

S4



Priests for Scotland

Vocations Awareness Week

Chiara Badano: Clear Light

Introduction

This week the Catholic Church in Scotland celebrates Vocations Awareness Week. 'Vocation' means calling, specifically a calling from God. In the Church and in the school, when we hear the word 'vocation' we probably think of God calling people to serve Him as priests, deacons and religious sisters. We believe, however, that everyone has a 'vocation', that God calls everyone to some form of service in the Church and in the community. In this lesson, we're calling to look at the life of Chiara Badano, a young Italian woman who responded to God's call in a variety of ways throughout her short life.

The Background

Troubled Times: Chiara was born in 1971 in Sassarolo, a small village in the Northwest of Italy. Her father, Ruggero, was a truck driver and her mother, Maria, was a housewife. The couple had waited and prayed eleven years to have Chiara and they believed that she was a gift from God. Things, however, were difficult for the family, the community and the Italian nation at this time. Ruggero was frequently without work, there was little employment in the local area and Italy was going through a time of massive, political and social upheaval called by historians '*anni di piombo*' - 'the years of lead'. During this time groups from the far-right and far-left of the political spectrum carried out assassinations, bombings and kidnappings. Despite all these difficulties and challenges, however, the family were happy and were blessed with a deep faith in God

An Apple A Day

When she was 18, a family friend asked Chiara what was her most valuable childhood memory. Chiara told the story of how at the age of six, she had taken an apple from a neighbour's orchard. Her mother caught her and made her go and apologise to her neighbour for stealing the apple. She didn't want to go because she felt embarrassed but eventually, at her mother's insistence, she went and said sorry to her neighbour. After accepting her apology, the neighbour gave her a basket of apples to reward her honesty and sincerity. Chiara said that this made her realise that 'forgiveness leads us to places we can't imagine.....and that, how much more than apples will God give me if I always ask for his forgiveness with honesty and sincerity'.

Tennis

Chiara was a very talented tennis player. She regularly represented her school in competitions and was regularly featured in the local media. Her teachers presumed that one day she would become a professional tennis player. Chiara, however, seems to have had different ideas. She often commented that she would never play tennis for money but only to glorify God. She said "God gave me this talent with the tennis racket. Every time I step on the court, I want to give him that talent back. Our talents are gifts from God but what we do with those talents - well, that's our gift to Him'.

The Faith

From early childhood, Chiara had a very strong faith in God. She prayed regularly and went to Mass sometimes three or four times a week. At the age of 9, she joined a Catholic movement called Focolare which held regular retreats and services for young people. She was often teased in school because of this and was nicknamed 'Sister Chiara'. Chiara failed the first year of High School and her parents this was due to the teasing she experienced.

For Reflection

Troubled Times: Chiara was born in 1971 during a very difficult period in Italian history. What year were you born in? Can you find out about significant events that took place in the year you were born?

An Apple A Day: Chiara experienced being forgiven by a neighbour. This led her to reflect on the gift and mystery of forgiveness. Do you find it hard to forgive people? Do you find it difficult to accept forgiveness?

Tennis: Chiara was a very talented tennis player. What gifts and talents do you have? How do use your gifts and talents? How might you use your gifts and talents in service of other people, your school, the community and the Church?

The Faith: Chiara was teased at school for having a strong faith in God. What do you think of this? Do you always have respect for other people's beliefs?

Chiara Badano: Clear Light

The Diagnosis

When she was 17, Chiara experienced a great deal of pain coming from the area of her shoulder. She presumed it was a sports injury and she attended physiotherapy. The pain, however, continued and Chiara was sent for a series of medical tests. Eventually, the Doctors informed her that her pain wasn't the result of a sports injury but caused by a rare and painful form of bone cancer. After Chiara received the news of her diagnosis, people noticed a sudden change in her that was difficult to describe. Her doctor reported the following: "I went to see Chiara the day after she had received the diagnosis. I was very nervous. Here was a fit, lively 17 year old who had just received the most awful news. My job was to explain to her what lay ahead - the pain, the months of chemotherapy, the loss of her hair, the weakening of her body and, to be frank, the very slim chance of recovery. As I opened the door I expected Chiara to be very upset. I was truly heartbroken for her and her family. When I entered the room, however, Chiara was sitting on her bed reading the Bible. What I couldn't understand then and still don't get to this day was the look in her eyes. I have ever seen eyes so full of life, light and love. There was such warmth. My son was ill at the time and Chiara spent the next 30 minutes asking about him and about how my wife and I were coping. When I eventually got round to talking about her disease and all the various treatment plans, she simply said 'Doctor, Christ abandoned everything for me and now I abandon myself to him'. I've never been a terribly religious man but God was in that room, God was behind her eyes. The nurses on the ward all noticed the same thing. Chiara is the Italian form of the name 'Clare' but in our language it also means 'clear' - so we started calling her not 'Chiara Badano' but 'Chiara Luce' - 'Clear Light' - that's what she was!

