

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### The Father's Gift Video

Reaching back into the spiritual memoirs, the story of the creation of The Father's Gift video documentary is a chapter which strikes the heart of my trusting relationship with God the Father.

In the late 1980's and early 1990's, I had just successfully completed five international documentaries including Marian Apparitions of the 20th Century, narrated by Ricardo Montalban, the first video on Kibeho, Rwanda, Africa and three other religious video's. It was a busy time of raising my children, my husband working long hours and endless hours of editing footage on the apparitions of the Blessed Mother in a local office. Once Marian Apparitions of the 20th Century was completed, my spiritual director during this time period asked me to leave this work for a period of one year. He asked me to be present to my husband and daughters, doing the routine daily chores a mother would do. "Don't be involved in any ministry but your family ministry," he quipped.

For a period of one year I cleaned the house, cooked the meals, drove the car pools and worked hard at motherhood. When the girls would be in school, I started to make a Holy Hour at a local chapel just sitting there asking the Lord, "What's next?" Day after day I would visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, a precious time of sitting alone in silence. I would just stare at the gold monstrance, look at the stained glass windows and interceded for everyone. During this time, the video Marian Apparitions of the 20th Century started to receive national acclaim and numerous television awards. My spiritual director continued to insist that I remain hidden and faithful to my family. Unless you look at the credits of this video, one would never know I was the script writer and person behind the scenes. This is exactly what the Lord wanted me to do—remain hidden.

One sunny afternoon, while visiting Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, I heard a voice in my heart saying, "I want you to produce a video on My Real Presence in the Holy Eucharist. I will provide everything you need." Looking around to see if anyone was in the chapel, I was puzzled. Did I really hear a voice? It's difficult to explain since it wasn't an audible voice; it was an understanding in my intellect and heart. Some people may call this a locution. Quite frankly, I'm not sure what you would call it.

That evening I asked to meet with my spiritual director regarding this message. He listened carefully and said, "You are to do nothing for a period of one more year. We have to test the purity of your intention."

"What? Test the purity of my intention?"

"If this is from the Lord, you will know. You won't have to look for signs and wonders to make this happen. It will just happen. Since you have such a long history of investigating and producing television documentaries on church-approved apparitions, you have to be careful not to be misled."

Walking out of the church I headed home questioning the "purity of intention" clause. "Did I do something wrong in my life Lord?" You are constantly asking me to wait, test the waters and wait some more. I will be obedient to my spiritual director again and I will wait to see if this idea is truly from You.

About six months later the meeting with my spiritual director, I received an unexpected telephone call from a woman in Holland. At the time she was working with the well-known evangelist, Bobby Cavnar, producing television documentaries. She reviewed one of the video's I had helped to produce on Kibeho, Rwanda, Africa and wanted to personally meet me. "Why would you want to meet me," I laughed. "That video touched my heart so much and I called your old office to get your home telephone number. I will be traveling to New York to stay with friends so, may I come to meet you," she said. "Oh, Anne, when I decided to contact you someone stole my only form of transportation, a bicycle," she exclaimed. I remember thinking this would be a short visit from a stranger. Little did I know that it would turn into a special friendship for life.

### Sitting in a Holding Pattern

Ten days later I picked Fiorella De Ferrari up at the local train station. Immediately I was awed by her natural beauty. As a native of Argentina, Fiorella has lived all over the world studying and working in Catholic ministry. Once we arrived at my little home, we sat on my family room couch chatted and shared some fresh brewed coffee. Fiorella, after two hours of sharing asked me what I wanted to do in the future. "Oh, it's a long story. I'm in a holding pattern right now but I believe the Lord wants me to produce a video documentary on His Real Presence." Immediately she started to cry, which really surprised me. "Why are you crying?"

In her Spanish accent she shared, "this is what the Lord has placed on my heart too." Here are two perfect strangers sharing the same call; one is from Argentina via Holland and I'm a Pennsylvania resident. We both became quite animated over this calling and I cautioned her about my spiritual director. He's testing my 'purity of intention.'

