



TESTIMONY 7/19/2024

Felipe and Pilar Caballero-Hernández -

P Good morning. We are Felipe and Pilar Caballero-Hernández and we are scared to death and with trembling legs, to speak before an audience of so many people and also doing it in a way in which we must undress before you as we are, without nuances, without heroic stories, but from our smallness and from our fragility exposing our heart, our feelings and our thoughts about our life stories.

We were invited to Turin to give you our testimony. A story that, like a roller coaster, is full of ups and downs with pains and joys, failures and successes, disappointments and perseverance, rejections and acceptances, resilience, encounters and satisfactions. We are like coffee with milk: I, the extra dose of caffeine, and Pilar the sweet touch that tries to balance this whirlwind of madness we call love.

How do we manage to turn a story of pains and falls into an inexhaustible source of love and redemption? The answer is simple. With the palpable miracle of Jesus in the midst of our relationship and with the presence and help of the various instruments He used, we were led to one of the Teams of Our Lady responsible teams and then we were able to join the Teams of Our Lady.

F We are Colombians, with a civil marriage for 33 years and a catholic marriage for 20 years. We have 2 children Nicolas and Mariana, 31 and 29 years old. Pilar is a bacteriologist and I am a medical specialist in General Surgery. Before marrying Pilar, I had a catholic marriage, from which a daughter was born, Paula, who is now 40 years old.

Until a year and a half before I met Pilar, my life was marked by slavery to addictive substances and alcohol. A painful and devastating situation that accompanied me for more than 15 years. My decision to change and seek help was recurrent but always superficial and ephemeral. It was necessary to go through limiting, painful and abusive situations in my life such as the death of my mother, putting my life and the lives of my loved ones at risk, losing my younger brother, being on the verge of losing the possibility of continuing to practice as a General Surgeon and situations of spiritual death, so that I finally accepted to receive specialized professional help outside my country for the treatment of my addiction.

P On the other hand, before our paths converged, I carried the weight of an equally painful history. When I was very young, I experienced the separation of my parents and due to their particular personal and emotional traits, my life did not continue with either of them, but due to decisions beyond my understanding, my four siblings and I were divided among our relatives, each one in a different home. I grew up in a sui generis family, made up of my godmother and her two unmarried sisters who, although I am convinced that they gave their best to provide me with emotional, educational and affective support, they were never able to fill the existential void of feeling alone and abandoned.



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F One of the failures that produced my inappropriate and enslaving behavior towards drugs was the separation from my first wife. This marriage took place during the most difficult moments of my addiction and without the slightest awareness of the great responsibility I was assuming. During my treatment, in the moments of greatest therapeutic confrontation, I could fortunately count on the loving support of a Catholic priest, also addicted to alcohol and following a treatment in which he was dispensed from consecrating with wine, a man who, from his own fragility, lovingly guided me to take my first spiritual steps towards an honest search for God. I remember being always ready with enthusiasm and joy to all his suggestions because in his weakness and in my own fragility, I felt the infinite strength of God's love for me. When I arrived back to my country, to face life from the unstable and dangerous condition of "recently recovered", I quickly built "my little altar" which is still today my favorite place to find peace, closeness and support in my path of abstinence and sobriety.

After these gray years of our life and in my case always with the awareness that only with will, perseverance and faith I could continue being a teetotaler as I have been since life gave me that second chance, (because once addicted, one is addicted for life), our paths crossed. We met in one of the largest clinics in our city, each of us practicing our profession.

P I remember our first meetings in which almost immediately my heart tried to burst out of my chest; his imposing figure (at least for me!!!) that filled all the spaces where he was, his deep voice, his laughter, his big and strong hands had me captivated.

F For my part, her joy and freshness, her grace in walking, her smile, and above all, her beauty and simplicity enchanted me and as if our story was already written, we felt that we would never be separated again. Everything went very fast, fueled by our mutual attraction and paradoxically, by our past that united us and made us stronger together. Thus, a month after we met, we were practically living together because we shared every minute of our existence that seemed so few to us.

P Since love was present, imperfect but evident, we decided to get married six years after we met, and we did it in a civil ceremony in Mexico City. After our vows before a judge, we moved to San Miguel de Allende to enjoy our honeymoon. We walked with great joy to the Parish of San Miguel Archangel, seeking the protection and blessing of the Lord and the Virgin for our union because deep inside us, despite feeling rejected by the Church, with the pain of not being able to participate in the Eucharist and feeling marginalized and singled out, we felt that God and Our Mother looked at us with love despite our flaws and our ups and downs. This profound and touching moment was our "religious" marriage in quotation marks, which marked for many years our life of faith and spiritual union along with our clandestine visits to churches far from our home, where we did not have the possibility of being singled out or rejected as we often were by priests who knew our condition of being civilly married and in my case separated and remarried. It was hard to try to be members of a church that we wanted to be, but did not feel part of.

