

Saint Josemaria provided for my aunt during the pandemic

Michelle lives in Cebu and had to take care of her ailing aunt who was living alone in Iloilo. She narrates how that was made possible through the intercession of St. Josemaria.

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I would like to share this memorable favor I received from Saint Josemaría.

My parents and my brothers with their families all migrated to Canada in 2013. Since then, I have been looking after my dad's older unmarried sister, Esperanza, or "Auntie Inday." She was in her late 70s and living alone in Badiangan (Iloilo) in a nipa hut by the ricefields. I reside and work in Cebu, a good 30 minutes away by plane or an overnight trip by boat.

I would visit my aunt and stay with her at least twice a year: during the Holy Week and during Christmas break. With the COVID-19 travel restrictions, I could not go in 2020. My thoughts went to my aunt who has already been suffering dementia.

We are grateful to Auntie Albina and Auntie Digna, who have taken on the role of caregiver-relatives. They made sure that Auntie Inday ate well, took care of her laundry, helped her

groom herself, and assisted in getting her pension from the city.

Our family wanted my aunt to be looked after well in her old age, and we tried to talk her into residing in a well-equipped elderly home at Asilo de Molo in Iloilo City, where she could have a doctor and a caregiver, plus good company with other elderly men and women. But when talked about the matter, she would show displeasure and would repeatedly say that she doesn't want to leave her hut anymore. And so we let her be.

I was scheduled to fly to Iloilo on March 24, 2020, but just a week before my flight, both Iloilo and Cebu enforced a hard lockdown. I had to content myself with our regular phone calls to ask how she was doing, exchange stories, and pray Hail Marys. We invoke St. Josemaria, Blessed Alvaro and the Sto. Niño

after each phone call. She always ends asking me when I'd be visiting her again. I had to try my best to explain to her what the pandemic is, and that it was not safe to travel yet.

My second attempt to enter Iloilo was already on April 6, 2021. Getting denied once again was painful.

Firstly, getting a swab test (nose and throat) was a real ordeal physically and financially. And secondly, I went through so much finishing the required paperwork and Iloilo was suddenly placed on lockdown from April 4-10, 2 days before my scheduled boat trip. That was truly heartbreaking.

Meanwhile, my aunt's caregivers were telling me that my aunt's condition was deteriorating and they felt incapable of attending to her needs. I pleaded and requested them to wait for me to arrive so I could look for the caregiver replacements

myself. They agreed, but only for one month more. This was a crisis. I tried to keep my peace and prayed for the best possible solution.

Someone suggested that I approach the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) office in my aunt's municipality to ask for help; it was their job to do so, especially since we're in times of pandemic. I prayed to St. Josemaria to help me in this quest to find a working contact number of the municipality, and to connect me to social workers who would help me check on my aunt. I conducted a Google search, found a mobile number, which was the only number listed under Badiangan, and called. It rang! (I considered that a miracle because usually, the phone numbers posted on the web are not updated).

After just 2 rings, a lady spoke at the other end and, after explaining why I

needed to speak with someone from DSWD, she said she was going downstairs to look for a certain Cressel, the social worker on-duty at that time. When I spoke with Cressel, I knew that this was truly an answered prayer. She listened to my story about Auntie Inday, spoke so affectionately, and was to me the most reassuring and caring person I had ever spoken with on the phone. She mobilized her colleagues to visit my aunt.

She called me back the following day to relay wonderful news: the current Barangay Captain (a lady) is a relative of my dad, and so is one of the Barangay councilors. They were not aware of Auntie Inday's situation since she was living 5 kilometers from the town proper. I was connected to my Barangay Kapitana Auntie Nora and my Kagawad uncle, Tito Noel. They became my partners in looking after Auntie Inday from

June till September 21, 2021, when she passed away. She was 82 years old.

She was bedridden for almost two weeks, and stopped eating altogether. I'm glad that we still got to talk over the phone on September 16, and we managed to recite our usual prayers. Our relatives tried to look for a priest in their area but unfortunately, he was on self-quarantine.

I was finally able to arrange for a boat trip to Iloilo and arrived there on Sept 24, with no hitches (but going through standard travel requirements like the RT-PCR, which I dreaded). My aunt's wake started on Sept 29 at the barangay chapel and her funeral Mass and interment fell on October 6, St. Josemaria's canonization anniversary. With this final coincidence, I was more than certain that he interceded for our

family in looking after Auntie Inday until the end.

In the eulogy, I told the people about St. Josemaria and the express favor he granted me and my family. I managed to bring Saint Josemaría prayer cards with me during this trip, and I gave them out to our relatives there. I explained to them a bit about Opus Dei, a path to help people keep themselves united with God through their well-done work which they mostly do in the ricefields, for many of our relatives there are rice farmers.

A beautiful note to include here is that the parish church where my aunt's funeral Mass was held is called The Holy Child Parish at Palanguia, Pototan, Iloilo. So, together with St. Josemaria, I know that Sto. Niño also took care of my aunt, and was with her when she breathed her last.

My stay in Badiangan, Iloilo from September 24-Oct 6 is something I'll always treasure. Meeting my dad's and Auntie Inday's cousins: Tita Nora, Tito Noel, Tito Larry, and others, most of whom I met for the first time; and being cared for by them in the barangay preschool-cum-quarantine-facility, was such a Gift!

Despite the challenges that go with adjusting to a new place for 10 days, I felt that I was in good company. I never got to meet Cressel, the social worker, to thank her personally. I learned that she had just given birth during the days that I was in Iloilo. But, I was able to contact her later by phone to express gratitude for all the help she had given us in caring for my elderly aunt.

I am convinced that St. Josemaria was actively involved in all this and provided the pandemic solutions that we urgently needed.

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