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“I found God in a beggar on the metro”

Giampiero Autiero is an Italian surgeon who emigrated to Germany in search of work. An encounter with a beggar on the metro led him to change his life.

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I want to tell you how I found Jesus in the person of a beggar. My name is Giampiero Autiero. I work in a hospital in Germany and I am one of

the many Italians who have emigrated in search of a job opportunity.

At first, it wasn't easy to adapt to the German culture. Working in another language, living in a tiny apartment, losing contact with childhood friends and giving up watching your parents grow older are sacrifices that emigrating to another country involves.

Five years later, despite all the hardships at first, I am happy living in Germany with my wife and children. It isn't easy to leave behind so many persons who are dear to me, and the sites and even smells of my childhood spent growing up in Naples. But my family gives me the courage and strength to keep going. Besides, here in Germany is where I found God. It happened like this.

A beggar on the metro

One day, after attending a conference in Munich, I took the subway. When only one stop was left before the airport, where I was to catch a flight home, a poorly dressed beggar staggered through the subway car and stopped beside me. Looking at me intently, he asked me if I could give him the metro ticket I had used, so he could continue the trip with it. But I felt uncomfortable at his request, and refused. Without complaining, he walked away.

On getting out of the car, I found him again at the foot of the stairs leading to the surface. He repeated the same request, and I refused again, even though I wasn't going to need that ticket any more.

Later, while chatting with some colleagues, I suddenly realized that I didn't have my mobile phone with me. Right away the image of the beggar came to my mind. I

immediately reported the loss to the security service and went to the lost property office, but the phone wasn't there.

With a friend's cell phone, I sent a message to my own phone, hoping that whoever had it would contact me. I was desperate. I had on the phone memories and contacts from all my years in Germany. I called my number again and finally a friendly voice answered. Someone had found it on the metro seat, and he told me I could meet him three stops from there.

Even though I knew I was risking missing my flight home, I went to meet the unknown person who had answered. It turned out to be a well-dressed young man, who recognized me right away by the concerned look on my face. I wanted to offer him some money as a reward, but he wouldn't accept it. And he told me,

“Here, take my ticket for your return trip on the metro. I don’t need it anymore.” My heart froze at his words. I realized how heartless I had been, by denying help to my neighbor in need. I had been arrogant and selfish. I had had the opportunity to help someone less fortunate, and had misused it. And now this person was helping me. I had met our Lord dressed as a beggar, and I hadn’t been ready to serve him.

At other times in the past I had offered my help to people in need, but that day I wasn’t able to. All that made me reflect. My lack of compassion led to the decision to try to do more for our Lord, and several days later, when back in Naples for a few days, I wrote an email to the Opus Dei website.

An immense panorama

A cooperator of Opus Dei contacted me and invited me to an evening of recollection at the Monterone residence. The meeting lasted only a few hours, but I could sense the atmosphere of serenity and peace there. And I felt the desire to share in the happiness that I saw in the people there.

When I returned to Germany, I continued to go to the activities of Christian formation offered by Opus Dei. I learned to offer God my work, to serve others in my ordinary activities, and to provide those in need with a word of comfort and support. In the center of Opus Dei in Berlin, I met Father Wolfgang Weber, and we agreed to continue meeting along with other people who go to activities organized near Hamburg, where I now live.

Two years have gone by since then and my life has changed. I have

learned to pray in another language. I thought it would be impossible, but I have succeeded. In the thousand and one difficulties each day, in the demanding work of a surgeon, in family life filled with both joyful and difficult moments, I thank God for having found this path. And he helps me find the time needed for prayer each day, so as to confront together—God and I—all the challenges. As a supernumerary of Opus Dei, I just want to be a good Christian, able to pass on to my children my love for God. I have found God, and I want to love him more each day.
