



# RESTORING THE SACRED

By James Monti

## How A Plaster Statue Of Our Lady Changed One Young Woman's Life

### Part 2

In an earlier essay, we related the events leading to the conversion of the young Japanese university student Venerable Elizabeth Maria Satoko Kitahara (1929-1958), a conversion prompted by a decisive encounter with a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes. In this essay we complete our account of her spiritual journey.

Having been baptized and confirmed, Satoko, now 20, intent upon pursuing her dream of becoming a Mercedarian nun, arranged to have one of the sisters begin teaching her Spanish, an official language of the congregation. Anticipating her entrance into the convent with great joy, Satoko packed a black dress for her postulancy, and tucked her train ticket for the journey underneath her pillow as if it were her engagement ring.

But shortly before she was to leave for the convent, she developed a high fever. A doctor found that Satoko had tuberculosis. With the Mercedarians unable to receive her in this poor state of health, she was left at a loss as to what God's plan for her really was.

It was on a November day in 1950 that as Satoko was helping her mother with the household chores she heard a shop assistant from her older sister's shoe store calling out to her, "Lady Satoko,

come down and see! In the shop a little old man has come who looks entirely like Santa Claus!"

The visitor was the Polish Franciscan friar Brother Zeno Zebrowski (c. 1891-1982), who had come to Japan in 1930 with St. Maximilian Kolbe (1894-1941) to assist the latter in his bold plan to evangelize the country by means of his apostolate of Marian consecration.

Following Fr. Kolbe's return to Poland, Brother Zeno remained to continue the work of their Japanese mission. He had just arrived in Tokyo to begin assisting the poor of this city when as he was passing the shoe shop the store assistant spotted him. Thinking that Brother Zeno was a priest, he invited him in, telling him that the store owner's sister was a Christian.

As soon as Satoko entered the room Brother Zeno's eyes were drawn to the rosary beads dangling from the sash of her kimono. Satoko noticed the visitor's thick white beard and kind eyes, as he asked her in Japanese, "So you have received Baptism?"

"I was baptized at the convent of the Mercedarians," she answered. "Good, good! Do you, perhaps, have the intention of becoming a nun?" Startled by the friar's keen perception of her innermost thoughts, Satoko replied, "Yes, perhaps." "Ah, so it is," he answered, adding that the Blessed

Virgin would guide her, and asking her to pray intently for the poor.

Before leaving, the friar gave her a pamphlet about Fr. Kolbe, several issues of the Japanese edition of the *Journal of the Knights of the Immaculata*, and some holy cards of the Blessed Virgin.

In the evening, the shoe shop assistant returned to the house, breathless with excitement as he exclaimed, "Here... Look, Miss Satoko! The evening newspaper speaks of Santa Claus who came into the shop today." He showed her an article entitled, "A Cross at Arinomachi."

Arinomachi, a name meaning "Ants Town," was a riverbank settlement of impoverished and homeless Japanese, many of whom were children. Brother Zeno was there to help these desperate people, just as he had helped others like them elsewhere in the country. Satoko felt a desire to go and see the place, but she did not know how to contact Brother Zeno.

On December 1, as Satoko was closing the shutters of her family's home for the evening, she noticed through the window a robed figure rushing through the wind-driven rain without an umbrella. It was Brother Zeno. Eager to ask him about Arinomachi, she frantically ran after him. Forgetting to take an umbrella, she became soaked as she wandered through the streets,

trying to find her way to Ants Town. When at last she located Brother Zeno, he greeted her warmly and began introducing her to the grim world of Tokyo's poorest of the poor.

A few days before Christmas, Brother Zeno came again to see Satoko, this time bringing with him a stern stranger named Matsui Toru. The latter, who had made himself one of the unofficial leaders of the Ants Town settlement, was a Japanese intellectual with a genuine concern for the poor but also a bitter, snobbish contempt for Christianity. He had no use for Brother Zeno's piety, but he hoped the friar would win sympathy for the inhabitants of Ants Town. He and Zeno asked Satoko to prepare the slum village's children to present a Nativity play.

As Satoko assisted these children in presenting the play on Christmas Eve, there arose in her a deep maternal love for them. She had at long last found her mission in life. The girl who had aspired to be a concert hall pianist began using her gift for the piano to instruct and entertain these children.

Trials were to bring Satoko's service to perfection. Matsui accused her of being a religious hypocrite. As Satoko was by nature deeply sensitive, his insults sank like daggers into her, to which she responded by blaming herself and making ever greater demands upon herself. His criticisms were cruel and arrogant, but they were to serve as God's instruments in steering the young woman toward a life of total immolation in the service of the poor, which in turn was to transform Matsui himself. Less than three years after meeting Satoko for the first time, he was baptized.

Satoko resolved to live like the poor of Ants Town. As these people survived day to day by rag-picking, she decided to assist them by becoming a ragpicker herself. Satoko has left a very frank account of her early attempts at this, admitting her own feelings of revulsion and shame as she began collecting whatever could be salvaged from garbage.

Glancing about to make sure no one was watching her, she would hurriedly snatch what she had found and hide it in the sleeves of her kimono. But one day she discovered a lucrative pile of straw too large to be concealed, so she collected it in her arms and set off with it, hoping not to be seen or recognized along the way. But suddenly she found herself face to face with a woman who did know her. Satoko blushed and felt like she was going to die from embarrassment, but quietly invoking the Holy Name of Mary she overcame her shame and continued home.

Satoko was soon leading the children of Ants Town on rag-picking expeditions. Among the adults who participated was Satoko's own mother. Casting aside any concern about a Japanese woman of her refinement getting her hands soiled, she quickly tagged after her daughter and joined in her rag-picking apostolate.

