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From Helsinki to Rome

Anna Riina, a 25 year old Finnish girl, converted to Catholicism three and a half years ago. Now she is studying theology at the University of the Holy Cross in Rome.

02/01/2014

I am Anna Riina, I am from Finland and I am 25. Now I am studying theology in Rome, on a History of the Church program at the University of the Holy Cross. I have been a Catholic for three and a half years. Now, as a

Catholic I am very happy to be studying in Rome, in a Catholic environment and getting more formation, understanding the sacraments and my Faith better.

I'm from a Protestant family, so the rest of my family is still Lutheran. I was received into the Catholic Church when I was 22. I didn't know any Catholics, I just got a really strong feeling that God wanted me to take a new direction, and somehow I just came to the conclusion that it was the Catholic Church. I think it was a really strong spiritual and vocational thing, and not just an intellectual or dogmatic.

I was already studying theology before I converted, and because our faculty in Helsinki is not a Lutheran faculty as such, we also read the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, so I had some facts and some idea of what the Catholic Church was, but no

particular experience or information about what it means to be a Catholic. I think what really attracted me to the Catholic Church was the way in which you can live your faith in everyday life. When I was converted, I didn't change to a new faculty, but I changed my course of studies, because I was on a course that would lead to becoming a Lutheran pastor, so I just changed to a more social-oriented course. I studied theology and had some minor subjects that I could choose. Moreover, my major was Church History and Medieval Church History, so basically I was studying the history of the Catholic Church anyway.

My Catholic Faith helps me a lot in my everyday life. For example, just the fact of being in a new country, I couldn't do it without prayer and daily Mass. Everything is amazing: confession, Rosary, all the devotion to our Lady, how she can help us. It

helps me so much and it makes me really sad for my Lutheran friends who don't have this "extra stuff," the fundamental grace of the sacraments for example.

Catholics in Finland are very into their religion because we are a minority and most Finnish Catholics are people like me who have converted. So in Finland I don't see many people who are Catholic but not practicing, but here, for example, in Italy -and what I've heard of Spain and such- I see this, and I think that those people don't know what a treasure they have, being from a Catholic family and having been brought up as Catholics, because they've had all the sacraments all their lives, and that's such a great gift that I think the people who are from Catholic families but are not practicing just don't appreciate.

I know that sometimes young people think that being a Catholic means not being free, and that Mass is boring. That's a misconception of freedom, because if you think that freedom is "I want to do everything I want", you're not free, you're just a slave of your desires, and what they fail to see is that when you give a little of what you can give to God, He will give you so much more. If people think that the Mass is boring, I think that's because they lack formation. Maybe they were never taught properly what the Mass is about. They should pray more, and when you pray, when you ask for something from God, He will give it to you, if it is suitable.

In my home town, where my family still lives, there is no Catholic church, but in Helsinki, where I've been studying, there are two. So the way I got introduced to the Faith when I was interested in Catholicism, was

through the parish. It had this information course for people who are interested in the Catholic faith in general terms, or are interested in converting. So I went to that course, and it lasted an academic year. In spring I was received into the Church and after that I must say that my Catholic formation has come from Opus Dei. Right after the Mass where I was confirmed and made my First Communion, everything at the same time, we had a reception in the parish hall and then a lady who is in Opus Dei came to talk to me. We agreed to meet again, and she introduced me to Christian formation activities and the student residence. I also went to catechism classes there, which was really important for me because I still had a lot to learn, even after the info course that I had had in the parish church, I was still clueless about the details of our Faith.

From Saint Josemaria the most important thing that helps me is the thought of giving everything to God, the fact that everything you do – studying, working – can be turned into prayer. And also the way in which you can do apostolate, and how in his writings and in his spirituality it is so simple: apostolate is just to love people with the same feelings of Jesus Christ. God loves me and I love other people and I also want them to be closer to God, and of course I want to help them. And unity of life, I mean not finding time to pray like a Christian, and going to work and telling dirty jokes and speaking badly about people. Because it can happen, that people separate their spiritual life from their working or studying life when they don't think about God. Discovering unity of life has been a really good thing for me, to learn to give everything I do to God, and do everything for him.

(from www.josemariaescriva.info)

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(08/17/2025)