

"The Eucharist played the decisive role in my conversion."

Rianne Spoon, a 22-year-old Dutch medical student, was received into the Church this past December 12 during a solemn Mass in the Cathedral of St. Catherine in Utrecht, Netherlands. Here is her account:

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"I went to Utrecht to study medicine at the university. In need of a place to stay, I selected Hogeland residence, known for its clear Catholic orientation. I was brought up to believe that Catholic doctrine was erroneous, and so I asked myself why I wanted to live in Hogeland.

Undeterred by my childhood experiences, I gave it the benefit of the doubt and quickly found out that things were not as I had supposed. I met there a spirit of great freedom and respect.

"A year and a half ago a classmate converted, and that deeply impressed me. I realized that we both believed in the same God. But in spite of a strong sense of unity with the Catholic faith, there were two stumbling blocks: the Eucharist and Mary as Mother of God. After spending some time studying those and other subjects, I decided to make my profession of faith in the

Protestant denomination to which my family belonged, even if I had difficulty with some of its tenet-- especially its view of the Catholic Church.

"My decision not to continue the search and to leave everything in God's hands didn't leave me in peace. Doubts remained in my mind, and I was uneasy about it.

"There is an oratory in Hogeland residence where many students go to pray or to attend daily Mass celebrated by a priest of Opus Dei. I recall my inability to pass that oratory without feeling a need to go in. These sensations are hard to explain. In the situation I found myself in, I realized that if I did decide to go in and kneel before his Presence in the Tabernacle, I couldn't continue to be a Protestant. At that moment, I did not want to make to compromise myself; I had neither the

motivation nor the assurance to do it. I did not want to go against my Christian congregation nor my family, so I decided to let time pass in the hope that all my 'problems' would disappear.

"God doesn't get tired of waiting."

"Christmas came, and the clarity I expected this season of happiness and peace to give me didn't happen. My hope revived, however, when I came across a passage in Henri Nouwen's book, *Return of the Prodigal Son*. It did me a lot of good to read that God has infinite patience, for he does not want us to love him with a sense of obligation, but in freedom. He knows how to wait. He never gets tired of waiting.

"And so it was the Eucharist that played the decisive role in my conversion. I was envious of those who went to Mass every day; I couldn't imagine living as a Catholic

without daily Mass. Undoubtedly it was also important that I could sense the fatherliness of the Pope and see the face of Christ shine in the priests and Catholic lay people I knew.

"As I think back, what God was doing with me never ceases to amaze me. On the one hand, I learned the basics of the Catholic faith while having hot chocolate with my friend, Agnes. On the other hand, and going deeper, I felt in my very flesh that Christ is alive. If I write this down, it's only to express my gratitude. The priest who helped me along my path to the fullness of the faith put it this way: 'Not only must I be grateful for what I received, but also for what I can do for others from now on, if I am faithful.' "

Hogeland is a student resident in Utrecht where the formational activities are entrusted to the Prelature of Opus Dei.

For more information:

www.instudonl/hogeland/index.html

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