

Reading "The Way" changed my life

Interview with Oskari Juurikkala, from Finland, who is studying Law at the London School of Economics.

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"What attracted you to the Catholic Church?"

I grew up a non-believer, although my parents now belong to the Lutheran church of Finland. I became attracted to Catholicism some five years ago when I was 20.

The moral and cultural values of the Catholic Church greatly appealed to me. I saw them as a necessary counter-influence in our society, upholding the values of family, marriage and children.

At that time I had no faith. But I was curious, so I began to read about the history of Christianity. I soon was convinced that if there is any truth in Christianity, it must be in the Catholic Church. (This seemed clear to me even though I was reading a book written by Lutherans!) I could not believe that a handful of dissidents, who gained influence through the political opportunism of some rulers, could have taken the faith back to its true origins. Of course, it was easy for me to see things this way, because I had never been a Lutheran myself.

I nevertheless owe much of my faith to my parents. They developed in me an interest in the big questions of life

as well as a stubborn desire to defend all that is true and good. In contrast, the values of the society – school, university, media – were quite cynical and relativistic.

Because of this, my discovery of the philosophical tradition of the Church (especially the thought of St Thomas Aquinas) was to me like a refreshing oasis or a return to my childhood home! I was convinced that St Thomas' ideas provided a sound basis for so much that I already believed in: that there is a Truth out there to be discovered – and that there also is a truth inside us, which alone can provide a basis for our actions.

"How did you become Catholic then?"

I started thinking about becoming a Catholic – but I didn't know a single Catholic. I wasn't quite sure what it meant to be Catholic and what I

needed to do to become one. However, I then read about Opus Dei on the Internet. I became so curious that I immediately contacted these people by email and invited myself for a visit.

Before my first visit to the Centre in Helsinki, I had no idea what to expect. I thought the place would be like a headquarters of a political party. As entered the house, I was dumbstruck, because what I entered was simply the home of these guys who, on top of everything, were amazingly friendly and natural.

I sat down with the director of the centre and explained my desire to become Catholic. On the spot, he offered to give me talks on the faith. I entered a profoundly exciting time in my life. Not only did I find the faith beautiful and attractive, but I could not believe this guy was giving all these talks just for me, free of charge!

I wanted to become Catholic, no doubt about it. I used to visit the Centre as often as I could, and I began to do some personal prayer and to say the Rosary. All of this made me so happy that I couldn't believe it is possible to be so happy. I was finally baptised and confirmed on 1 October 2002, feast of St Thérèse of Lisieux.

"What do you like best about Opus Dei?"

I love so many things about Opus Dei: the family atmosphere, the idea that we are all God's children, and the respect for the freedom of each individual. But I suppose the thing I like best is that Opus Dei is full of these crazy people who just want to do so much good in this world – and they don't even care what others have to say about it!

"Why did you decide to become a Numerary?"

I wasn't really planning to become a Numerary at all. I was hoping to start a large family. However, God had other plans for me. When I discovered this, I was at first completely shocked and told Him in disbelief: 'No, you can't ask that of me! Ask anything else, but not that!' In the end I gave in and was happier than ever.

"What is your favourite passage from St Josemaría?"

Point 1 of The Way:

Don't let your life be barren. Be useful. Make yourself felt. Shine forth with the torch of your faith and your love.

These were the first lines I read from St Josemaría. They changed my life.

"What can Opus Dei contribute to European society in the 21st Century?"

Big question... Let's think what Europe needs. It certainly needs hope. Europe has been disillusioned by decades if not centuries of ideologies founded on hope in man alone without reference to God. Not surprisingly, such hopes have never quite lived up to their promises. In a sense we're still in a period of false hopes: hope in the almost salvific nature of material progress, economic growth etc. I don't think anyone deep down believes these things will make them happy, but they are clinging on to them because they have nothing else, and no one can live without hope.

This is the amazing message of Christianity: God really does exist, not just out there in the infinity but also right here, next to me, even inside me. He comes into history, because He loves me, and He doesn't just redeem me from my sins (which are a reality), but He's also the most

impressive person you or I have ever encountered.

What Opus Dei does, then, is that it tells people that they are called to be followers of Christ in this world, without leaving behind anything that is good in the world: technological progress, scientific discoveries, great films, music, good food and wine, human love, friendship... All these things can be an occasion for encountering Christ and getting to know Him better. Besides, if we fall in love with God, these good things will become even greater and will make us love God more and more.
