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Kidnapped architect finds spiritual freedom in tiny cell

Bosco Gutierrez is Mexican architect who was invited by the Neeje Association for Women in Ottawa to speak about his harrowing kidnapping in 1990, and how he encountered true inner freedom.

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Bosco Gutierrez Cortina found spiritual freedom during the nine

months he was held hostage in a tiny cell in Mexico City.

The Mexican architect travelled to Ottawa Feb. 9 to tell how God used his plight to deepen his faith in the hope his story would strengthen others' belief

“We are safe if we put ourselves in His hands,” he told a packed auditorium at the University of Ottawa at the event sponsored by the Neejee Association for Women and Family. “It is time we realize this truth. On this lies our happiness here on earth, and our eternal happiness in heaven.”

Except for an endlessly repeating cassette tape playing a radio station's music and ads, he never heard a human voice or saw a human face for those nine months 18 years ago.

The Mexican professional was then 33-years old, the father of seven

children, when his ordeal began in August 1990. His kidnappers planned to extort a ransom from his prominent father and his large family of 13 siblings.

Facing his captors

Thrown in the trunk of a car, stripped naked, carried in a blanket “like a little taco,” Gutierrez described the surreal experience of first seeing two of his captors disguised under white sheets like the Ku Klux Klan once the painted goggles blocking his sight were removed.

His captors told him via written instructions, that he must answer truthfully such things as where his wife went to the hairdresser, what school his children attended, what route they took and so on. If he lied, they threatened to kill him and kidnap one of his brothers.

He decided to answer only those questions his captors could verify if they put his family under surveillance, but he still felt as if he had betrayed them.

“I felt like a piece of nothing.”

For a couple of weeks, he sat in the corner by the makeshift toilet in a fetal position, hoping to die. His captors realized that if they didn't do something he was going to die, so they wrote him a message on Mexico's Independence Day and told him he could have a drink. He asked for a high ball-sized glass of whiskey. When it arrived, he felt it “was the best thing I ever had.”

Cult of the whiskey

It began what he called a “cult of the whiskey,” where he smelled it, ran the glass along his unshaven dirty face. But then he heard an internal prompt : “Bosco, give up the whiskey.

Show me you are strong.” That internal voice persisted, “Give me something that is under your control.”

So he threw the whiskey away without taking a sip. He wrote himself a note. “Today I won my first battle. I know at the end I can still be free, that I am not a piece of nothing.”

He also realized his family was trying to arrange for his release and praying for him and he was part of a team. So he designed a regime of regular prayer and exercise and Bible study. He also realized he could not live with anxiety.

“You’re naked. What the heck!” he said, quipping he was in a cell in warm Mexico and not frigid Ottawa. “You’re going to have a very good story to tell.”

Though he had grown up Catholic, “I had to make it my own faith.” He decided to give his faith 100 per cent.

“If you believe in God you cannot be afraid. If He is omnipotent, He can do anything.”

He realized God had allowed the kidnapping to happen and that ultimately it was “going to be good” for him.

One night he dreamt he was in hell. A man in front of him was yelling, “I am in hell because I was bad. Nobody helped to convince me I was wrong.”

“You are in hell because you didn’t help anyone,” the man told him.

Gutierrez realized he must reach out to his captors. He started devoting time every day to pray for them. At Christmas, he told them they were going to pray together at 8:00 o’clock.

Though he had no idea of the time, he received a note saying: “We are ready.”

The window in the upper part of his door swung open to reveal all five captors, dressed in the white disguises, red gloves on, with their arms crossed. Gutierrez read the Christmas story from the Bible. “They stood as statues,” as he then recounted some personal experiences. Then he prayed a decade of the Rosary. At the end, one by one, they came forward and shook his hand.

“Can you imagine the happiness inside my soul?” he said. “It was the happiest Christmas I ever had.”

God touched them

The next day, they gave him shorts, socks, a t-shirt and a watch. They also switched the relentless radio station cassette recording to Mozart,

and turned it off at night. Not long after one of his captors wrote him: “What is the source of your strength?”

“I understand that I am not going to die either one minute before or after what God wants,” he said, telling them that even if they killed him he would go to heaven and his family and he would still be winners, because they had prayed and had faith.

Virgin Mary's guidance

He then began a program for his captors of weekly Saturday sessions. He told them he would ask the Virgin Mary to provide him inspiration for what to tell them. They came and listened to every session.

When a planned ransom drop fell through, he faced another three months of captivity, so he decided to try out his makeshift tools while he

could hear one guard taking a shower and the other sleeping. He ended up walking past them to freedom. His family decided not to pursue an investigation as a tacit agreement with his kidnappers that they leave them alone.

Gutierrez and his wife Gabriela, now the mother of nine, travelled at their own expense to Ottawa to help the Neejee Association, a charitable organization that runs the Valrideau University Residence for women in Ottawa, and offers programs to encourage women and strengthen families. Its spiritual activities fall under the Opus Dei Prelature.

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