

Even if you only have the strength to beg for food, it is the
blessing of the Lord



1. “Even if you only have the strength to beg for food, it is the blessing of the Lord”

Grandfather, Choi Gui-Dong (1909 – Jan. 4, 1990)

The House of Love at Mugeuk-ri, Geumwang-eup, which is the mother-house of Kkottongnae, began with the meeting of the Kkottongnae founder Father, Oh Woong-Jin and Grandfather, Choi Gui-Dong.

Grandfather Guidong’s original name was Choi Gyeong-Lak, but, as a son of a rich family in the Geumwang area he grew up being called Guidong. Geumwang was famous at that time for its gold mine. However, as a result of the Japanese invasion and occupation he was a conscript to Japan and forced to work in the Bukhaedo Mine as a laborer. Due to the harsh conditions and as a result of torture he became mentally ill. After he lost his ability to work he was returned to Korea and made his way to his hometown only having a name label on his clothes. When he returned to his home, he found that his parents had already passed away from opium poisoning and his wife had disappeared. He was reduced to being a beggar, and found a place under Mugeukcheon Bridge. From then on Grandfather Guidong began to live under the bridge and to take care of other sick and dying beggars who had no strength even to go begging.

Dream of a Child

Kkottongnae founder Father Oh Woong-Jin was an elementary school student during the Korean War. One day, on the way home from school while drinking water at a stream, he saw a refugee father and a daughter arguing over a shrimp. Taking a closer look, he could see that their argument was about which one of them should eat the shrimp. The little daughter had caught a shrimp at a stream and she had wanted her father to eat it. The father had only one leg because he had lost the limb from a bomb blast, Watching this, Oh Woong-jin, himself a very hungry boy, began to have a dream of being a person who would live for those who were dying from hunger. To make the dream come true, he wanted to be a politician at first, He became skeptical about politics going through the Student Revolution on April 19th, 1960 and so he changed his chosen way to that of being a priest, realizing that it could be a better way to live his life for dying people. He became a Catholic priest in 1976 and began his assignment at Geumwang Church.

An Encounter

The encounter of the two dates back to 1976. On September 12 of that year Fr. Oh was tak-



Fr. Oh Woong Jin with Grandpa Choi in 1976 when they met for the first time.

ing care of an apple tree in a church garden when he happened to see a beggar passing the church. He became curious and so he followed him. When he reached a dugout on Yongdam mountain, he found that the beggar-grandfather was taking care of 18 sick people who were too weak to go begging for themselves. The grandfather distributed the food he had collected from begging, fed and looked after them, and finally he ate the leftovers.

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Returning to the parish house, Fr. Oh could not sleep. He tossed and turned all night thinking about the grandfather: 'While I became a priest to make my dream to live for the poor come true, Guidong is already living a life of practicing love like that, even though he has only the mere strength to go begging, being less healthy and having less knowledge than me.' After thinking over and over about what he had seen, at last around dawn he had a sudden flash of insight that it is still a blessing of God just to have the strength to go begging. So next morning he bought some cement with 1300 Won, which was his whole possession at that time and began to make bricks and build a house of love for the beggars.

Grandfather Guidong who Lived a Spiritual Life

Grandfather Guidong was a person who had been deprived of everything. He had lost his possessions and his house; he had become separated from his family including his wife and parents; and finally he had lost his health. He was the poorest and the least of persons

who had only the mere strength of begging for food. Yet, until he himself became paralyzed by a stroke, he kept on doing these good deeds of bringing and looking after the dying sick that he had found on streets and under bridges, who do not even have the strength to go begging themselves. No one is so poor that they are unable to give love. We all can love so long as we are alive.

Grandfather Guidong loved quietly. He never tried to reveal himself or get credit. He went without being recognized by anybody for 40 years of his tireless life.

Grandfather Guidong begged only for the bare necessities. When offered expensive fruits, candies, money, or new clothes, he declined them with thanks, saying that those good things belong to children or other people who really needed them. He also used to carry a big sack on his shoulder in order to pick up dangerous things that could harm others such as broken glass bottles.