The Carer

'Clear Light', however, wasn't an ideal patient! The Doctors and Nurses always had problems tracking Chiara down to give her the treatment for her cancer. She was always somewhere else helping care for other patients. Her ward was specifically for teenagers with a variety of medical problems. She developed a real bond with a girl who was being treated for severe depression. She was always reading to her and taking her out for walks. Her Doctor suggested to her that she really had to take care of herself before worrying about others. She responded 'I know but the Lord has other plans for me'. Despite being in severe pain, Chiara refused to take any medication. She said she didn't want to be drowsy or tired but free to help those less fortunate than herself'.

The Friend

Chiara's friends also noticed a big change in her. One of her friends explains: "We went to see Chiara to cheer her up and keep her company.....or so we thought! Soon though we were going to her with out problems. We'd want her advice, guidance and encouragement. Chiara was always my friend but we became a lot closer at that time. Her advice was always the same 'Give it to Jesus, let him carry your problems'. Chiara's friendship helped me re-discover my faith. I hadn't been to Mass since my First Holy Communion but I started going back when I was 17 - thanks to Chiara. Our friend went to volunteer in Africa and she gave him all her money. She said she didn't need it anymore.

The Daughter

In the summer of 1990, Chiara and her parents received the devastating news that all treatments had failed and Chiara only had weeks to live. Her mum and dad were incredibly upset but Chiara was as resilient as ever. Her mum reports what happened: 'As you can understand, we were incredibly upset when the Doctors gave us the news but Chiara was so strong. I remember her saying 'Mum, I'm your daughter and perhaps not always a very daughter (we had our moments!) but now maybe its time for me to be the mum and taker care of everything'. The very next day she insisted that we pick all the hymns and readings for her Funeral Mass. She booked my husband and I a holiday for the following February and she even gave us Christmas cards for her friends. She kept saying 'Don't shed any tears for me. I'm going to Jesus. At my funeral, I don't want people crying, but singing with all their hearts.'

Signs

In the last weeks of her life, Chiara often spoke about sensing Jesus at er side. She also said that during a particularly painful procedure, she became aware of the presence of a lady with a very beautiful and luminous smile. Chiara said that the 'Lady came up to me and took me by the hand, and her touch filled me with courage. In the same way that she arrived, she disappeared, and I could no longer see her. But my heart was filled with an immense joy and all fear left me. In that moment I understood that if we're always ready for everything, God sends us many signs of his love." Those close to Chiara say this 'Lady' was the Virgin Mary. One of Chiara's last visitors was Cardinal Saldarini, a senior Churchman. He asked her, "The light in your eyes is splendid. Where does it come from?" Chiara simply replied, "I try to love Jesus as much as I can." The Cardinal then asked Chiara how she wanted to be remembered. Chiara said " young people...they are the future. You see, I can't run anymore, but how I would like to pass on to them the torch, like in the Olympics! Young people have only one life and it's worthwhile to spend it well." Shortly after going to confession and receiving Holy Communion, Chiara died at 4am on October 7, 1990, with her parents at her bedside.

For Reflection

The Diagnosis: The Doctor was very surprised with Chiara's reaction to her diagnosis. Has anyone in your life surprised you with their courage or generosity or faith? How did this make you feel?

The Carer: God calls some people to serve Him as priests, deacons and religious sisters but He calls everyone to care for others. How do we care for our family, our school and our community?

The Friend: What qualities do we look for in a friend? Who do we trust and why?

The Daughter: Chiara's home life wasn't always easy but she worked hard to make things easier. What can we do to improve the lives of those at home with us?

Signs: Chiara was aware of signs of God's presence in her life. What 'signs' point to God's presence in your life? Is there a Priest or someone else in your life who makes you think about God's presence?

Saint

Immediately after death, people started talking about Chiara possibly being a Saint. In 1999, her cause for Sainthood was introduced in 1999. She was declared 'Venerable' in 2008. This meant that Church recognised that she had been 'venerable' in faith, hope and charity throughout her life. In 2008, Pope Benedict XVI acknowledged the miracle of a young Italian boy whose parents interceded to Chiara to heal him from meningitis that was destroying his organs. His doctors could not medically explain his sudden healing. In 2010, Chiara was declared a "Blessed". This is the last stage before a person is made a saint. Speaking about her life, Archbishop Angelo Amato, the head of the Vatican Congregation of the Causes of Saints, said that Chiara was a great example of how the short life of the young could be lived out in great holiness. The Church remembers Chiara on the 29th October - her birthday!

Extension Tasks

#gosee

There are a lot of resources on-line about Chiara's life. Watch highlights from her beatification on youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bShKKjvJirM>

#goprayer

Chiara had a great devotion to Mary. She said the Rosary every day! Perhaps with your class say a decade of the Rosary for someone you who is sick. You could invite your chaplain in to lead you in your prayer time.

#godiscover

Chiara is on course to be a 'teenage Saint'. There are, however, other teenagers who the Church has declared as saints. Find out about the lives of one of these Saints and present their story to your classmates. Make a poster or work on a presentation.

Teenage Saints to research:

Saint Dymphna
St. Kateri Tekakwitha
Saint Dominic Savio
Saint Tarcisus



