

## **“I think my journey has helped me be a bridge for others”**

Celica, who comes from a small town in Batangas (Philippines), shares how she discovered her Catholic faith and her mission to share it with others.

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We each carry a story; a path shaped by questions, challenges, discoveries, and moments of grace. Mine was not a one-time dramatic conversion, but

a slow and intentional search for truth and meaning.

I was born into a Catholic family, yet for many years I simply went through the motions of practising the faith. Because of my family's friendships and travels, I was exposed to many Christian traditions — Catholic, Protestant, even Aglipayan — and at times I didn't exactly know what I believed in. For me, religion felt like something inherited rather than something chosen. Slowly, God began to stir in my heart a hunger for something deeper. I started to realize that faith cannot stay borrowed; it must become personal. It must be lived, owned, and loved.

This is the story of how I moved from confusion to conviction and how the Catholic Church became not just a tradition, but my home. It is the story of how God used people, places, and

unexpected detours to lead me closer to His love and reveal my purpose.

What began in uncertainty has blossomed into clarity, joy, and mission. Today, I walk with a steady heart and a deep desire to help others discover the beauty of the faith and the vocation that I have come to call my own.

## **A faith inherited but not understood**

I was born into a Catholic family in a small town in Rosario, Batangas. Baptized and enrolled in a Catholic school as a child, I grew up in a home where the faith wasn't deeply practiced. As a young girl, I often served as a flower girl in Iglesia ni Cristo (INC) weddings and even had an INC godmother at my confirmation. At the time, I didn't think much of it; I simply followed my parents' lead.

We attended Catholic Mass on Sundays but also visited Protestant services due to my father's friendships. We once traveled to a church in Quezon Province, which I later learned was Aglipayan — an independent Christian denomination with its own traditions, including female celebrants. This diversity of exposure sowed in me seeds of spiritual confusion.

## **A personal awakening**

That confusion grew as my father, a civil engineer, went abroad to work to support our family of six children. In his absence, I began to turn to God on my own, asking for strength and guidance. I realized that I needed to build a personal relationship with Him, not just to inherit a faith that I barely understood.

When it was time for high school, my father enrolled me in Balete Family Farm School in Batangas, a unique

school that required us to engage in hands-on agricultural business, research, and on-the-job training at a young age. I brought my spiritual questions there and started searching for answers.

At Balete, I observed our school directress spending quiet moments in the chapel every morning. Later on I discovered that she was a member of Opus Dei. I wondered what she was doing: grading papers? praying? reading? It sparked my curiosity. Weekly confessions and Masses, and soon I learned to pray the Rosary daily. Through our doctrine classes at Balete, I encountered the concept of the Eucharist and heard the word “transubstantiation” for the first time.

That moment changed everything. I finally understood what really happens during the consecration at

Mass: the bread and wine become the actual Body and Blood of Christ. That truth deeply moved me.

Reflecting on my past experiences in the Aglipayan and Protestant churches, I realized that what I had once considered “just another form of worship” lacked the sacramental foundation I was beginning to discover in Catholicism. I chose to go deeper, to learn and ask questions, and ultimately to embrace the Catholic faith, not merely as a heritage, but as my own conviction.

## **Discovering my vocation**

For many years, I truly believed my vocation was marriage. Every day I prayed for a future husband who would love me as Christ loves his Church. Deep inside, I dreamt of building a family and raising children in the faith. After high school, I took up Culinary Arts in Manila because I thought that I

should know how to cook well to serve my family.

As I immersed myself more deeply in the writings of St. Josemaría Escrivá, especially his book *Friends of God*, something new began to stir within me. *Friends of God* is a collection of homilies, and it opened my eyes to a truth I had never fully grasped: God's call to holiness is for everyone, regardless of work, vocation, or social standing. Ordinary tasks, daily responsibilities, and professional work can all become ways to love Him and serve others.

Slowly, that message began to change me. I started to see celibacy not as a loss, but as a gift: the beautiful possibility of giving myself completely to God and to others. It wasn't an overnight decision. It was like an invitation that kept coming back to me in prayer until I could no longer ignore it.

Through time, prayer, and careful discernment, I embraced the vocation to Opus Dei as an assistant numerary. This choice meant living celibacy, striving for professional excellence, and discovering the joy of making ordinary work holy. It also inspired me to pursue further studies in theology and philosophy, which deepened my love for the Catholic faith.

Looking back now, I see how my earlier spiritual confusion has given way to clarity and peace. I am no longer simply receiving a faith handed down to me; I am consciously choosing it, living it, and joyfully sharing it with others.

## **Sharing with others**

I taught Catholic doctrine and mentored young people first in Quezon City, then in Visayas, and now in Calamba, Laguna. Through these experiences, I have been

blessed to witness firsthand how formation shapes lives and how God works powerfully in the most unexpected ways.

One day, a friend invited me to an online catechetical seminar. At first I was reluctant — my schedule was full — but eventually, I said yes. That seminar was hosted by *Unboxing Catholicism*. Initially, I ignored the follow-up emails, thinking I was already receiving enough formation through Opus Dei. But I got to appreciate the *Unboxing Catholicism* initiative and the way it helps ordinary Catholics defend their faith clearly and charitably, without being preachy, more and more.

As my formation in Opus Dei deepened, so did my desire to share what I was receiving. I began inviting my family and friends to some spiritual activities of the Work, and I quickly saw how it changed the

way they understood and lived their faith. The spirit of Opus Dei is practical, faithful to Scripture, loyal to the Magisterium, and deeply pastoral. It has nourished me and given me the tools to help others grow.

Wanting my own family to feel closer to this spirit, I bought a large frame and installed an image of St. Josemaría Escrivá on our wall at home as a reminder to pray to him and be inspired by his example each day.

About a year ago, together with others at my center in Calamba, I helped organize a visit in an orphanage. That initiative was close to my heart because of my love for children. We reached out to friends, companies, and benefactors for support, and I was deeply moved by the generous response of those we approached, which helped us bring

the project to life. That experience confirmed for me once again that Opus Dei is not just an institution, but a living family of ordinary people striving to do extraordinary good for the Church and society.

## **From searching to conviction**

Today, I strive to live my faith intentionally and share it courageously. I am deeply grateful to God for leading me through a path of questions, confusion, and, ultimately, conviction. I have consciously chosen the faith I inherited and used to take for granted.

I mentor other young women, and looking back, I think my own journey of doubt and discovery has helped me be a bridge for others. Having been exposed to different denominations myself, I understand where they're coming from.

If there is one thing I have learned along the way, it is this: God never wastes our searching. Every detour, question, and season of doubt can become a bridge to deeper grace.

As I continue to walk this path, my prayer is simple: I want my story to encourage others who are still searching to keep going, so that they may discover — just as I did — that God's love is patient, personal, and powerful enough to transform any heart willing to be found.

Celica Tapero

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