The grandfather gave out everything he owned: his time, health, body, and mind. Through his will he even donated his eyes to the blind after his death. Once when I exaggerated being hungry, whining like a crybaby before the grandfather on a wheelchair, he gave me his whole meal tray asking me to eat first not just sharing some of his meal. The spirit of giving out everything for his neighbors was embodied in him.

The grandfather lived with the poor. Even though he gave a lot of help to the weak, he did not reign over them. He became one with them, and he lived and ate together with them, not making a distinction between the giver and the receiver.



Grandpa Choi was awarded Grand Prize of Love on February 15, 1986.



Many people celebrated the occasion.

The grandfather loved to his last moment. One day, on his way home from getting some food for his brothers, he fell down on a street by a stroke. He had worked for his neighbors to the last moment until he could not work anymore for illness in his body.

The grandfather, Guidong, lying buried next to his statue at the entrance of Kkottongnae, is still quietly awakening people who are wearied of their worldly lives today. Visitors to Kkottongnae while they think about the life of grandfather Guidong, often look back on their own lives: they see that they have often complained even though they have been given, enjoyed, and owned a lot.

“Even if you only have the strength to beg for food, it is the blessing of the Lord.”



The funeral procession of Grandpa Choi Gwi-Dong





Fr. Oh Woong-Jin is looking around the tomb



Grandpa Choi

The tomb of Grandpa Choi located at the main entrance of Kkottongnae.

The Life of Grandfather Choi Gui-Dong (Gyeong-Lak) Peter



Words Written on the Front of the Tombstone of Grandfather Choi Gui-Dong

He was born as a son of a rich family at Mugeuk-Ri, Geumwang-Myun, Eumseong-Gun, Chungbuk in 1909. The neighbors called him Guidongi (a precious boy in English) since he was a son of a noble family. He married a beautiful lady and lived happily, but as a result of the Japanese invasion and occupation he was a conscript and forced to work in Bukhaedo Mine as a laborer, and became mentally ill due to the harsh conditions and torture. After he lost his ability to work, he was returned to Korea only having a name label on his cloths by the Japanese.

Experiencing all kinds of hardships, when he arrived in his hometown, he found that his families had already died or disappeared after getting disease and using up all the money worrying about him.

Grandfather Choi Gui-dong was reduced to a begger and found a place under Mugeukcheon Bridge to live with many other

beggars there. He used to visit round the houses for begging for food for the beggars who did not even have strength to go out for begging, asking, “Do you have any leftovers?” and he used to bury the beggars on the foot of Yongdam mountain when they passed away. He declined expensive fruits or money with thanks, saying, “Those good things belong to children not me,” or “I don’t need money.” He also used to carry a big sack on his shoulder in order to pick up dangerous things that could harm others such as broken glass bottles around playgrounds for about 40 years. One day, on September 10, 1976 in the dusk of the evening, Father Oh happened to see him passing Mugeuk Church after begging and getting some food, and tried following him with curiosity.

There were 18 beggars, who were tuberculosis patients, the mentally-ill, alcoholics, the blind, and cripples in a dugout. They were groaning in the dugout on the foot of Yongdam mountain without anybody to depend on and any strength to beg for food.

That night, Fr. Oh could not sleep all night and finally had a sudden insight that even if you only have the strength to beg for food, it is the blessing of the Lord. He bought some cement with his whole possession of 1300 Won and made bricks. On October 15, 1976 he began to build a house with 5 rooms on the foot of Yongdam mountain, completed it on November 15 and housed the 18 beggars there. The people in the neighborhood called it

House of Love.

Grandfather Choi Gui-dong, who had lived a life of love, was awarded the honorable Catholic Grand Prize in the field of love on February 15, 1986. To pay a tribute to this, about 1500 believers and neighbors with Bishop Chung Jin-Seok, governor of Chungcheongbuk-do, the superintendent of education, a division commander, and congressmen had a street parade and held a congratulatory ceremony at Mugeuk Church.

