



Immaculée Ilibagiza is a living example of faith put into action. Ilibagiza's life was transformed dramatically during the 1994 Rwandan genocide where she and seven other women spent 91 days huddled silently together in the cramped bathroom of a local pastor's house. Ilibagiza entered the bathroom a vibrant, 115-pound university student with a loving family—she emerged weighing just 65 pounds to find her most of her family had been brutally murdered. Ilibagiza credits her salvage mostly to prayer and to a set of rosary beads given to her by her devout Catholic father prior to going into hiding. Anger and resentment about her situation were literally eating her alive and destroying her faith, but rather than succumbing to the rage that she felt, Ilibagiza instead turned to prayer. She began to pray the rosary as a way of drowning out the negativity that was building up inside her. Ilibagiza found solace and peace in prayer and began to pray from the time she opened her eyes in the morning to the time she closed her eyes at night. Through prayer, she eventually found it possible, and in fact imperative, to forgive her tormentors and her family's murderers. Ilibagiza's strength in her faith empowered her to stare down a man armed with a machete threatening to kill her during her escape. She also later came face to face with the killer of her mother and her brother and said the unthinkable, "I forgive you." Ilibagiza knew, while in hiding, that she would have to overcome immeasurable odds without her family and with her country destroyed. Fortunately, Ilibagiza utilized her time in that tiny bathroom to teach herself English with only The Bible and a dictionary; once freed she was able to secure a job with the United Nations.

In 1...

Immaculée Ilibagiza

Speech Topics

- Overcoming Adversity
- Global Leadership
- Diversity
- Change

