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# **Local Lives, Universal Faith: Just Three Steps**

The next article in our local series featuring personal testimonies of people in the region on how the faith and the Work has impacted their lives. Cuiwen is a supernumerary from Singapore who is a convert to Catholicism. Here is the story of her journey towards a true relationship with God and her vocation.

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In my youth, I worshipped in a Baptist church. There was a very strong focus on Bible study there, and I went every Sunday more out of a routine than actually searching for God. At that point in time, my faith was motivated partly in wanting to please my parents and be a good daughter, and to be a faithful disciple of God. My understanding was that if I sought God and obeyed Him, I would find Him and fulfill His will for me. When I was in Secondary 4, I underwent a baptism course and got baptised. However, there was a nagging feeling in me that I had done so not fully accepting God into my heart, and I left the church shortly after.

### *First step*

When I was in junior college, I met my friend Wei Lian, and we became good friends as we stayed really close to one another and were in the same

art program. She was the first person to introduce the Catholic faith to me. When she joined Opus Dei, she invited me a few times to the doctrine classes and meditations, and that was my first interaction with Catholics who were really warm and friendly, and who readily offered explanations to my questions. Prior to this, my experience with Catholic people was very foreign, with many 'additions' of rituals during Masses and of devotions to the saints, and I was always resistant to finding out more. I thank God for helping me, in due time, to appreciate the richness of our faith and for revealing the beauty of the Mass to me!

### *Second step*

A mission trip to Vietnam organised by Hillcrest, the Centre for young people in Singapore, in December 2013 was my first chance to do mission work overseas, and for me to

see how service could be like in a developing country. At that time, my focus was on work and not my spiritual life – the trip happened at the opportune time when I was transiting between jobs, that I felt I could give of my time and energies to others. I met Carmen, who was the trip organiser, and who I felt was always very kind and willing to share her thoughts and faith. Although at that point in time, I did not know of my future conversion and did not feel any spiritual calling, I had the understanding of what good, self-sacrificial work the Catholic faith inspired through the example of the priest in Myson village – he knew each and every member of the village, and could tell us his concrete plans to improve the lives of the poor. I was also impressed by the warm way our young Vietnamese translators received the poor and elderly in the village, as well as the cheerful and enthusiastic volunteers

from Hillcrest. All these helped me to feel God's presence in the daily lives of the Catholics who prayed and went to Mass everyday and were close to God.

*Mission trip in Myson village. The man in the photo is the village priest.*

After that trip, I entered into the social service line of work in the area of mental health, and was invited by a colleague to a Methodist church. It was then that I began to feel the desire to be closer to God. I felt comfortable and accepted in the community, and made many friends in that church, a very different experience from my first church. I also joined a year-long Bible study class to deepen my faith – I felt that perhaps I had not read enough of the Bible to understand God's will for me. Through fellowship with my friends at that church, I found that it was an improvement from my

previous spiritual experience – I joined them in outreaches to nursing homes, and there were opportunities to serve others and show God’s love through service.

### *Third step*

It was at the end of May 2015, halfway through my Bible study class and a year into my job, that I felt burnt out from throwing so much of myself into my job – even though I found it very fulfilling to be serving others directly. Wei Lian told me that she was going on the Camino de Santiago for the second time, with Carmen, and extended me another invitation to join. I agreed. It was a small group this time, and I was the only non-Catholic person there.

At first, I was quite enraptured by the experience of being a pilgrim and spending time in nature and the quiet time with God, and the cheerful way that people greeted one another

and meeting fellow pilgrims along the way. But as the first and second days progressed, I felt increasingly uncomfortable as the only one who didn't pray the rosary or want to know the Catholic version of the stories. To avoid feeling awkward, I decided to walk very quickly and on my own. However, things did not progress smoothly and on the third day of the walk, I fell very sick. I felt feverish and weak. My companions saw that I could not continue on, and helped me tremendously, calling for a car and Joanna, a friend, accompanied me to the next location. As I was burning with fever in the inn, I felt alternately weak and also angry with God. Why had He brought me on this trip to suffer, when I wanted to spend time with Him?

The only conclusion that I could come to, was that God was trying to tell me something. I could not imagine an evil God who delighted in

my suffering, so I looked back on the events of the past few days and realised that although my companions had helped me and were kind to me in many ways, I had been polite but distant. I resolved from that point to change the way that I did my walk, by learning how to pray the rosary, and also taking turns to read from St Josemaria's *The Way*. I thought about my usual attitude in life, how I usually respond to God's call, and began to see similarities in the way that I had begun my walk. I began to pray to God to show me the truth – how should I live my faith?

It was in a small chapel, nearing the end of our walk, that I saw a statue of Jesus. For the first time, I prayed to an image of Jesus, to ask Him if this was the path that He wanted me to follow Him in, and if so, to explain what this was all about. It was at that moment when a friend came up to me, and told me that the statue was



an image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and for people who saw it, it would remind them of a prayer written by a French nun. It was only upon my return to Singapore, that I saw how Jesus answered my prayer. After going for daily Mass in Spain, I decided to try going for Mass in Singapore. It was a Friday, at St Joseph's church, when I heard the prayer dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, that I finally understood what Jesus was showing me. In the prayer, I was touched by the words "Jesus, help me to love You more." In that moment, I understood that I had always approached God with my problems and needs, but had not asked God to show me the manner in which I could love Him more. I was struggling by myself to learn how to love others and myself, and in that prayer, He was showing me how to pray. And at that point, I finally understood the Catholic emphasis on charity manifested in deeds – these

were the ways that I could love God more.

At that point, Wei Lian was sponsoring another friend, Janelle, who lived in Jurong for RCIA, and the process of confirmation went smoothly. The major obstacle I had to overcome was my mother's anger, but God's grace, helping me through with gentleness and firmness, allowed me to be fully received into the Catholic faith in Easter of 2016.

### *Reception into the Catholic Church*

Today, I give thanks to God for how He has continued to bless me in the years after. I met my husband, a former Protestant who also converted to the Catholic faith in 2020, and discovered my vocation as a supernumerary to Opus Dei. I participated in two mission trips to Cebu before marriage, and help to give classes of formation to a group of cooperators today. My husband

also became a cooperator soon after, and I am thankful for the spiritual direction and friendship offered by the priests to him. God blessed my mother and me with reconciliation and healed our relationship before she passed on recently in 2022. My husband and I are also blessed with our first child on the way.

There were many other instances where God showed His mercies, and through quieting my heart, reflection, and charitable work, I am able to appreciate His presence and grace more deeply in my life. I thank Him from the bottom of my heart for leading me to fuller communion with Him, and look forward to growing in Him and the spirit of Opus Dei.

Loong Cuiwen (Singapore)

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