When he was asked what he would like to use the prize money of 1.2million Won for by Fr. Oh, his answer was really touching to everybody: "There's only one place to use this money for. Please build a house for dying people." Accordingly, people decided to build a nursing home for the elderly with one chord. On October 15, 1986 a sanatorium for the elderly was completed. At a dedication ceremony 50 thousand Kkottongnae members unanimously agreed to build a nursing home for the elderly with the donation of 600 million won and government subsidy of 600 million won. Grandfather Choi Gui-Dong lived in the nursing home completed in 1987 and passed away on January 4, 1990 at the age of 81.

Grandfather Choi Gui-Dong's death was announced to all over the country by the mass media, such as KBS, MBC, and all kinds of newspaper as a special feature, and headline. Under a tombstone, where his words of teaching of 'Even if you only have the strength to beg for food, it is the blessing of the Lord.' were inscribed, he was laid away peacefully.

The stone coffin, statue, and the pedestal of tombstone were built by the chairman of Pyunggok Stone Company, Cha Joo-Won. The

tombstone was unveiled to the illustrious memory of this valuable person with the donation by President Noh Tae-Woo and the first lady Kim Ok-Sook. Many people at the funeral ceremony donated money on the spot to build a statue of a 2.5 meter height, and the statue and the tombstone with an epitaph were unveiled on January 4, 1991 on the 1st anniversary of his death.

He ended his life of love on this earth and went to Heaven, saying his last words, "Life and death are providential."

Catholic Grand Prize in 1985
In the field of Love

To Mr. Choi Gyeong-Lak

We award this medal to you to preserve your sweet fragrance for good; you have shed light in the darkness and inspired people with hope as a little living Christ in this world.

February 15, 1986

Hyun Seok-Ho, the chief member of the Screening Committee for Catholic Grand Prize

Eom Ik-Chae, the president of Korean Catholic Laypeople Apostolate Meeting

Rev. An Sang-In, the advising priest of Korean Catholic Laypeople Apostolate Meeting

Bishop Kim Nam-Su, in charge of Catholic Council

We dedicate this to the spirit of grandfather Choi Gui-Dong Peter



Words Written on the Backside of the Tombstone

On a dark night
that a flowing star
being the soft glow of light
as a friend of a lonely wanderer
stopped its flowing quietly
is never in vain.
It is for the glowing morning star
in your and my shady heart
to shine more brightly
high in the air
so to become a light for everyone.
Grandfather Choi Gui-Dong
lived a life more fruitfully than anyone else
overcoming the pain of being stamped
down
like a plantain trampled on a roadside.
As he was a beggar
he loved beggars more than anybody,
as he was poor
he shared the pain of the poor
as a forerunner of the lonely.

One day
when I said “Give me a half,”
seeing a candy in your hand
you answered,
“Eat it all, I’m OK.”
I used to hold out my hand like this often to
you
since I liked to see your generous mind
and I loved your white smile.
On January 4, 1990
you left us quietly
but the sweet smell of the love
you emitted by practicing God’s words
will be throbbing
in everybody’s heart lively.
The power of love
which lets withered hand
straightened out
makes everybody feel ashamed.
And it will be fumed up
as stronger fragrance than rose color
being a fire of warm love
in the whole world.
Who sang that death is just sad?
I pray to our Father
for grandfather Choi Gui-Dong,
who nestled in Father’s arms
becoming a Nazareth today,
to give him Father’s blessings
not a piece of candy.
Grandfather Choi Gui-Dong Peter,
May you enjoy everlasting rest
in Heaven.



The picture is excerpted from a picture story book, 'The Story of Kkottongnae,' (published in 1991), depicting Grandpa Choi taking a mental patient who was found unconscious on street.

2. The Origin of the Name of Kkottongnae

Where are the Flowers at Kkottongnae?

