

## **“To be a priest is something beautiful and great.”**

Fr. Shohei Kimura was ordained as a priest of Opus Dei on 31st May 2003 in Rome by Bishop Javier Echevarría. He tells his story of conversion.

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Shohei is the firstborn of the Kimuras. His name means “the serene man from the forest village”. His mother embraced Catholicism when he was eight. Four years later,

he too was baptised. In May 2003, his father and relatives travelled from Japan to Rome for his ordination, together with the parish priest Father Inoue and parishioners of Ibaraki.

We present some excerpts taken from an interview given in 2003, shortly after his ordination.

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“I was moved to know that faithful from Ibaraki were at my ordination. During the persecutions of the 16th and 17th century, there were many clandestine Catholics in the area of Ibaraki. I don’t think I’m exaggerating if I thought that I owed some part of my Christian vocation to them.” **Can you tell us what influenced you in taking the step of your vocation?**

I was baptised when I was twelve. I owe this to many people, firstly to both my parents. My mother, who

converted 4 years ahead of me, prayed the Rosary frequently. I recall that she had great devotion to our Lady of Guadalupe. She was the one who found a priest to teach me Catechism.

My father was remarkable too as a person who loved freedom. Although he has no religion and was none too pleased about my conversion, he always defended my freedom before relatives who took our conversions as a sort of betrayal. My conversion was a serious matter since I was the firstborn. Nonetheless, my father always stood by me, “Let him be, if he wants to be baptised, he will be baptised.” This respect for freedom was an important factor. **Do you recall something from those years of catechism?**

The Parish priest, Father Gustaf Banbael de Scheut, from the Congregation of the Immaculate

Heart of Mary, came every Saturday to my house to teach me Catechism. When he couldn't come, some nuns I had met in the parish would come. As distance goes in Japan, the parish was far from my house, which made the constancy with which they came over those 3 years all the more remarkable. I will be forever indebted.

When I turned thirteen, my family moved to another part of Osaka, where I met a Salesian priest, Father Josef Heriban. He was a serene and affectionate man who radiated peace. I remember this Belgian priest perfectly because he helped me greatly and gave me invaluable advice. Once he presented me with a book which captivated me. I discovered my professional calling to be a teacher through it. It was the biography of St John Bosco. It inspired me to be pious and above all to dedicate my life to education,

which was why I later read English Philology at university. There I met Opus Dei through a friend and saw that God was calling me to the Work.

**What impressed you most from those years?**

The exemplary sanctity of many priests in Japan working under circumstances that were objectively very difficult was impressive. Fr. Banbael was no exception; I have met other priests like him. They neither forced nor insisted on my taking steps forward; on the contrary I have been the one who felt drawn. This is why I would say they were saints: they were a marvelous example of love and sacrifice; an example that greatly attracted me.

**How did your relatives and friends take the news of your ordination?**

In general, fairly well, due to the esteem that is given in Japan to professions that seek to serve others;

like being a teacher. I have received congratulatory letters from 3 friends, one a Catholic and the other 2 free-thinkers. They understand that what I have taken on means service to others, for a good priest retains nothing for himself. Our model is Christ.

Besides, I am really happy that my father came to my ordination; I did not expect him to. I also appreciate the effort it has taken for my sister and brother to make the trip. It is difficult to take leave from work in Japan, one has to make up for time lost up to the last minute.

As you can imagine, we miss the presence of my mother. She died 10 years ago. She wanted me to be a priest and prayed for it. She left me completely free to decide what I wanted to be, but I recall that from time to time she would tell me,

“Shohei, to be a priest is something very beautiful and very great.”

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