F Paula, daughter of my first marriage and the engine of my recovery, and then our children, Nicolás and Mariana, who arrived some time after our civil union, were baptized, made their First Communion and were confirmed, because we wanted to provide them with an education in which Christ would be



in their lives. We regularly and permanently attended Sunday mass, where each time we were confronted with the painful reality of not being able to receive the Eucharist. There were several occasions when we were scolded and disconsolate in the Sacrament of Confession. On many occasions we felt rejected and questioned in a harsh and unfair way even by some friends who reminded us that we could not have Communion, many times we felt anger and frustration, excluded, and feeling like second-class Catholics.

P Although I never received a deep religious education at school, much less in my family, deep in my heart I always had Jesus with me and I knew I was blessed and privileged by His infinite love. In my childhood, my adolescence and my youth, His presence in my life, which I could not fully perceive, was miraculous and filled the pains that my family history generated. Today I know that I always walked hand in hand with Him through those dark ravines in which she revealed Himself to me more and more each day, as I surrendered and abandoned myself from my frailties.

At the beginning of this sharing, we told you that our story is above all a story of perseverance in which a miracle was worked. Why Miracle?

A miracle is an extraordinary event caused by the power of God that leads to the restoration of life above human limitations and even against prejudices and that is what happened in us. In that desire that we had in our hearts we were eager to live more closely an experience of faith, so we were attentive to catch any sign that would lead us in that direction. It was with this sensitivity that we saw that some of the parents of the kindergarten where we took our children were talking about team meetings. We inquired what the experience was all about.

When we found out in more detail, we were disappointed to find that the doors were closed to us because we could not have access to this privileged space of the Teams because we were only a civilly married couple and were unable to receive the sacrament of marriage. The pain and frustration were very great. Not only did we feel rejected by the church, but also by our own friends. We were definitely second-class Christians; a harsh reality that we would have to accept, carrying a stigma that left deep wounds that were difficult to heal.

However, a light emerged in the darkness. A couple of these friends from our children's school told us that they knew about an experience of conjugality in which some couples from the Teams were working, accompanying remarried separated couples, they called it apostolates. It was in this way that they gave us the coordinates of some true apostles (today we understand the true scope of this word), who became our spiritual counselors and beings that marked our lives. They welcomed us with much love, inviting us to attend for the first time, an information meeting on "Love as a couple". Several couples from the Teams attended this meeting, showing themselves full of love and compassion, and other couples who lived in the same situation, separated and remarried. Pilar and I were deeply happy to find a space for the first time, in which prayer, mutual support and spiritual growth would strengthen our relationship with God, which up to that moment was fragile and inconsistent.



Not being able to receive the body and blood of Christ, our condition of 'separated and remarried' led us to fight for the longed-for Sacrament of the Eucharist. We started the process of requesting the nullity of the marriage, which had many conditions to be accepted, but a process that we carried to a successful conclusion thus nullifying that bond. After achieving it, our 3 children as pageboys, some companions of the Teams, family and friends, accompanied us as first line witnesses of our definitive 'yes' before God, receiving the longed Sacrament of which we were no longer deprived, but that we knew and desired from the depth of our beings.

Pilar and I received with enthusiasm, fervor and wonderful impact, what we had longed for during so many years of struggle. It was a sublime moment for both of us. The Eucharist was the center of our whole being and spirit. We had fought for it and we had achieved it. We had not received the Sacrament, we had earned it on a path of struggle and redemption. Jesus had revealed Himself to both of us and we were already three. We began to really perceive, in a different way, his presence in our spirit and in our interior.

From that moment on, our lives were never the same again. We were in the same house, in the same bed, in the same environment, but with the great difference that in the midst of both of us, little by little, the figure of our Lord was revealed. As his presence became greater and greater, we understood that we had to be more and more poor, humble and small, and the Eucharistic experience acted as a balm that soothed our deepest emotional wounds. Being able to recognize God in others has fostered mutual respect, generosity, compassion, joy and mercy, generating in our souls an attitude of forgiveness. Prayer together has become a unique language that has gradually united our hearts as we had never experienced before, in those moments of shared recollection we have immersed ourselves in a sacred space, which has taught us that it is not only an act of communication with God, but a means to communicate deeply with each other, making us one flesh, revealing our longings, hopes and gratitude that perhaps otherwise, we could not express.

This legacy that transformed us and redeemed us so lovingly is the one that today we try to transmit to our children and to the society to which we belong; it is the most important achievement that we have obtained as a couple and as active members of the Teams, that was instrument of healing.

Let us never stop acting, communicating and helping to heal, always having, as Pope Francis says, the conscience and the decision to be a field hospital, going out to meet those who need us.

We are privileged witnesses of this miracle.

Thank you very much for your patient and respectful listening.