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The beginning of my love affair with God

Collins finds God in a centre of Opus Dei in Enugu, Nigeria.

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All the experiences of my life came together as I sat in the Chapel listening to the priest. It was an evening of recollection held once a month at Ugwuoma, a Centre of Opus Dei in Enugu.

The priest was quoting from *The Way*: “A secret, an open secret: these world crises are sanctity crises. God wants a handful of men 'of his own' in every human activity. And then... *pax Christi in regno Christi*— the peace of Christ in the kingdom of Christ”. As I listened, deep in my heart, a feeling was growing in me that nothing will ever be the same again. All connections and relationships made during my relatively short life all seem to acquire new meaning. Engrossed, I was no longer aware of the others sitting beside me in the Chapel.

The priest seated at the small table facing us continued speaking, what he said filled my heart.

“Either we find God hidden in the little things of each day, in the most material things or we will never find him.”

When the recollection ended, I followed the others out of the Chapel. It was already dark outside, a thought of “what will I have for dinner” crossed my mind.

“Have we met before?” someone asked. He was tall and almost bald.

“I don’t think so”, I answered.

He introduced himself.

“Nice to meet you”, I said.

We shook hands.

“Is this your first time?”, he asked smiling.

“No, not really”, I said.

“But I feel it for the first time”, I continued after a slight pause.

He was puzzled.

“Well, come over here let’s *gist*”, he said. (*gist* here implies chatting or talking).

He led the way to a side room with emerald green sofas. On the middle table, a large bowl filled with little crystals pebbles added charm and elegance to the room.

As we sat down, I began to explain.

“I had attended days of recollections in the past, about four or five times. I have even gone to the Centre in Abuja, but I guess I wasn’t ready, and it did not make much sense to me then, but today is different.” I paused, searching for words to express myself.

“How did you get to know about Opus Dei?”, he asked.

“I first met Opus Dei while living at Abuja. A friend put me in contact with Professor Picardo, who gave me

the address of the Centre. I went and later, when I came to Enugu, he gave me directions to Ugwuoma.”

“Interesting” he said, “and what do you do for a living?”.

“I am a 3rd year law student at ESUT,” I said, “my first degree was in Business Administration. But I have always wanted to read law, so I went back to school.”

He was easy to talk with, and we were soon talking like old friends. I ended up talking about my late Dad:

“My Dad was everything to me” I began, “as a child he took me by the hand to school daily, cooking, washing up after us, and was practically the Nanny of the house whenever Mom wasn’t around. When money was short and the food less, we ate with joy because he would make us laugh with many funny stories. As a teenager, I remember the evening

strolls with my Dad, him telling me many stories, about his life, his youth and his dreams. We were friends, and I looked forward to our discussions. He even sought my advice in business, and I would help him reply business letters and take phone calls.

I did not realize my Daddy was very ill with diabetes all the while, until when it was almost close to killing him. He hid his pain from me and my siblings. Although he was in great pain he never showed it. When his illness slowed him down, he concentrated his energy into motivating us, inspiring us to achieve greatness.

He died on 13th Sept 2009, at Park-lane hospital. When I went back to see him and touched his body, I was shocked that it was as stiff as wood, I could not shake the horror. Death then took on a whole new meaning. It dawned on me that I could die. Life stood still and aimless.

I remember rushing out to buy a Bible with the last money I had and went into a Church, St Brigid, to ask God to speak to me and tell me why he took my Dad. Kneeling, I asked God why he needed to refine me. I was unsure how to proceed. I wasn't sure what to do. I felt I needed a guide.”

The cold wind hissing from the air conditioner vents was all the sound in the room. I had run out of words.

After some silence he told me about our being children of God, “Awareness of our divine filiation” he said, “is the foundation of the spirit of Opus Dei.”

He asked if I would like to have a life of intimate relationship with God, I lit up like a Christmas tree, and said that I thought he would never ask.

Before I left the Centre that evening, he showed me how to do the Mental prayer, and gave me the book, “In

Conversation with God” by Francis Fernandez.

Few weeks later when we met and he asked how things were going, I was gushing:

“Learning about the mental prayer and the divine filiation is like being born again, again,” I said. The puzzled look on his face made me laugh.

I explained that I believe I was born again that day, after my father’s death but I could not go far because I had no one to guide me.

“When you taught me how to do the mental prayer, I was born again, again. I am a changed person now,” I said.

He beamed as I recounted my experiences of the past few weeks.

“One day the topic of the mental prayer so haunted me that I had to go and apologize to someone who had hurt me.”

“Is that so”, he chuckled.

“Yes”, I answered, “the topic was on mortification, and I read that it was easier to give up your bed or give a little change to a beggar than to humble oneself and apologize to someone who hurt you. So, I rose from the prayer, determined to do just that. It was quite difficult, but I made up my mind, and God did it. The person concerned was so taken aback he nearly fainted. He knew that he hurt me, and the last thing he was expecting was an apology from me. Thus, he began to apologize to me as well and now we are friends again.”

He smiled.

“There is more”, I said, “on another occasion, I was driving home when a car almost ran into me. I swerved to avoid him and was shocked when he scoffed at me. Instinctively, I scoffed right back at him. At that instant, I felt a sharp rebuke from somewhere in my conscience. It was as though Christ was sitting beside me in the car and talking through my conscience, telling me not to lose an opportunity to share his cross. I felt ashamed, and took back my insulting words.”

“Though, I was going to Mass previously”, I added with a deep smile, “now I go with enthusiasm and love, helped by the mental prayer. I hungered for a love affair with God. I was looking for it, and I thank God that it has begun.”

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