She understood spiritual direction and my need to test the spirit; prayerfully, the Holy Spirit. We spent the afternoon laughing, crying and starting to plan a television documentary on The Real Presence. I looked at her as she was leaving and said, "Fiorella, I have no money, no editing equipment and not even a fax machine." At the time, computers were rare commodities in the home.

Again, I heard in my heart, "I will provide everything you need."

That evening I called my spiritual director and he said this was a providential meeting which could not be orchestrated. He gave me permission to proceed, if the Lord provided the way.

The very next day a friend of mine, Joe, asked me about my meeting with Fiorella. He said, "What do you need to get started?" To communicate with Fiorella, I needed a fax machine. He told me to go buy a fax machine immediately. Now what? Fr. Rene Laurentin, a noted Marian theologian from France had worked on several video scripts with me, specifically during Marian Apparitions of the 20th Century and Kibeho, Africa. We maintained our friendship even after I left my other company. He called me from Mount St. Mary's in Emmitsburg, Maryland inviting me for lunch. I asked him if he would be open to a video shoot regarding Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. "Of course, I would love too."

In a moment of total insanity, I booked a camera crew with my credit card in order for me to interview Fr. Rene Laurentin in Maryland. "How would I ever pay off the credit card?" The zeal placed in my heart was something I can't describe. It was one of those moments when I just knew. As my husband would say, "knew what?"

The video, after this shoot, started to take form. I called Fiorella and told her about what happened. She was so excited for the two of us to work together. "Fiorella, I don't have any money for you to work with me." She laughed at my spiritual insanity and we dubbed our relationship as the "sisters of divine poverty."

The next day I traveled to Mount St. Mary's to interview Fr. Laurentin. As usual, his dissertation on the Real Presence and the Blessed Mother was magnificent; truly, a history making moment. The crew captured about one hour of footage in which we would only use a few minutes. We enjoyed a delightful afternoon together; a precious time for me to sit at the feet of such a noted Marian theologian.

Arriving home the next day, I received a telephone call from my friend, Joe again. He asked me how I paid for the camera crew and we laughed at my insanity. As we were about to say goodbye on the phone, he said, "Oh, by the way, a check will be in the mail to pay for that credit card bill on the shoot." I dropped the telephone in total disbelief. This became the pattern for every segment in the documentary; the Lord would test my faith with scheduling international shoots without money and, then, He would send an angel to pay for the shoot.

The entire video documentary was created on pure faith. When we would shoot overseas, Fiorella hired production crews across the world who worked out of their love for the Holy Eucharist. In order to save money with hotels and airfare while shooting overseas, she would sleep on crowded trains overnight, really sacrificing every step of the way.

When she returned to the United States after her vigorous production schedule, she decided to share a tiny, rented apartment in Washington, D.C. With Washington, D.C. as her home base; she would have access to Catholic University and its library. She spent endless hours researching the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, photocopying this research and sending it to me. "How could one write a script on the Holy Eucharist without a full understanding of St. Thomas Aquinas and his writings," she would claim.

The lights would be on in my house late at night as I tried to study the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas. Fiorella was trying, without really knowing this, to make me into a theologian. We even laugh about this today. "Oh Lord, this is too heavy for me to understand."

### Stop Studying and Start Praying

In quiet desperation one evening I received an unexpected telephone call from Fr. Lawrence Sweeney in Ogden, Utah. He is featured in the video regarding an alleged Eucharistic miracle. "Fr. Sweeney, I'm so tired of studying all of this theology." I could hear him puffing on his pipe, there was silence on the phone and he said, "Anne dear, stop studying and start praying."

The Lord zapped me! I'm just an average housewife called to produce this documentary. It was important for me to read the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas yet, He wanted me to intensify my prayer life. My spiritual director agreed with this insight, thank God.

The next day I went to the little chapel close to my home for adoration again. This time, alone in the chapel, I said, "Lord, what do you want for an open and close on this video. All of my footage involves interviews around the world." No answer.

That evening, in the middle of the night, around 3:00 AM, I was awakened with a visual movie playing out in my head. It was one scene after another and I couldn't discern what it was. Bolting up in bed I knew something spiritual was happening and then, I fell asleep again.

