

# Jubilee Eucharistic Convention 'the Best Yet'

(New Zealand)

Auckland 28-30 April 2000

A standing ovation might be commonplace for a rousing version of "La Bamba", but at the Eucharistic Convention?

But Tony Melendez, the guitarist born with no arms but with a martyr's heart, brought down the house at the Jubilee Eucharistic Convention with "La Bamba". And talks and music by Tony Zuniga, Donna Cori Gibson and Fr Michael Semana made many swear that "this was the best Convention yet!"

Organiser John Porteous wouldn't disagree.

"Every Eucharistic Convention has been special and unique. In the beginning, we worried about how we could top the previous year's Convention. But early in the piece we realised this was God's work, not ours, and God can do anything. Every year He delivers remarkable, talented, faithful guests. I believe that as long as we conduct this ministry under obedience, with Bishop Pat's blessing and support, it will continue going from strength to strength," says John.

## Tony Melendez

When Tony Melendez was born in Guatemala, word quickly spread through the neighbourhood that he was a "monster." Because his mum had been given thalidomide, Tony was born with no arms and a clubbed foot.

People lucky enough to see and hear Tony at the Convention know that he is not a monster, he is a miracle. Tony devotes his life to God and to fulfilling the mission given to him by the Pope. "Tony," the Holy Father said in 1987 after hearing Tony and being deeply moved, "Tony, you are a courageous young man, and you are giving hope to us all. My wish to you is to continue giving hope... Hope to all of us."

After watching the miracle named Tony perform, playing the guitar with his toes and singing so professionally, most everyone in Logan Campbell Centre thought the same thing: "What on earth have I got to complain about. Forgive me Lord for my pettiness."

One of the most moving moments of the Convention (in addition to the Masses and Adoration), came when Tony invited people to come forward and offer a prayer as he quietly strummed his guitar. Would Kiwis come forward? Well, the line grew and grew. More

and dozens of prayers, Tony finished his songs. But our hearts were about to burst.

## Donna Cori Gibson



Donna Cori Gibson isn't called the Celine Dion of contemporary Catholic music for nothing. Her voice and music were as professional as the Convention has heard before, but there was far more to Donna than talent. Donna is a woman of prayer, one

who knows her faith, and loves it with all her heart. Was she an instrument of the Holy Spirit? Most anyone listening to songs from her CD "Prayers From Heaven and To Heaven" would say yes. And with the canonisation of Jacinta and Francisco set just after the Convention, her beautiful version of the Fatima prayer "I believe, I adore..." was a wonderful grace from God.

Those wise enough to come early to the Convention got a real treat, as Donna used her voice and faith to best purposes as she sang the gathering Rosary. It's worth making two points about this. - First, Donna's marketing

material is full of quotes from priests who have been deeply touched by her faith-filled music. "Her reverence, faith and humility was evident throughout the Rosary, and had a profound effect on everyone," said an American priest. The same was true in Auckland. - Second, because people were coming and finding their seats, sometimes a bit noisily while Donna was singing the Rosary, one Convention official felt the need to apologise to Donna for the distractions. Her response? "Were there distractions? I didn't even notice."

Over the years, many speakers at our Eucharistic Conventions have poked fun at the almost genetic predisposition of Catholics against memorising Scripture. Donna may change this forever. Because her lyrics frequently come straight from Holy Scripture, singing along to her music will help us all remember God's word! And the lyrics that she wrote, well, they bring the tears. Like these from "Trust in Me" about Our Lord calling us to Himself in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.

*"Trust in me, I'm Jesus.*

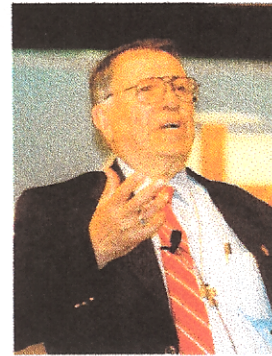
*Trust in me, I died for you.*

*My heart is tenderly broken,*

*Believe in me, it's Jesus,  
I'm calling, calling you,  
And I'm waiting to give you  
Everything you want me to.  
Then why do you still mock me,  
Forget me and leave me alone?  
You hurt me, refuse me,  
Won't make my name known.  
What more can I show you  
I haven't yet shown?"*

## Tony Zuniga

When one Convention official heard that a Hispanic from South Texas named Tony Zuniga was coming, his initial thought was, "This will be a disaster - they'll never understand his accent." But the Blessed Mother is in charge of bookings, and Tony's accent was never an issue - the real issue was his heart.



I don't know whether you "feel" or "hear" Tony's messages of God's

boundless love, but Tony touches you at your core. The proof was in our tears and in the crowds engulfing his table and Myriam Tape Ministries to get copies of his talks. More proof saw many praying for his recovery. He had taken a bad fall soon after arriving and had spent Thursday in emergency treatment, finally having blood removed from under his kneecap. Yet Tony didn't complain or even consider not talking to us.

His talk on stewardship struck a deep cord with many. As a young Mexican in South Texas - prevented from drinking at "white's only" water fountains - Tony lived in a shack with his pregnant wife Mayme and their daughter, barely surviving on \$32 a week. Then he read an article on the "beautiful act of tithing" in *Our Sunday Visitor* and immediately started giving God \$3.20 a week. He waited for an immediate miracle... Nothing! But then he reread the article and began tithing the FIRST 10% with joy and faith. Within a week he doubled his salary to \$65 a week, then up and up to \$115, and finally \$500 when he accepted a job in Korea. He opened a bank account for "Tony Zuniga and God," and "it was such a joy on Sunday writing cheques to go all over the world." Tony reminded us that "it's all God's money." And when we give to our ever generous God, he always gives back ten or a hundred fold.

The list of miracles that Tony has seen is too long to even scratch in this short article. Luckily, Myriam Tape Ministries (see advert in

