

Surprised by God

Celina, a 23-year-old Chinese, is studying to be a concert pianist in Austria. After suffering a personal tragedy, she found new friends, and the path to God, in a student residence in Vienna.

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When I came to Europe in 2003 from Lanzhou in the Peoples Republic of China, I didn't suspect that this would not only lead to important developments in my professional life,

but that my life as a whole would also change.

A dream comes true: Vienna

Practicing the piano--up to thirteen hours each day! That's how my life was, and the lives of many other young Chinese who wanted to pursue a musical career. My goal was a high one: I wanted to win a musical competition whose prize was studying in Vienna at the Conservatory of Music. And I succeeded! I was awarded a ticket to the "City of Music," along with my boy friend at the time, a very talented flutist. We had even more serious plans for a future together and were thinking about marriage.

But that was not to be. When we were back in China for a vacation visit, he died in an auto accident. It was a great shock to me. But God's ways are often not easy to understand at first. I still remember

the advice that some Christian friends of my mother gave me: “Keep your faith in God.” But I was not baptized myself.

Währing — a new home

When I returned to Vienna I looked for a place to stay and found a room in the Währing student residence for women, run by people of Opus Dei. That was a great good fortune for me. Here I found strong support in my music studies, while also coming to realize that the whole meaning of my life couldn't be my professional career. Practicing all day long and giving concerts couldn't be all that there was to life.

The death of my boy friend led me to ask myself many questions. I had begun seeking for and struggling with God. My confrontation with death brought me slowly back to life! Together with my friends in the residence I went on excursions, I

learned German, we looked after the garden and the house... and I no longer needed to practice grimly for thirteen hours a day. The way was a long one. I had to give up old habits. I stopped consulting horoscopes in search of my future, and decided to take my life into my own hands, and with God's help lead it along the right path. I grew in my trust in God, who was always there for me and for whom I tried to make every practice session into a gala concert in his honor.

A deep joy and peace

I wanted to learn more about the Catholic faith, and in the residence I received answers to my questions. After a thorough preparation and examination of the Catholic faith and its way of life, I was baptized in the residence chapel during the 2005 Easter Vigil. Everyone helped me with the preparations. We went

together to find the Baptismal candle and the white dress, and also a pair of earrings. I wear these earrings at every concert as a remembrance of the most important moment in my life. A great faith and joy flooded into my soul. And a deep peace entered my life.

Meanwhile I am studying with a professor in Linz. I know that my new life in the faith has to be renewed every day. To find Christ in my daily life I read the Gospel, spend some moments in dialogue with God, and go to the sacraments regularly. In Linz I meet with some friends from Opus Dei, to find encouragement for a consistent life of faith. The motto for my new life is: God is a sure help!

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