

Daniela Zanetta

The key to happiness: suffering immersed in Love (15.12.1962-14.04.1986)



Portrait of a young girl from Maggiora (Novara, Italy) who asks herself a question: are we sure that happiness, to which we have a right, coincides with physical health at all costs?

Danielina, as the Gen called her, lived a short life marked by a serious skin disease: *“a seal stamped on my flesh since my first cry”*, she wrote in her diary. Yet she always had a peaceful expression and the diary pages she wrote- or dictated when her health deteriorated- were lofty, youthful and joyful hymns to life: *“Today I’m 21! I am truly happy and love life. I am happy to be here, to live, to fight (...) Lord, I’m so happy I want to sing and dance. (...) Thank you, thank you for everything!”*

What was the secret of this apparent paradox? Daniela’s story is all about love of God and of those around her. She was 11 when she met Chiara’s Ideal and for her it meant “understanding the cross, understanding suffering, accepting it as a gift and living it deep down”. In 1982 she states: “You Father have entrusted me with this task (...) as if You wanted to be sure not to lose me, to be able to track me down at the bat of an eye”.

Through their letters Daniela and Chiara Lubich had a deep relationship. She loved everyone and every moment of her 23 years and 4 months spent on the Cross showed that her illness was not an obstacle to loving: suffering proved to be the secret to happiness. “The long hours dedicated to the thousand and one difficulties, inconceivable to us healthy people, require a precise and determined will to live”, comments Dr. Cavagnino, one of her doctors, “How did she have this? She was bursting with love for others (...) her eyes, which were red because of the illness, were full of joy and they saw beyond the hospital walls, her pain was a gift to others”.

Everyone was marked by Daniela’s love because she took care of those around her, she perceived hidden problems and was capable of pulling them out of people. In exchange, a network of friendship and support grew around her. Her family who sustained her through everything, in turn, had their horizons opened to others in difficulty. Daniela wrote in her diary: “Today things are going better because I had the chance to love You in these people... I have lots of prayers for you, lots of people who I love to entrust to you”.

There’s much more we could say about this girl **whose beatification process started in 2004** but for now we’ll simply relate some excerpts from a letter published by the Italian weekly magazine “Famiglia Cristiana” (Christian Family) in 1984, two years before her death. On the 14th April 1986 she passed away repeating over and over “Thank you for everything, thank you”.

“I am a 22 year old girl. I was born handicapped. I have a skin disease which leaves scars all over my body (...). Maybe I look like a monster but I’m not! It’s not easy to spend 22 years on the Cross but I believe in God and love him immensely. I thank him for having given me life because every new day presents me with a new opportunity to love him and serve him. It’s not madness that makes me consider suffering as a precious gift from God, it’s concrete experience, lived out and often soaked with tears: I am sure that everything is a fruit of Divine Will and Love. (...) Every day that dawns is a gift from God and if this life is marked in a particular way by pain it’s a double gift because pain makes us grow, generates a deep dialogue with God, helps us expiate for many sins and stops foolish people’s nonsense. (...) Life is Beautiful!!”

Source: Focolare.org