It was not long after first meeting Brother Zeno that Satoko consecrated herself to the Immaculate Virgin Mary in the manner instituted by St. Maximilian Kolbe, becoming a member of the latter's *Militia Immaculatae* most probably toward the beginning of 1951. The rosary that was always in her hands, tucked into her kimono, or beside her pillow became the outward sign of this total consecration.

Praying everywhere she went, even while riding trains, she sought to attend Mass and receive Holy Communion as often as possible, hindered only by her poor health and the considerable distance she had to travel to get to the nearest Catholic church.

But the construction of a Catholic chapel in Ants Town at last gave her the opportunity to get to Mass daily. In addition, Satoko frequently visited the church "in order to thank the Lord," she would say.

### "How Good It Is!"

As Satoko was pursuing her mission of serving the poor, her other great mission was taking shape — an apostolate of suffering. The tuberculosis that had blocked her entrance into the convent was gradually taking its deadly course. Repeatedly Satoko found herself bedridden with dangerously high fevers. At such times she felt useless, unable to continue her labors for Ants Town. Yet her ceaseless recourse to the rosary as she lay in bed was quietly doing more good for Ants Town than any physical labor.

Satoko had also assimilated the distinctive charism of the Mercedarian congregation she had longed to join, offering her life to God for the good of others in the spirit of the Mercedarians' fourth vow in this regard. In everything she did, Satoko had one motivation, as expressed in a letter she wrote in 1952:

"How much greater should the joy of our Heavenly Father be if instead of saving only myself I shall lead to Him hand in hand so many other souls, saving them from the pains of hell!"

In the lives of holy souls we tend to expect the moment of death to be marked by some profound final word or incident. In Satoko's case, when that moment came, she was simply a little girl again in the tender care of her mother. At 7:00 in the morning of January 23, 1958, as Satoko was drinking a bit of water she had asked for, she said to her mother, "How good it is!" And with these words on her lips, she gently passed away. Four years later, Satoko's mother entered the Catholic Church.

Shortly before dying, Satoko told her niece Choko, "There is nothing to fear; in Catholicism we have all that is good." Satoko's discovery of this began with a visit to a Catholic church. May those of other faiths find the doors of our churches unlocked, that they too may enter and find Christ inside.

(Quotations in this and the preceding essay on Venerable Satoko Kitahara are from the 1997 *Positio super virtutibus* prepared for her beatification cause by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. A detailed biography of Satoko has been published by Ignatius Press: Fr. Paul Glynn, SM, *The Smile of a Ragpicker*, 2014.)

## Good And Bad Angels

### (Continued from 1B)

ness which He always gives with joy. But sin is always an act against God's will, an act of disobedience.

There are times when the action of the opposition demons is too much for a person to get rid of, and the help of the Church is needed to expel it from the person. It is called infestation, obsession, or possession, and the cure is called exorcism. That is when the Church authoritatively commands the Evil One in the name of Jesus Christ to leave a person or object. Exorcism banishes the Devil, withdraws people and things from his dominion, and protects against his power.

An exorcism may be public (with an authorized form in a rite), or private. When public, it may be simple (as within the rite of Baptism), or solemn (in case of possession).

Now folks, this is no joke: The reality of diabolical possession and exorcism is clearly set forth in Sacred Scripture. For instance, our Lord questions devils, or at times forbids them to speak; He casts them out and gives His apostles power over them (*Matt.* 11:18; 12:22f.; *Mark* 5:2f.; *Luke* 8:27f.; *Acts* 16:18; 19:13). The power which Christ gave to His apostles He has given to His Church.

Although the exorcist has power to expel the devil, the possessed person must cooperate with the help furnished by the Church by making a good Confession, by Mass, prayer, use of the sacramentals, and by observance of the Commandments.

In our own day, instances of possession have been proven by abundant evidence. Fr. Gabriele Amorth, the chief exorcist of Rome, who has performed thousands of exorcisms, has also written books about the topic. I strongly recommend that you read them! One of the books is called *An Exorcist Tells His Story* — a life-changing experience (available at [www.ignatius.com](http://www.ignatius.com), or call 1-800-651-1531).

Fr. Amorth explains that a successful exorcism can take minutes or hours, or longer; each case is different. Only a priest lawfully deputed by his bishop may perform an exorcism. It is presumptuous, dangerous, and disobedient for a layman to undertake such a ritual. Lacking authority from the Church to exorcise, he may expose himself to the power of the demon, whom he imitates by disobedience. Simplistic and imprudent laymen who try to exorcise the devil risk putting into practice the old adage, "He went out to steal wool and returned sheared."

The well-known lengthy prayer of Pope Leo XIII against Satan and the rebellious angels is not for use by the laity. The short prayer of Leo XIII to St. Michael is recommended for general use.

There is one important thing that we should note that Satan cannot do, even in the case of possession: It is to compel any one to commit sin. He may force his victim to do many things that are in themselves sinful, but cannot force him to approve of them. A demon may take possession of the body, but never of the soul. God has placed man's faculty of free will absolutely beyond the reach of evil spirits. If we misuse it, the fault is ours alone.

Next article: More on the powers of the Devil.

+ + +

(Raymond de Souza is an EWTN program host; regional coordinator for Portuguese-speaking countries for Human Life International [HLI]; president of the Sacred Heart Institute, and a member of the Sovereign, Military, and Hospitaller Order of the Knights of Malta. His website is: [www.RaymonddeSouza.com](http://www.RaymonddeSouza.com).)