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# Closer to God through Montse Grases

Raymond, a physics major and avid chess player, discovered an inspiration for his life of faith in the story of Montse Grases. He designed youthful prayer cards to spread devotion to her. She was declared Venerable in 2016 by Pope Francis.

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Raymond studied physics at De La Salle University, in Manila. He loves chess (he used to play for the chess varsity team) and writes short poems for his friends. He's of Chinese descent. His grandparents were fisherfolk who migrated to the Philippines on a small boat, fleeing the Communist takeover in China. Though eventually baptized in the faith, Raymond's family were not practicing Catholics. He started living his faith more deeply as a teenager. This is a story of his friendship with Montse.

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*Download* Montse's prayer card (PDF) *and a* free e-booklet *on her life. A* novena *for Montse's intercession has been written by Fr. Francisco Faus.*

*Videos on Venerable Montse are available on YouTube:* Inspiring Life, Joy of Youth

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My name is Raymond. I'm from Bacolod City, in Negros Island (Philippines). I first got to know about Montse almost by chance. It was during one occasional visit to Buklod, the only center of the Work for men in our whole island province, two jeepney rides away from home. I was then sixteen, in my last year of high school, and would go at least once a month for the afternoon recollection in the center.

In one of those Saturdays at Buklod, I was leaving earlier than usual to catch a ride home sooner. As my friend was accompanying me to the door, I happened to see a small prayer card lying on a side table. It

showed the portrait of a teenage girl. I asked my friend who that girl was, and I was told that she was a young numerary from Barcelona named Montse.

It was a providential encounter. I had spoken earlier with that same friend about how I could possibly get my sister and mother in touch with the Work. And that's how a simple devotion to Montse began, whom I asked to intercede for my family.

Some time later, during my school's Christmas break, I managed to drop by Buklod to attend morning Mass on a weekday. I also hoped to borrow a book that I could read over the holidays. As I was scanning through various book titles on the shelves, my eyes were drawn to a small yellow paperback. It was *Montse: A Fun-Loving Teenager* by J.M. Cejas (now republished as *Like Any Other: A Girl*

*Named Montse*), and I ended up taking it home for the holidays.

Reading that account of Montse's life, I was moved by how she spent her life of dedication to God in a very natural way: in her studies, her friendships, her family, etc. It was heartening to know how fond she was of theater acting, dancing the sardana (a traditional dance in Catalonia), and going outdoors. She was a normal girl, like any other… and I saw in her a wonderful role model for young people.

In that book, I also learned about the terrible illness she suffered, a rare type of bone cancer called *Ewing's sarcoma,* which seriously affected one of her legs. Given its advanced stage, it was impressive how Montse continued to live her life with a clear sense of direction, with a serene (even cheerful!) abandonment to God's will. She never allowed herself

to succumb to melancholy, even though the doctor's prognosis was far from hopeful.

Amid the great pain she continuously endured, she would heroically think of those around her. (I can well visualize the scene when she gave up her seat for a child, although her leg was hurting.) It also struck me how—despite knowing her youthful life was nearing its end—she still strove to make good use of time by continuing to work on her studies. Montse kept tending to her various duties until her illness eventually forced her to stay in bed. And while in bed, she would not refuse anyone her smile, even though she was easily exhausted.

I asked Montse to intercede for me, that I may do well in my studies, and that I may acquire the same level of filial trust that she had in divine providence.

## Taking Initiative

In light of my acquaintance with Montse, a friend and I tried to work on a small initiative during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Since we couldn't hand out physical copies of prayer cards, we thought of creating digital versions, with a more youthful look and feel, in different sizes suited for Facebook or Instagram and Twitter, in both image and document formats. *The printable PDF of Montse's prayer card can be downloadedi here.*

Among the various digital prayer cards in the website of Opus Dei, my personal favorite is that of Montse. We were able to access some high-quality photos from the *Flickr* page of Opus Dei. For her digital prayer card design, we chose a shade of pastel blue, which to us seemed to convey both her serenity and youthful cheerfulness. Moreover,

since being a student was her profession, we included some design elements related to study, such as a pen, book, and notebook. Lastly, to help spread the devotion to more people, we worked on versions of Montse's prayer card in different languages, namely English, Spanish, French, German, and Chinese.

It did require time and careful attention to detail working on these prayer cards. But if it would help even just one person to get to know Montse better, all the effort would have been worth it. My hope is that many people receive the material and spiritual favors they petition through her intercession. (And God willing, may the Holy See soon approve a miracle attributed to her, which would pave the way for her beatification!)

This little initiative that my friend and I started has also helped me

grow closer to Montse, and for that I am grateful. I remember her more often now, and I continue to ask little favors from her. In my last years in college, I was tackling several tough subjects, alongside thesis work… I counted on Montse and she helped me pull through.

It's 2024 and I've just recently graduated. (And as if Montse were teasing me… I'm recovering from leg troubles of my own! Nothing serious though.) In any case, I owe deep gratitude to her intercession.

And I still keep her prayer card as my desktop screensaver up to now. Hopefully many more young people may come to know about Montse's outstanding life, and help make her example known to others.

Raymond Albert Ng

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