While attending an early morning Mass a few hours later, during the Consecration, the Lord specifically told me, "Contact National Geographic. They have the footage you need."

National Geographic? "Are you serious Lord? Again, no answer.

After Mass I looked up the telephone number for National Geographic in Washington, D.C. The phone call to the Archives department was hysterically funny with me trying to explain the footage the Lord had shown me the previous night. Thank God they were understanding and professional. Within one week, a box of tapes arrived at my home for me to preview. It is virtually impossible to explain how complete strangers in Washington knew the exact footage the Lord wanted utilized in the video-impossible. Once I slipped the tapes into the VCR, I gasped with delight. This was the exact footage the Lord had shown me. This was a miraculous moment affirming the Lord's will for this video to be produced.

Then, the issue of original music became a challenge. How would the music work with this footage? Lord, what can I do? Richie Rome, a Philadelphia native, producer, arranger and orchestra conductor donated his talents to write an original music score for the video. This is a South Philly man who wrote for the top Motown artists during the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's. Lord, You gave me Richie Rome too? The Lord did, indeed, want the best for this video.

After six scripts had been written, re-written and written again, all were stored in a large trash bag under my bed for safe-keeping. The seventh script was finally written and approved by a team of theologians, including the late Fr. John Hardon, Fr. Harold Cohen and many more notables. Fiorella and I worked diligently preparing this script, to work with the footage.

"Are we ready yet?" We both laughed as she took the next plane out to Mexico for her work. We knew it was important for us to wait on the Lord for the exact moment when He wanted the video finished. About two days after Fiorella left for Mexico, I became ill with bronchial pneumonia. We both knew the Lord would have to "pull the trigger" for both of us to be ready to finish this documentary. We would stop and start constantly over a three year period. We never expected the Lord to say "now" when I was sick and she was in Mexico. It certainly wasn't a convenient time to produce a video. Then, out of the blue, Fiorella called me from a telephone booth in Mexico. "Anne, I believe the time is now!" Coughing into the telephone I laughed, "Fiorella, are you kidding? I have pneumonia right now and I'm sick in bed."

Whenever I'm at my lowest point in my life, the Lord moves powerfully. Having pneumonia was the perfect time to begin the editing process; I had to depend totally upon the Lord's guidance. He reminded me of the Sacred Scripture, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

With a box of tissues in my brown canvas bag, an array of antibiotics, an inhaler and pills, I headed to the editing suite to start the offline editing. In the early 1990's, cameramen shot on Betacam camera's

and one would have to transfer and edit offline, then move to a professional TV editing suite. Digital didn't exist during this time period. It was a tedious process of editing offline with Michael. His patience and gift of creativity was truly a God-given gift for me, particularly coughing and sneezing the entire time. We did finish the offline edit in one week for a 47 minute documentary. The video was now ready to go to what is called an online suite, where television documentaries are made.

One problem existed. We didn't have the money to finish the documentary since it cost over \$250 an hour. It was estimated a 47 minute documentary would take 40 hours or more to finish. By this time you can only imagine I was crazy enough to reserve the edit suite without the money. The owner of the company offered me a great deal for editing. "You will have to edit in the middle of the night, between 11:30 PM and 5:30 PM. That's our down time and you can use the suites for your documentary," he shared. Many mornings I would return home after editing all night and my husband would be preparing to go to work. He made many sacrifices for me to continue with this documentary and now, when I reflect back on this time period, he was certainly played a pivotal role in this work of faith.

After the edit suite was booked, I called Fiorella in Mexico informing her of the schedule. She traveled to the Philadelphia area to finalize the documentary with me, which included the amazing footage from National Geographic and the original, heavenly music score from Richie Rome.

#### Hollywood Comes to Us

In a darkened room with a huge screen in front of us, we sat at the large, grey console with the editor in front of us. Back in those days the room looked like a spaceship launch and we happened to be sitting in the captain chairs. At one point, in a moment of exhaustion, I remember saying to Fiorella, "Beam me up."

