in autumn is beautiful.
But I, however, sing:
I have no need of summer, or autumn or winter!
Eternal springtime,
heaven is mine!

Epilogue:

This poem is worthless.
But so that it may be true,
I would not trade my blessed deafness
Not even for a sack of gold."⁴²

⁴¹ Diary entry is taken from August 24, 1962.

⁴² Diary entry is taken from November 11, 1963.

At point of his life, he lived with a disposition of complete abandonment. His diary tells us:

“We are together again *Beautiful Love!* The Will of God is a gift from God! Everything is a gift from God for me: the good and the bad. I thank him always in advance.”⁴³

Fr. Marcel is living the realization of the great ideal that he had already experienced as a young man, though temporarily, he found himself before the love of God with the innocence of a child. He reported this episode in his autobiography as followed: “I was child, truly a child. I did not presume anything, I only resigned myself, I abandoned myself to *Beautiful Love.*”⁴⁴

Despite his illness, weak and misunderstood, Fr. Marcel did not consider his life useless. The loss of hearing did not force him to turn inward, but made him more attentive, notwithstanding the Iron Curtain, to the news that filtered into Hungary regarding the Second Vatican Council. “This attentiveness find a particular importance in various section of his diary. He cites papal discourses, different proposals from the Council Fathers. He lived with the council, accepted and considered the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, a beginning for the times to come.”⁴⁵ He welcomed with joy the liturgical reform and intimately shared Pope Paul’s VI conviction: ‘There is nothing more important in the world than prayer. Know how to pray well. This is the first message of the Council to the world. Be in an intimate and trusting relationship with God.’⁴⁶ He cited in abundance the conciliar discourses that regarded the reevaluation of the role of the laity in the Church.⁴⁷

Fr. Marcel’s love grew simultaneously always more universal as his desire to become a “fisher of men” increased. He thought of souls as his property, everyone of them without exceptions:

“I love very much the pure of heart, the virgins, the unstable, the unfaithful; I love so much the abandoned, the infirm, the suffering, the contaminated, the sick with cancer, those who struggle with sin and sexuality, the neurotic, the insane, those with amnesia, all, all whose spiritual life is without profit, the scrupulous, the stubborn, the maniacs. I throw the net on your word, My Jesus. I play the fisherman. I become aware in me of unmeasured desires: to save continents, multitudes uncountable.”⁴⁸

⁴³ Diary entry is taken from October 4, 1964.

⁴⁴ *The Beautiful Love*, p. 11.

⁴⁵ *Testimony*, n. 21.

⁴⁶ Diary entry is taken from December 21, 1963

⁴⁷ Cf. Diary entry is taken from October 30, 1963.

⁴⁸ Diary entry is taken from June 10, 1963

He could perceive the interior suffering present in the hearts of sinners, above all in the atheist. He empathized with the pain of Jesus in not being able to ignite in them a flame of love.

“How I love the sinful person! Not the sin, but the person who commits sin. I am full of compassion toward the atheist. I feel their emptiness and empathize with them. Their monstrous error almost destroys me. I die in not being able to help them and in not being able to make them happy! When my role as “leaven” is ineffective in their regards, I feel like their unhappy mother. Love or better said all consuming passion is my interior reality. I would like to be Jesus so that they may have life to the fullest. This is why Jesus came. That the fire brought to this world by him be ignited. I am a disciple of Jesus, his apostle, his instrument, his match. I wish to burn in order to light up, to enflame all hearts, the entire world! Be on fire for the love of God! The flame that has ignited in me is already not in my possession. I have received it from him and I will give it back to him.”⁴⁹

As his sufferings increased with age, his experience of the love of God also increased.

“It is not “I” the ocean of love, but I am in him and He is me. Like a sponge soaked with water and the water absorbed by the sponge. I am like that in the Ocean of Love. I am one with him and he is one with me because God is love. He is life giving water that knows no limits; he is eternal and he is life. ‘We live in him, we move in him and have our being in him’⁵⁰. “⁵¹

Toward the end of his life, Fr. Marcel felt most intensely the presence of the Virgin Mary. In a dream he had he saw the eyes of the Mary as a child. This vision made a lasting impression on his person:

“In the dream the virgin child allowed me to see her beautiful eyes. I saw nothing else but her eyes, and I saw them up close. They contained all things such as maternal solicitude, extreme attention. They examined, warned and loved infinitely. They were so expressive that their attentiveness penetrated me like a unparallel reality. They seem to speak to me: “See, I am constantly with you, my eyes keep constant watch on you at all times.”⁵²

⁴⁹ Diary entry is taken from February 3, 1965.

⁵⁰ Cf. Acts 17:28

⁵¹ Diary entry is taken from October 31, 1961.

