

## A Christian Home and Church

Matilde Palau, a young Argentine woman, heard a knock at the front door of her home. Opening it, she found a tall, sharply dressed British gentleman standing on the step. He held a fine-looking book in one hand and a heavy walking stick, which was sometimes needed to ward off aggressive dogs, in the other.

‘Buenos Dias, Senora,’ he greeted Matilde pleasantly. Then holding up the book, he asked, ‘Would you like a copy of the Word of God?’

Matilde was a devout Roman Catholic. She regularly attended Mass where she sometimes heard Scripture verses read. But it is not known whether she had ever owned a Bible of her own.

Gladly she received the attractive copy of the New Testament in Spanish, which was given to her free of charge. ‘Muchos gracias,’ she stated sincerely.

Matilde’s life was very happy. She was married to her husband, Luis, who worked hard and provided well for them. They loved each other deeply and were joyfully anticipating the birth of their first child. However, for many years Matilde had been unable to find the spiritual peace that her soul craved. She

faithfully attended Mass and confessed her sins to the priest. She served in church by playing the organ. She made promises to God and tried to keep them. Yet, something was missing. She did not have inner peace.

She immediately began to read the New Testament. So deep was her reverence for God's Word, that she read it on her knees! Soon she came to Matthew 5:8, where Christ Jesus stated: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.' Instead of being encouraged by Christ's words, she at first felt despair. 'That's it,' she thought, 'I will never see God. I know that I do not have a pure heart.'

As she was praying, however, the Lord spoke to her in her heart: 'My daughter, you are mine. You are forgiven.' She suddenly remembered John the Baptist's testimony about Jesus that she had often heard the priest quote at the Mass: 'Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29).

Joy flooded her heart as she realized: 'This Lamb was for me! He came to take away my sin!' Her fears of 'I will never find peace with God and will never be forgiven' instantly vanished, as she trusted in Christ as the Lamb of God who had come to save her from her sins. At last she had found the spiritual peace and rest that her heart had longed to have for so many years.

Brimming over with joy, Matilde sought out the kindly British man who had given her the New Testament. His name was Edward Rogers. He had come to Argentina as a self-supporting missionary. During

the week he worked as a high-ranking executive for the Shell Oil Company in Buenos Aires, the capital city of Argentina. On the weekend he carried out evangelistic work in Ingeniero Maschwitz (usually called simply Maschwitz), the small town where the Palaus lived, about thirty miles northwest of Buenos Aires. Mr. Rogers had also planted a Plymouth Brethren Chapel in Maschwitz, the first non-Catholic church in town.

After telling Mr. Rogers of her new-found peace from trusting in Jesus as her Savior, Matilde asked him, 'Should I leave the Catholic church?'

'No, no! Stay there,' he advised. 'Tell your friends what you've experienced. Tell them how the Lord has brought peace to your heart. Many of them are probably still searching for what you have found. Then, in the evenings, come join our Bible meetings in our little chapel.'

She did that for a time. Eventually she came to believe that her duty to the Catholic church was fulfilled, and she started attending the Brethren chapel services Sunday morning and evening.

Matilde desired her husband to have the same peace and joy that she had found. She tried to share with him about spiritual matters, but he made it clear he was not interested.

Though only in his early twenties, Luis was already enjoying considerable success as a businessman. He had his own construction company. In addition, he was a tough, muscular athlete who played soccer in his spare

time. Though he was a member of the Catholic church, he viewed religion as a crutch to help the fearful and weak – something for women, children, and the elderly, but not for strong men like himself.

Luis drove his wife to church every Sunday. After dropping her off, he would go for a drink with his buddies then return when the service was over. But one Sunday evening he surprised Matilde by going into the chapel with her.

Right in the middle of the pastor's sermon, Mr. Palau suddenly stood up and announced: 'I receive Jesus Christ as my only and sufficient Savior.' Having made his simple, sincere declaration of faith in Christ, he then sat back down. From that night forward he was a totally devoted follower of Jesus.

Luis and Matilde's firstborn child was a son whom they named Luis Palau, Jr. He was born on November 27, 1934, a few months after his mother trusted in Christ and several months before his father became a Christian. In the decade that followed, five daughters were born to the couple.

When Luis and Matilde dedicated their young son to the Lord they prayed: 'Lord, here is Luisito. He is yours. Use him for your glory and as you wish, so many may come to know you through him.' They kept this prayer a secret just between them and God. So, their son did not know about their prayer for many years.

Later, when Luis entered his teen years, he was concerned about his future. 'My friends already know

what they're going to do when they grow up,' he told his mother. 'I don't have a clue what I will do.'

She did not want to pressure her son with her own heart's desire that he would serve the Lord as a preacher of the gospel of salvation. So she wisely responded: 'You don't know what you will do, Luis, but God does. He will show it to you at the right time.'

Mr. and Mrs. Palau faithfully attended the Brethren church with their children. The tiny chapel measured only about 20 feet by 20 feet. Its walls and roof were made with sheets of corrugated metal. When the heavy winter rains poured down against the metal roof and walls, they nearly drowned out the sound of the congregation's singing and the voice of the preacher.

Young Luis gained many spiritual benefits from his years growing up in that small, humble church. In Sunday School he learned Bible stories and memory verses. The Lord's Supper was solemnly observed each Sunday morning. Mr. Rogers' clear preaching emphasized not only the problem of sin in each person's heart and life, but also God's gracious solutions of forgiveness, spiritual rebirth and eternal life through saving faith in Jesus. This helped prepare Luis's heart to believe in and receive Christ at a later time.

Luis's father enthusiastically assisted Mr. Rogers with evangelism and church planting in the surrounding area. Mr. Palau actively involved his family in those outreaches. Luis, his mother, and his sisters would ride with his father to nearby towns to hold street preaching

meetings. The Palau children, seated on benches in the back of the truck, would throw out flyers, inviting people to a meeting to hear the gospel.

The family brought along a pump organ for Mrs. Palau to play at the meeting. This helped to draw people to listen to what was being shared. Mr. Rogers would preach, and Mr. Palau would tell his story of how he had become a Christian. His testimony always featured John 3:16: 'For God so loved the world, that he gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.' That verse was always followed by Acts 16:31: 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household.'

As Mr. Rogers and Mr. Palau spoke, Luis and his sisters would weave through the crowd, passing out gospel tracts. 'Have one of these!' Luis would offer, then add the suggestion, 'Go read it.' Some accepted their literature, while others teased or even insulted them.

Remarkably, over the course of several years, Mr. Rogers and Mr. Palau were used of the Lord to plant nine new churches around Buenos Aires. Every summer they selected a new town in which to minister. They would preach on the streets and gather new converts. Then as the year ended, they appointed leaders for a new church. Mr. Palau built each new church a simple chapel, complete with a baptistery and an outhouse. Around seventy-five years later, Luis would write: 'The nine churches they planted still exist today as a testament to their ministry.'