Fiorella came armed with every relic one could possibly imagine and we placed each relic carefully in front of us. I brought the Holy Water and sprinkled it around the edit suite carefully. As the editor pulled up the offline- edited tape with the National Geographic footage on the huge screen he was astounded. "How did you get this?" Fiorella looked at me and we laughed heartily. "The Lord provided all of the footage, trust me," I laughed. He turned in disbelief as he laid down the music score and the narration track. "Richie Rome did the music score? How did you get him to do this?" he asked. When I think back to this time he probably thought we were two local women putting together a family-type documentary. Little did he know, this was a "call from heaven."

We were at a point when transitions, the special effects seen in movies, were important for the editing. We didn't have the money to buy special effects or to shoot special scenes. We sat at the console stumped. Immediately, the editor reached into a brief case and pulled out a handful of CD's that he inserted into the equipment. Our mouths opened widely at what was being displayed on the large screen. "Where did you get these transitions?" He turned in his mobile chair and informed us that he previously worked in Hollywood for large movie production companies. When he left Hollywood, he brought these CD's with him since he created them. He owned the rights to the transitions and he wanted to utilize them for us in the documentary.

#### Experiencing Nothingness and Powerlessness

When we finished the week-long editing in the wee hours of the morning, which is why the owners allowed us to edit there, both Fiorella and I were totally speechless. It was a mystical moment in which we both sensed the enormous love of God the Father for us in producing this documentary on His Real Presence in the Holy Eucharist. The only way we both can explain that moment is this: we both felt total nothingness, overwhelming nothingness. God the Father allowed us to experience only the tip of His Heart. This moment can only be described as “loving nothingness.” No sense of pride existed. It was a spiritual nod from God infused in both of us. It was a moment in my life that I will never forget. To this day, just writing these words bring me to tears. We were totally powerless on this journey and ended up with nothingness. It’s a reflection piece for the rest of our lives

I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:13)

The day after finishing the documentary, Fiorella had to fly to another destination. I often joked with her sharing how she traveled across the globe more than I went to the supermarket. She always packed lightly with one Italian-made tapestry bag. As one of the first women to graduate with a Masters degree in Social Communications from Gregorian University in Rome, Italy, Fiorella understood the spiritual hunger of hearts around the world yearning for a relationship with the Lord.

Arriving at Philadelphia International airport, I turned to her and said, “How are we going to distribute this? We don’t have any money?” Her eyes were filled with tears and she reminded me of St. Theresa of Lisieux, the Little Flower. “Remember the “little way” Anne.” The Lord will take care of this. She left me standing at the curb in awe again. Her level of trust in the Lord was something I had never experienced in my life. Not only did she speak of this trust, she lived it.

Within a two month period after the video was finished, the cover or jacket of the video was designed by a local couple, Joe and Gerry Simboli. They donated their services for the red cover which was striking and simple. In 1994, *The Father’s Gift* was considered one of the top-selling Catholic video with distribution companies across the globe. Over 10,000 units of the video were distributed in a two month period alone after global release in five languages. For years it aired on Holy Thursday on EWTN, the Eternal Word Television Network and in Brazil on national television on Holy Thursday each year. Distributor rights were provided on all continents of the world for mass distribution so companies could distribute the video in their language and continent. For every dollar donated for the video, it was reinvested in providing free video’s to Third World Countries. The blessings continue today, close to 18 years later. In October, 2011 I received a telephone call on my business line asking if I knew how one would obtain a DVD copy of *The Father’s Gift*. I asked this lovely woman, “How did you hear about it?” She was quite articulate and said, “Oh, I was rummaging through a thrift store and found an old video copy of it. I bought it and took it home to watch on my old VCR. It moved me to tears and I want to share it with the rest of my family and friends.” Eighteen years later and it continues to convert souls? This call gave me hope to continue ‘flying my kite.’ Today, this video is distributed in a DVD format through Women of Grace International in Oldsmar, Florida.

“I am the Bread of life. He who comes to me will never be hungry; he who believes in me will never thirst.” John 6:25

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From the book:

“In the Whisper of the Wind”

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