People who visit Kkottongnae sometimes would say in sport, "I thought they named the village Kkottongnae (Kkot means flowers; tongnae means village in Korean.) because there were many flowers here, but I can't see many. Where are the flowers?" *While the area certainly doesn't overflow with blossoms all throughout the year, it has its share of beauty that awes the beholder of the sight.* With spring comes, many forsythias, azaleas, royal azaleas, magnolias, and rhododendrons that bloom beautifully around Kkottongnae hills and fields, on the roadsides and embankments. When May comes with its strong fragrance of acacias, honey bees fly back-and-forth actively between their combs and flower trees as to finish up a year's harvest at once. Kkottongnae presents us with beautiful nature every season: spring with peach and apricot blossoms; summer with wooded verdure; autumn with colorfully tinted leaves; and winter with immaculate snow.

However, more beautiful than nature are the human flowers that bloom with forgiveness, reconciliation and love. We would see the Kkottongnae families, who had lived a miserable life until they got sick physically and

mentally and were forlorn, reconcile with the world which had deserted them, repent on their life, forgive their neighbors, and then blossom into a beautiful flower to bear the fruit of salvation. I think there would not be anything more beautiful than this.

The Most Beautiful Thing in the World, Flowers

The founder, Father Oh Woong-Jin, deliberated the name of Kkottongnae with Mr. Kim Jong-Ho, who was the governor of Chungbuk Province at that time. The word Kkot (which means flower in Korean) came to his mind when he was thinking about the representation of the ideal form of love. He thought that it is the most beautiful thing in the world to welcome the love-starved people with warm love, to take care of them, and help direct them towards God. So he suggested naming it Kkottongnae as it means a village filled with beautiful people and deeds just like a "flower village" filled with beautiful flowers. He added that the name is good since it is not a foreign name and friendly feeling is attached to the name. So this name, corresponding to the spirituality of Kkottongnae which wants to be one in love by even overcoming nationality,



A Bust of Fr. John Oh Gi-Seon which is in the sculpture garden at the Kkottongnae Love Training Center



An entrance of Kkottongnae. You can see a beautiful rainbow on the sky.

race, and age, was selected. The night before Fr. Oh Gi-Seon passed away on July 30, 1990, Fr. Oh Woong-Jin visited him in the hospital. Fr. Oh Gi-Seon informed him that the very same name, Kkottongnae, was the name of Nazareth, the hometown of Jesus Christ, where He grew up. The etymology of Nazareth shows the meaning of flower in it.

The Connection with Fr. Oh Gi-Seon

It goes back to the time of political chaos just after the April 19th Revolution in 1960 when the Kkottongnae founder Fr. Oh Woong-Jin's bond with Fr. Oh Gi-Seon began. At that time Fr. Oh Woong-Jin had a dream of becoming a politician to become capable of helping those who were dying on the streets. He used to correspond with a student leader, Kim Joo-Yeol as a pen-pal, but found that he had died from a teargas bomb. This made him give up his dream of becoming a politician making him skeptical of politics. After that, he happened to see Fr. Oh Gi-Seon being awarded by the president at Daejeon Public Stadium in recognition of his good conduct of taking care of about 3 thousand war orphans. Looking at this, he thought that he could take care of dying people on the streets if he would be a priest. So he decided to become one after visiting Daejeon Daeheungdong Church and joined an early morning mass by Fr. Oh Gi-Seon.

Fr. Oh went to a seminary with the money from timber trading and graduated from it, becoming a priest. After that, he visited Fr. Oh Gi-Seon to greet and consult him for advice on his future. Fr. Oh Gi-Seon asked just two things of him: "Be a priest who is crazy about whatever you do," and when you do anything

in the future, there may be some opponents. But don't face them with anger or frustration but endure them with forgiveness and love." As he requested, Fr. Oh Woong-Jin became a priest who has been crazy about the poor and who has prayed for those who persecute him. The priests who had received love and guidance from Fr. Oh Gi-Seon made a scholarship foundation—Oh Gi-Seon Joseph Scholarship Foundation—to help orphans in honor of his big footprint in the history of the Korean Catholic church. They offer a mass for the scholarship foundation members at 2:00p.m. on the third Thursday of every month at Daejeon Daeheungdong Church and on the last Saturday at Seoul Myeongdong Church, accumulating funds for educating young people.