⁵² Diary entry is taken from February 3, 1966

Fr. Marcel would celebrate mass every morning, even though it was a great strenuous effort on his part. His abandonment to God and his complete trust increased with his experience of incapability. Three months prior to his death he wrote the following alluding to St. Therese:

“At this part of my life I find great consolation in the experience of little saint Therese who resembles so much my own soul: ‘I became surprisingly aware that the more one advances on the way of perfection, the more one finds himself farther from the goal. By now I have resign myself to see myself always imperfect and I find joy in it.’”⁵³

Meanwhile he was preparing for mass in the sacristy on the morning of May 6, 1966 he fell and broke his femur. Nonetheless, sitting down, he celebrated Mass with great recollection. Only afterwards, he was transported to the hospital. During the journey he repeatedly said, “Sis Benedictus! Be Blessed!” He desired to love with ardent love the Will of God for him. A confrere recounts Fr. Marcel’s last days as follows:

“He was placed in the middle of a room with nine beds, exposed to a continuous air flow. Shortly, soon after he fell sick to pneumonia. He recovered from it, but the treatment administered destroyed the equilibrium of his body. He was in need catheter. The doctor chose a tube to thick for him and tortured him to the point that the bed was covered in blood. How great was his pain for each internal cut. Then he was heavily drugged, among the many drugs he received he was given multiple doses of penicillin that served only to completely ruin his health in a time span of less than two weeks. He received communion with great difficulty and only received it in secret.

Fr. Marcel did not wish any longer to return home; or to go anywhere for that matter. He read St. John of the Cross, but he did find himself in the *dark night*. “This is the true way,” he affirmed regarding suffering. “Here there is no room for imagination. This is the truth!” To the extent that he could still speak, he was always grateful to everyone and spoke with a tender voice to everyone: to the infirm, to the nurses, to his visitors. In those moments, he always proved himself a true gentleman.

When I visited him for the very last time, a few days before his death, he concerned himself only about me. He wanted me to be first for him. Facing death, he showed himself a holy man without any egoism. He was until his death loving and sensible, two qualities for which people loved him.”⁵⁴

Someone once asked him if he missed celebrating mass? Fr Marcel replied “No” and went on to say, “Now I truly say mass, to the degree that I sacrifice myself.”⁵⁵

⁵³ Diary entry is taken from March 9, 1966. Cites St. Therese autobiography, MS A 74 r.

⁵⁴ Testimony is given by Fr. Szeverin László Szedő, ocd.

⁵⁵ Testimony, n. 28

On May 29, the morning of Pentecost Sunday, the feast of divine love Fr. Marcel concluded his life on earth. Confreres, spiritual sons and daughters saw a providential sign in this fact: on the morning of Pentecost he was entering the bosom of the most holy Trinity. A year before on August 15, 1965 he wrote,

“Hail Mary! In coelum assumpta! I offer my death for the glory of the Father, for the consolation of Jesus, for the delight of my Immaculate Mother, so that the Holy Spirit may be always praised, Holy Spirit of Justice and of Love.”⁵⁶

Knowing the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ, *Beautiful Love*, Fr. Marcel died with that certainty that nothing could separate him from the love of God, that is Jesus Christ just as he had once prayed after the suppression of all religious orders. He made a vow of love committing himself to God – Love:

“I make my vow to live loving, to die loving. May the following words become a reality: O! Jesus I live for you. O! Jesus I die for you! I know that God is love and whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him. Thus, O my Jesus, I desire to become the instrument and the distributor of your love always and for all. I do not expect success. I will not know anything impossible. I will bring you O! Love, I will give you to the happy and to the unhappy but only according to your holy Will. I add only a small request to this vow: Unite me in every moment to the blessed Virgin Mother to whose Immaculate Heart I offer my poor human heart. May she empty it; make it humble and simple so that your love, Love Embodied, may fill it perfectly and exclude always all that is not love. O! My Jesus live in me so that I may live always in you, via my virgin child mother. Deem it worthy to accept my simple vow of love from the sweet hands of the Immaculate! Amen.

Fr. Marcel of Our Lady of Carmel”⁵⁷

Without doubt, Fr. Marcel lived fully the profundity of the Christian mystery. However, at the same time, he lived it as he was led to discover a manner in which to live the essence of the Christian life in order to maintain his faith during the horrific historical events of his life. As an officer in the military he defended always and everywhere the dignity of the person. As a young well-prepared professor, he strived to offer an all encompassing literary formation. As a religious, in the beginning he retired to a monastic setting renouncing all the riches of the world in order to be all for Jesus. Then he lived a period of intense apostolic activity throughout Hungary. Afterwards, he found himself once again living in the world, sharing for many years the life of the laity and the bitter fate of the persecuted Church. He became a living testimony, with

⁵⁶ Note written on August 15, 1965.

⁵⁷ Diary entry is taken from November 21, 1953.

his entire being, of the power and joy of his Christian life: hoping against all human⁵⁸ hope and loving everyone even his enemies.

His natural gifts, the historical events of his time and the diverse circumstances he lived throughout his life helped to purify him and to strip him of all that at one time seemed important, but really it is only secondary to the life of grace, this included for him the stripping of his religious life in the monastery with all its external practices. What remained was the essential that no one could take from him because it was God who gave it him: the discovery of Trinitarian Love and of life in the Trinity via the self-donation of Jesus Christ, *Beautiful Love*, and with the example and help of Mary, the perfect model of the Christian, Mother of Beautiful Love. All who knew Fr. Marcel during his life agreed that he was for them a shining witness for God. His life still today still offers a vital message to today's world, independent of each person's individual vocation. It offers a way to respond with a strong conviction and without reserve, with simplicity and with joy and with complete self donation to the gift of love that comes only from God. And a way to live discovering the maternal presence of Mary in our daily life, as well as, awakening a filial trust toward her in that 'great hope that sustains all life', a hope that overcomes all delusions. A hope "that can be only God."⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, n. 1.

⁵⁹ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi*, n. 27.