

“We need you, Elisabeth”

Elisabeth has become a Catholic. She went for a year as an exchange student from Sweden to Cordoba, Spain, and studied at the Zalima High School, an apostolic work of Opus Dei. Now she has returned to her country to study nursing.

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Elisabeth Malmgren is "almost 19," with the blond hair, blue eyes and fair skin of her native Sweden. She is

also a bit red now, due to Cordoba's summer sun.

She arrived in Cordoba last September to spend a year at the Zalima High School, an apostolic work of Opus Dei. In short order she picked up the local dialect perfectly. And a St. Raphael medal hanging from her neck gives notice that something happened during her stay with us.

What happened was her conversion to Catholicism. Not long after she got here, she went with some of her classmates to Rome to attend the October 6 canonization of St. Josemaría Escrivá. "I'm not even sure why I went, but I was impressed by the fact that I was witnessing something very significant." Then, in her Philosophy class, themes such as the origin of man and the transcendent meaning of life awoke questions within her. And from there

things progressed. "I had never really seen a Christian life being practiced, and I came here with almost no knowledge of religion", she recalls.

In search of something

Elisabeth's journey was taking place through her classes, through the people she lived with, and through participating – at first just as a spectator – in events such as the Mass and the Rosary. "How can there be Catholics," she asks herself, "who say that the Rosary is boring?"

Little by little, a series of coincidences was opening the way: "I was realizing in my heart that I had to do something because God was asking me to." At first she was afraid: "When I began to think about becoming Catholic I kept remembering that only nine percent of my country is Catholic, and the closest Catholic church is 55 kilometers from my house; but I also

knew that God was asking me to do it, and I neither could nor wanted to say no."

In Holy Week, with her decision made but not yet put into effect, she returned to Rome to participate in an international student congress.

While there, she attended an audience with the Pope and with Bishop Javier Echevarría, the prelate of Opus Dei. She told Bishop Echevarría about her personal experience and her decision to become a Catholic. He concluded his response by saying: "We need you, Elisabeth, we need you. May God bless you." She wrote down his words, and since then has saved them in a small notebook that she carries in her bag.

On April 29 at Zalima, she made a public profession of the Catholic faith -- Protestants do not need to be baptized – her first confession and

her first communion: "Confession is wonderful; I have always known that God forgives, but I have discovered that Christ administers his pardon and his mercy to each person through the sacrament of Penance."

What else attracted Elisabeth to Catholicism? Perhaps it was Confession and the Virgin Mary, and also the moral clarity: "Catholicism is concrete and practical, as clear in moral matters as in doctrinal questions. It sets out what is good and what is not."

Elisabeth is now in her home city of Höör, about 650 kilometers from Stockholm. And in Sweden, a silver medal with the image of St. Raphael will remind her of the year she spent in Cordoba and the new course her life took in our city.

Antonio Varo // Cordoba Daily (Spain)

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