The Origin of the Name of the Congregation, Kkottongnae Brothers/Sisters of Jesus

Jesus Christ has established and led Kkottongnae, and the Sacred Heart of Jesus who took pains and died on behalf of human beings is the spirit of the Kkottongnae Congregation's foundation. The sisters and brothers at Kkottongnae Congregation practice love, praying and asking God everyday to let them live for those who have no one to rely on and no strength to beg for food. Therefore, the guardian saint of Kkottongnae is the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The words of Jesus Christ, "Now I do not call you servants any longer, but, instead, I call you friends (John 15: 15)" mean that he would make all those who live for and practice His words his friends. When we live a life of prac-

ting love for those who have no one to rely on, we become His friends and will be called His sisters or brothers.

Servants do not know what their master is doing, but friends do know what the other is doing. Our Lord wants us to love our poor neighbors to bloom the spirituality of poverty, living in accordance with God's will in this world.

Kkottongnae of Jesus is a place full of vari-

ous kinds of flowers: flowers of salvation achieved through the forgiveness and reconciliation by the forlorn; flowers of love created through the devoted sacrifice of the volunteers and the religious; flowers of spirituality formed through living by the Holy Spirit's will and not by our worldly whims. Jesus lives in Kkottongnae of Jesus, and there live Kkottongnae Brothers/Sisters of Jesus who follow God's will as well.



Founder Fr. Oh Woong-Jin, family members of Kkottongnae, staffs, volunteers and religious

3. Teach, and Help Them Learn and Experience the Love of God

January 8, 1990

From Kkottongnae family

At midnight on August 15, 2004, one hundred members of the Kkottongnae Order (friars, nuns, and the secular) held a mass to celebrate the foundation of the Love Research Institute at the auditorium of Kkottongnae Love Training Center. The Love Research Institute is not a real place per se, but is in essence, a practical spiritual institute placed in the minds of the religious; the goal of which is to practice the Lord's calling that commissions us to, "Teach, and help them learn and experience the love of God." The religious in attendance walked barefoot around the Love Training Center, praying the rosary while holding a burning candle in one hand and a cross in the other, in order to live in the spirit of poverty and sacrifice for the establishment of the Love Research Institute. After the symbolic walk, Rev. Oh Woong-Jin, founder of the Kkottongnae Order, resumed the mass and officially proclaimed that the religious in attendance carry the Love Research Institute in his or her mind from this moment on and are commissioned to, "Teach, and help them learn and experience the love of God," to those who have never realized, felt, or received God's love. They would in

essence be commissioned to lead and assist these people to a life of happiness.

I took care of an AIDS patient who was in the terminal stage of the disease with sympathy and heart. The poor patient was waiting for death, alone, in a retired hospital room. I was informed that he contracted the disease in a foreign country and exhausted all of his resources for the treatment of the disease. Eventually he was discarded by his mistress and banished from his country, and even his own immediate family and relatives turned their faces away from him. I brought him to this hospital, cleansed the bloody pus on his decaying flesh due to bedsores, applied disinfectant, administered an enema for him with my finger whenever he suffered from constipation, and bathed his body covered with blood and sweat. When I once fed him with some warm rice after changing his clothes and making his bed, I happened to make eye contact with him and found tears welling up in his eyes. We lived together like this for about forty days.

On a silent night when almost everyone was asleep, the patient told us his last words: "I am happy—I can now forgive everybody, my mistress, my family—I repent my past and



Brothers and Sisters of the community in prayer on the day when the special Mass for the establishment of the Theological Research Institute of Love was celebrated.

will pray for everybody though I am dying now. I am truly happy because I was able to receive real love for the first time in my life.”

