

Redemption in left to
tell by immaculée
ilibagiza



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Left to Tell by Immaculée Ilibagiza narrates her painful autobiographical account of the Rwandan Genocide in April 1994. She gives a personal testimony of her traumatic confrontation with a national carnage and the hurt of losing her entire family to the reign of terror. During this entire ordeal, prayer becomes her divine nourishment and spiritual support. Her agonies in the bathroom of a Pastor Murinzi causes her to discover God amidst the Rwandan holocaust. Immaculée realizes that she can never achieve true peace and freedom, without forgiving her enemies as the oft-repeated proverb maintains, To err is human, (but) to forgive is divine. As a devout Catholic, she prays her rosary, for her family and their protection but one unavoidable hurdle protrudes in her own life - the necessity to forgive. In her own life experience, the forgiveness, redemption and restoration themes stand out as God directs her to peace, personal freedom and new purpose.

Torn by anguish and tormented by fear, Immaculée awakens to her need for freedom from retaliatory rage and victimhood. In the bathroom, as she utters the Lord's Prayer "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us" she can distinctly hear God's voice gently alerting her of her need to forgive her enemies on the murderous rampage (Ilibagiza 91). As chaos unleashes havoc in the outside world, in the same way, she senses an inner chaos and weighty burden from which she needed to be delivered. However, as she reads her Bible, she rediscovers that Jesus Christ forgives his own accusers and murderers, praying: Father forgive them for they know not what they do. God's infinite love and mercy work like medicine on her crippled heart and she utters the first prayer for her enemies.

Immaculée sustains deep wounds and griefs from the first day of the genocide as her friends, relatives, neighbors and countrymen spew hate and decimate their loved ones. Their conspiracy and surprising duplicity enrage her to the point that she feels as if it lies beyond her power to even pray for them, far less to forgive them. To worsen matters, the one hiding her, Pastor Murinzi keeps updating her on new developments on the hundreds of thousands of Tutsis gunned down in churches and stadiums. She becomes “angry at the government for unleashing this holocaust. (She) was angry at the rich countries for not stopping the slaughter. But most of all, (She) was angry at the Hutus ... (her) anger grew into a deep, burning hatred” (Ilibagiza 88). After toiling in supplication and prayer, the Holy Spirit whispers that unless she forgives, her lot would be to sink to the same level as the aggressors. Her own heart would remain imprisoned in pain and polluted in vindictive resentment.

Left to Tell declares the efficiency of prayer as time and again, God preserves Immaculée and providentially saves her from her killers. They besiege the house in which she hides, hurl invectives, search out the house and overturn furniture but God miraculously shields her and her colleagues. As her trust in God builds, she realizes her helplessness to change her own heart and to heal her own pain. As a result, she surrenders her heart to God.

Confirmed reports of Immaculée’s dead family and the large-scale devastation whip up her passions for immediate vengeance against the killers. “The heartrending memories and the gory, gruesome details were all too much for me. I’d just begun to heal, and now I felt my wounds forced open again” (Ilibagiza 196). For a moment, her peace seems broken and her

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capacity to forgive withdrawn. As she confronts other victims with similar heartrending stories, her wrath stirs to the extent that she wants to exact justice by incinerating her entire village on whose hands her family's blood remain. However, God reminds her of her resolution to retain her spiritual freedom and to follow a life of peace and forgiveness. With time, she obtains the liberty of the spirit and begins to experience a personal transformation on the inside. The entire ordeal changes her from a poor, unstable and dependent youth set on revenge to an emancipated, self-aware young lady who is mistress over herself.

The universal destruction that waste Rwanda, and most importantly, the lives sacrificed at the altar of blind prejudice and ambition inflict wounds point Immaculée to her new mission. Walking with a renewed sense of peace and even pity for the massacring multitude, Immaculée enjoys healing as God endues her with power to dissolve the bondage of fear, anger, doubt and enmity. Strengthened by her own conflict and armed with a healed and forgiving heart, Immaculée can now share her experience with others, enabling helpless and hurting people to forgive and triumph over their brokenness and losses.

Underlining the redemption and restoration themes, Immaculée ministers to the many Rwandans, she becomes instrumental in igniting a fire of hope for the despairing and ministering to the wounded among her people. She instructs others, " We have to stop killing and learn to forgive" (Ilibagiza 178). Her new purpose catalyses her to spread God's redeeming love to millions. As the international tribunal convenes at Rwanda to try the murderers, she asks some poignant questions: How many years - how many

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generations - would it take before Rwanda could recover from such horror?
How long for our wounded hearts to heal, for our hardened hearts to soften?
(Ilibagiza 179).