

A Woman Named “Titia” and Her Story of a Simple Rosary

This is the text of a letter Fr. G. Megens, O. Carm., wrote to Titus Brandsma Parish in Colmschate (The Netherlands) in November 2000. Fr. Megens tells the story of Titus Brandsma’s rosary which is now kept in the parish chapel.

He wrote, “This is the last rosary Titus had prayed before his death and which, on his deathbed, he gave to the nurse who hailed from Holland (she was called “Titia” during the trial). She administered the so-called “mercy-injection” to Brandsma.”

“In 1957/58 she visited the late Father Gemmeke a few times (who was my housemate in Hengelo at the time) and entrusted that rosary to him. When the Titus Brandsma Parish was officially founded in Colmschate in 1980, Father Gemmeke, then my housemate in Deventer, said to me: ‘Here is Father Titus’ rosary for your Parish.’ Was I ever happy about that!”

“However, the story behind the rosary was not well known to me until, here at Nijmegen, I found the official explanation during the trial around the beatification of Father Titus. I realized at once that, in Colmschate where this valuable piece of inheritance is being kept, they have to get to know this story. For this reason I am pleased to offer to you her declaration to let you know what that rosary and especially Father Titus himself has meant for her and what he may mean to your Parish and to each one of you.”

THE TESTIMONY OF “TITIA”

On May 28th at 2 o’clock, of her own doing, this witness appeared in front of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal in Kamp-Lintfort, declaring that she was present at the bedside of Titus Brandsma during the last days of his life. With her declaration she wanted to render a service to Father Titus “because I have to make up so much yet and in appreciation, because he has helped me so much. Also in this way to contribute to the beatification of “Father Titus.”

“I bear witness because of the personal knowledge. I was in Dachau from April till October, 1942. There I got to know Father Titus a week before his death. I was a nurse in the infirmary of the concentration camp at Dachau. I visited him twice a day. Fourteen or 15 times I spoke with him briefly, about 10 minutes each time.”

“When I was 16 years old I went to Berlin as a nurse of the Red Cross. There we had to swear an oath that we viewed Hitler as our god and we had to confirm that we would never go to church. The church and all else was only deceit. The Jews would have to be completely exterminated. That was the start of our training. I was too young to understand the consequences of all this.”

“He (Titus) would have to die, irrespective of the fact that he would have arrived from Holland in good health, because they had a great deal of hatred towards distinguished clergy. When he arrived at the infirmary, he was already a candidate for death. That stems from the fact that the doctor had pointed him out as one of those who, after a certain period of time, would be administered the ‘Mercy-Injection.’”

“I have rarely seen anybody who got well because of medical treatment.”

“I sensed immediately that he felt very sorry for me. He was very gentle because he was aware that we, the doctor and I, had life and death at our disposal. The camp doctor’s name was Dr. Wolters. Often Dr. Wolters was very impudent. Father Titus was always very

friendly and kind towards the doctor. As well, he felt very sorry for me and asked how I could have gotten this far. Then I told him how things had come about. Once he took me by the hand and said “What a poor girl you are. I pray for you a lot.”

“Generally we talked about Holland and he told me that he came from a convent in Nijmegen.”

“He also gave me a letter to deliver secretly outside the camp. I accepted the letter but afterwards I tore it up because I was afraid.”

“He gave me his rosary, as well, to allow me to pray. I answered him that I was unable to pray and therefore did not need it. He told me that although I did not know how to pray, I could at least recite the second part of the Hail Mary: ‘Pray for us sinners.’ I started laughing then. He told me that, if I were to pray a lot, I would not be lost.” (Here the witness showed the rosary.)

“I felt a dislike towards the other patients. Even hundreds of priests have made no impression at all. Only Father Titus had my sympathy immediately and I got to know him as a kind patient.”

“He asked me once if I smoked. I said yes and then he gave me two cigarettes, which was not more than a bit of tobacco rolled in a piece of paper, while we received good cigarettes ourselves.”

“Another time I told him about the Polish priests, who secretly offered Holy Mass during the morning. I said that the majority of the priests were good for nothing. He answered with a word from St. Theresa, that it is not necessarily the best priests who deliver the most beautiful sermons from the pulpit, but the best priests are those who have to suffer much and who offer their suffering for the sinners. He added that he was content to be able to suffer.”

“Besides the rosary Titus gave me some notes on which he had written some prayers. Those notes I lost later on.”

“One time he was taken along for an experiment and, in spite of the fact that he had a suspicion what it was all about, he remained friendly and retained his good mood. I remember that he said at that moment: ‘Your will be done, not mine.’ These words impressed me a good deal. At this experiment, which Titus was subjected to, I was personally present. I have the impression that he was unable to offer resistance and he felt deeply unhappy, yet he never mentioned it again.”

“He was always cheerful. Several times I have tried to understand him better, but he never told me why he was arrested.”

“Never did he show any remorse as to the reason why he was arrested.”

“Dr. Wolters, as well, was wary because he said: ‘This is a remarkable man, for when you speak with him or ask him something, he never offers resistance.’ Whoever had seen him would come away with the impression that there was something supernatural about him.”

“Usually there were a number of patients at his bedside everyday, which I was able to ascertain. He always knew how to console people. Once, I was present when a man who stood close to his bed, wept while he told his life story. I heard Titus say: ‘But my dear man, that is not so bad. It is all in the Past.’”

“A great majority of the ill prisoners were only concerned about themselves and only thought about themselves, but Titus was always in a good frame of mind and was a support for everyone and, in a special way, for me.”

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