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My Journey into the Catholic Faith

Matthew explains his journey to the Faith helped by a secondary school friend.

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My name is Matthew. I was baptized a Catholic on Ascension day at the age of 32. This is the story of my journey into the Catholic faith. I was born in Lagos where I currently reside. I am the last of five children of my parents, even though two of my siblings are deceased: the first in 1999 and the second in 2019. Since

my Dad died in January 1998, my mother raised us all by herself. I also had my primary and secondary education in Lagos.

From birth my family had belonged to the Cherubim & Seraphim church which, in Nigeria, is colloquially referred to as a “white garment” church, a reference to the full length white cassock that all the faithful wear.

I had been an active member of the church since childhood, attending the children’s class and then, as I grew older, I began worshipping as a teenager with the “youth fellowship”. As a youth I was given many tasks of responsibility in the Cherubim & Seraphim church because of my sense of responsibility, commitment and dedication to whatever was related to God’s work. Senior church executives later appointed me to work as an interpreter, a task I tried

to do very well and diligently. I was also invited on many occasions to lead the church service, on regular church days, as well as on special occasions and anniversaries. All of these gave me joy because I was developing quickly. I loved those moments and thought it was the only way to serve God better and to develop physically and spiritually.

Segun and I have been friends since secondary school. He is Catholic and talks to me a lot about the Catholic faith. Although I do not condemn any religion, I told him that I could not be Catholic as I did not see any difference between one way of worshipping God as a Christian and another way.

I told him about my church (Cherubim & Seraphim) and all I have been able to achieve with the youth department and even the church at large. However, he

continued to present arguments to me, trying to shine more light on those aspects of Catholic doctrine I considered to be idolatrous.

In 2019, I lost my sister who died during child birth. She was delivered of twins who survived. This was a tough time for everyone concerned, especially my mother, my two other siblings and the three children of my late sister. At this point, I realized that we needed to do more to support our family financially. I was earning a very small amount of money from working as a teacher but this was barely enough. However we did our best to make it last while remaining hopeful about God's help.

I had been a Cooperator of Opus Dei since 2017. When my sister died in 2019, Opus Dei was the source of my greatest support. I used to frequent a centre of Opus Dei called the "Akoka Study Centre" in Yaba, Lagos. My

Catholic friends there gave me moral and spiritual support which lifted my spirit, giving me the energy and motivation to work hard to continue to provide for my family.

I began to participate at the monthly short retreats and was also attending classes on Christian spirituality given by a lay person of Opus Dei who was a friend of mine. From the wealth and diversity of the topics covered, I realized how well organized and orderly the Catholic Church is, in its beliefs and methods.

It had all these without as much “noise” as the more “popular” churches I was used to in Nigeria. I have no doubt that the “Catholic” way has really helped me beyond my imagination both physically and spiritually and I still believe that more is yet to come.

Matthew Okunola

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