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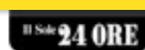
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The heart of a murderer

Dec. 2, 2012

“You’re my son, and I’m glad you came”. How is it humanly possible to receive your daughter’s killer into your home? How can you shake his hands knowing her blood was on them?

The powerful mystery of forgiveness is at the center of the film, *The Heart of a Murderer*, set in India and directed by Catherine McGilvray (coming out this month). The one hour film tells the true story of Samunder Singh, a twenty-two-year-old fanatic Hindu, who in 1995 murdered Sister Rani Maria, a Franciscan missionary nun from Kerala. He stabbed her 54 times and left her to die on the side of the road. Sister Selmy Paul, who lived in community with Sister Rani, was very saddened when she heard about her friend’s horrible death, “At least you had your mother and dear friends at the foot of the Cross when you were dying Jesus, my sister died completely alone”.

Samundar was subsequently arrested and sentenced to death. In response to Sister Rani’s murderer, her family not only forgives him but they receive him into their family as a son and a brother.

Samundar is the primary narrator of the film. Travelling by train from his village in Northern India on his way to meet Sister Rani’s family, he relives the details of the tragedy. The journey also becomes a spiritual awakening for Samundar. He’s transformed from a boy drenched in hate and ignorance to a free man living in love. He is timid and surprised when the family receives him unconditionally with love and forgiveness.

The language Samundar uses to describe his painful story is fascinating. The director says that he himself chose to play the role and tell his story going through the actions again, rather than using words. “It is an Indian way of telling a story”, says McGilvray, “and I gladly accepted this cultural “contamination” in hopes of capturing the authentic spirit of the event”.

The other narrators in the film come from the voices of Sister Rani’s mother and sister. They are women united by love, hurt and peace. Their faces and gestures are calm, and they demonstrate an incredible capacity to forgive. Sister Rani’s mother who, initially didn’t support her daughter’s decision to become a religious sister, in the end comes to understand the meaning of her daughter’s death.

The fourth voice is from Swami Sadanand. He is the peacemaking priest, “where there’s conflict, I will go”, and the first to go visit Samundar in prison. Subsequently, he became Samundar’s spiritual director and father.

McGilvray’s film is able to tell the story without being rhetorical or

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gruesome. She doesn't exploit nor exaggerate the facts. Rather, she respectfully reveals a tragic story, and artistically gives it universal meaning.

McGilvary became familiar with the story in 2009 and immediately wanted to meet Sister Rani's mother and sister. She wanted to understand how they were able to forgive Samundar after the horror they suffered so that she could tell their story: "I went to India wanting to completely embrace this story".

The message is intense: forgiveness can truly transform hatred into love. During the course of the film, Samundar calmly tells the story about his radical and progressive conversion from despair, "no one can forgive me. Not even God", to complete rebirth. Samundar is a true witness to the indispensable and powerful gift that he has received.

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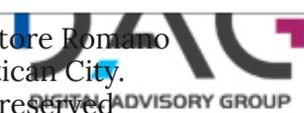


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