

Inspiring story rescues man from darkest night

While venting about the excruciating pain he had been experiencing from being trampled by a horse at work, Luis realized that the pain throughout his body and the paralysis of his right hand may be permanent. How could he work? How would his wife and two daughters in Guatemala survive? Luis is uninsured and his former employer is not taking financial responsibility. Lionel and I listened attentively to Luis's lamentations of this darkest night.

Young immigrant laborer Lionel encouraged Luis to be hopeful and advised Luis to accept his trials faithfully. Then Lionel told his story.

To overcome the obstacles of a difficult childhood in Guatemala involving poverty and the loss of his father at a young age, 10-year-old Lionel dropped out of the fourth grade to work 15-hour days. He sold candies, washed car windows on street corners, and performed odd jobs and manual labor. An only child, Lionel was determined to provide for his widowed mother.

At 15, Lionel embarked on a most treacherous journey, crossing borders in Mexico and the United States. Lionel was detained by immigration and deported three times. One incarceration lasted six months, another lasted three months and a final lasted one month. While incarcerated as a juvenile, Lionel mastered English and grew in faith praying and studying Scripture.

Lionel's fourth attempt to cross the border was successful. When Lionel ultimately reached his Maryland destination, he received tragic news.

While he was detained, Lionel's mother had died.

Lionel grieved that he missed the funeral and never had the chance to say goodbye. For several months, Lionel relieved his pain with heavy drinking.

While attending a parish retreat, Lionel heard God's voice and discovered a new circle of young adult immigrant laborer friends. Lionel eased out of his darkest

night, stopped drinking, and started attending mass, young adult groups and Bible studies almost every night. Glowing, Lionel proclaimed, "I'm not an orphan - I am a son of God."

An engaging speaker and dynamic group catalyst at age 23, Lionel has been a key leader and spiritual father of his young adult group for the past five years. His young flock constantly rings his cellphone to seek comfort and advice. Recently, while on a private retreat, Lionel remembered his beloved youth when he purchased 60 tiny wooden crosses. He placed them below the altar during three days of intense prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. He presented them as gifts later.

Last fall, another tragedy struck Lionel. When he arrived home from church at nighttime, Lionel discovered the body of his young cousin and roommate, Samuel, outside his apartment. Lionel called 911 and searched for Samuel's pulse. He laid his hands on Samuel's lifeless body in prayer. Lionel dreaded the thought of calling Samuel's parents in Guatemala. Samuel was their only child.

Lionel's aunt wept bitterly into the phone. She wailed, "What am I to do?"

Without batting an eye, Lionel gently replied, "from now on, I will take care of you. I have lost my parents. You are now my parents. You have lost your son. I am now your son."

Lionel remains faithful to his new parents. He phones them every week. He sends them half of his humble wages biweekly.

Lionel attributes his response to life in the Holy Spirit.

After hearing Lionel's story from his own lips, Luis was transformed. He has been cheerful, hopeful and attentive to prayer. He has been drawing inspiration from a book by Mother Teresa recommended by Lionel. In fact, Luis has been getting closer to God and has resumed receiving holy Communion, a grace he had not enjoyed since his terrible accident two years earlier. Clearly, Lionel's story has helped to bring Luis out of a darkest night.

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