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Conversion story: Back home with the 99

"I attribute my conversion to St. Josemaria Escriva, who interceded fervently for torrents of graces to come my way."

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A good friend once told me this thing about shepherds - they break the legs of the sheep that would stray from the fold. I thought, "How cruel! Poor little lamb." She then continued,

saying that after breaking the legs of that sheep, the shepherd would set it on his shoulders until they reach their destination. Through this painful experience, the sheep learns to keep to the fold. Though surely feeling much pain, that sheep must have felt tremendous peace knowing that it was finding its way back home on the shoulders of its beloved shepherd.

My story is similar to that of the lost sheep whose legs had to be broken in order to learn its lesson not to stray from the fold.

My mother is a protestant since birth while my father is a non-practicing Catholic. Growing up in Metro Manila, I was not very spiritual and would merely accompany my mother and aunt to various fellowship services. I went to a Christian grade school where I learned to memorize bible verses. All those years spent

repeating verses made no real impact on me.

My father worked outside the Philippines and would come home once a year, for a few days. I was always looking for my dad and asking my mom when he was scheduled to come for vacation. Looking back, I realize the importance of having both parents present during the developmental years of a child. My longing for a stable father figure became a void which I tried to fill by spending more time outside with friends.

In high school, I found solace in relationships with boys. While at first I thought I'd find happiness, deep down, I knew that this was not what I truly yearned. I was lost, confused, depressed, and angry as I could not cope with relationship problems and family issues. I declared myself an agnostic and

couldn't care less about God. I forgot that I had a soul.

On hindsight, it truly was a blessing that I got a scholarship to a University that my mom had been eyeing for me since I was young. I owe this school my whole life. Through the philosophy, theology and history classes that they offered, my eyes were opened to the Catholic faith.

In my second year of college, I enlisted for a course on the Sacraments, which was taught by a priest of Opus Dei. I never really took any of my classes seriously. However, there was something about this priest and his no-frills explanation of the Truths of the Catholic Faith that sparked my interest. I never missed a class, aced all my quizzes and exams and simply focused my energies on trying to understand the mystery that was Catholicism.

Halfway through the semester, he asked the class if anyone wanted to go for spiritual direction. I honestly did not know what that meant but I felt like my life needed to have clear direction, so I decided to give it a shot. I told him that everything about the Catholic Church just made a lot of sense to me.

Learning about my growing interest in the Catholic Church, he advised me to borrow Scott Hahn's *Rome Sweet Home* from the library. I finished the book in a week, taking down as many notes as I could. Scott and Kimberly Hahn's journey back "home" inspired me so much that I came back to the priest with the conviction to finally become a Catholic. I was instructed what to do: go to the parish church in my vicinity for me to make a profession of faith. But for months, that intense longing remained a longing, which was not translated into action.

I got derailed once again. I returned to my old ways. I felt like a different kind of spirit was living within me, someone who had no sense of remorse or guilt for trespasses. I would wake up in the morning and stare at my reflection in the mirror, which was looking less and less like myself.

I started seeing a guy and we seemed to get along well, since our personalities somehow matched. After a while though, we lived an unending cycle of fighting, making up and draining the life out of each other. It was on one particular night of arguing when I felt this impelling force to surrender the fight to a higher power. I resolved to start anew and to live a sober life. I quit all my worldliness cold turkey.

I finished my studies and went on to work for my friend's mom. One afternoon she told me that her

daughter's mentor from the same University wanted to see me. I met with the mentor and as soon as I sat in her office, she told me that she learned about my wanting to convert to Catholicism. A rapid stream of thoughts ran through my head. I fought off all negativity and told her that, yes, I wanted to become a Catholic. I told her my life story and I realized then that I had been delaying and saying no to the truly good things for such a long time.

I began attending the activities in a center of Opus Dei with my friend. Our mentor from college guided me back to working on the things of faith that I had set aside two years ago. By a tremendous influx of graces and prayers, my profession of faith, first communion and confirmation all took place in less than a month.

I thank God every day for the dedicated people who go out of their

way to help those straying from the right path. I attribute my conversion to St. Josemaria Escriva, who interceded fervently for torrents of graces to come my way. As written by this great saint in his book *Furrow*, my horizons broadened and every day has become more colorful and meaningful, amidst the struggle.

The greatest gift we can give someone is to lead them closer to God. Now that I am back with the ninety-nine, I hope to help the Good Shepherd in tending His lost sheep and bringing them back to the fold, through the intercession of Our Lady, the surest and easiest way back to the Shepherd.

“Conversion is the matter of a moment. Sanctification is the work of a lifetime.” - St. Josemaria Escriva, the patron saint of the ordinary

Maria Agustin

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