About a week later, he passed away, *singing the happy song as a man who had indeed received true love for the first time in his life.*

There was also once a middle-aged woman who visited the Kkottongnae Sanitarium. What was unusual about this woman was that she had decided to commit suicide. The woman had been running a small business by herself but had endured many financial difficulties resulting from both bad luck and the International Monetary Fund financial crisis. Unable to deal with her problems, she decided to visit Kkottongnae before carrying out her decision to commit suicide. At the sanitarium, she happened to enter a room where Ms. In-Ja Kim (Cecilia) was staying. Ms. Kim was born with a serious case of cerebral palsy that had left her unable to use her paralyzed arms and to live her life of sixty years using only her legs. And in spite of the many years of medical treatment, she continues to suffer from severe chronic pain in the right shoulder of her paralyzed arm. Nevertheless, Ms. Kim’s life has been an example of a life filled with a heart of gold. Ms. Kim continues to assist in the feeding of people who are members of the Kkottongnae family, in particular, Ms. Young-Hee Bae. Ms. Kim also makes fine work of folding paper by making paper cranes with her toes. When the visitor entered her room, Ms. Kim welcomed her with her usual warm heart and gave the guest some paper cranes that she had made. Ms. Kim also blessed her for her happy life without knowing that the

visitor was a person who had earlier decided to take her life.

When she returned home later that day to take her life, a paper crane fell out of her purse when she was reaching for the lethal pills. The paper crane immediately reminded her of what Ms. Kim had told her earlier, that, *“Patience is not to endure what we can endure, but to endure what we cannot endure.”* At that moment, she came to her senses and decided not to kill herself. She made a firm commitment to herself to live, saying, “How can I even consider killing myself, when I am so much more blessed than a woman with cerebral palsy who lives wearing a happy smile and folding paper cranes for her neighbors for such a long time in great pain. How can I possibly think about killing myself.” The businesswoman eventually sent a thank-you letter to Ms. Kim, calling Ms. Kim a life savior. Though there was nothing special about a paper crane, it became a symbol that could rescue a person from committing suicide. This great crane saved a life because it was folded with true love, sacrifice, and prayers by someone who overcame a life filled with tears, pain, and suffering.

“To teach others, and let them learn and experience the love of God,” one must carry a cross of great pain and sacrifice like Ms. Kim, who, like a candle, provides light at it’s own expense.

People who serve at Kkottongnae proclaim in one resounding voice, *“I receive much more from the poor than I give them*— No, actually, It seems that I have only received and not have given anything—” This may at first appear to



Kim In Ja Cecilia who cannot use both her hands due to cerebral palsy is embroidering the holy face of Jesus with her toes.

The holy face of Jesus, the work of Kim In Ja Cecilia, is being presented as a special gift to the first lady Son Myeong Soon on the celebration of completing the sanatoria for psychiatric patients and the elderly.



be an exaggerated confession of humility. However, as time goes by after people begin to serve and volunteer here, it becomes clearly evident to them that the favors that they provide for the poor return as favors given to them. How is it possible for people to understand this mystery?

A few days ago, Mr. Baek Jong-Ryol (Paul) passed away. Even though he was suffering from pain and emesis, he did not pass away without expressing his gratitude and appreciation for our small gesture of love and assistance. The sincere gratitude expressed by those we help in dire situations where all hope of life is lost, makes us realize the love of God living in us. In these instances, the weakest among us were the ones who, “taught us, and helped us learn and experience the love of God.” In this manner, we learn what love is by loving, just as people learn about marriage through married life as well as parents learn about parenting by raising children.

“Love comes from God. Whoever loves is a child of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love (1 John 4: 7-8).”

The Kkottongnae Love Research Institute was established in the souls of people by having Jesus Christ as the director. Every member of Kkottongnae carries his or her own cross and lives a practical life dedicated to learning about true love through the Holy Spirit and sacrificing their lives for the love of their neighbors, and to finally, teach what they learn and to let them experience what they teach.

Kkottongnae Spirituality of Love Retreat Center



