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# **“God has given me the gift of faith, my vocation... and Himself”**

Conversion story of a Hindu girl from Cebu (Philippines)

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I was born in Cebu, Philippines, and am of Indian ethnicity. I was born Hindu and no one in my family was Catholic. However, my parents had a personal devotion to our Lady and would visit churches whenever they had urgent petitions - when I was ill

or during financial difficulties. And our Lady would always pull us through.

I was enrolled in a Catholic school, and at the age of 7 (like the rest of my friends), I wanted to participate in the First Holy Communion celebration. But this was not possible because I was not baptized. After asking permission from my parents, they agreed, and that was how I became a Catholic. I really just wanted to be with my friends.

Over time, I received Catechism in Christian Living class, and after several years my parents also became Catholic. They wanted a Church wedding, as they already had a Hindu ceremony and a legal wedding in 1993.

Soon, I was in college and felt the need to know God more. I did nothing drastic in response to my sentiments. But it was through a very

good friend and my love for studying that I met the Work. The study center in Cebu had a free library, and a breathtakingly beautiful oratory. I saw a lovely image of our Lady with a golden frame, and noticed the many little details of care that the center took when it came to worship. This refinement was what made me take my religion and faith seriously.

The talks at the center were very insightful. I learned that “an hour of study for the modern apostle is an hour of prayer.” The simplicity, serenity, hard work, and cheerfulness of the people of the Work was a source of comfort to me whenever I was lost, and they led me to Our Lord in the Tabernacle.

In the past, I would sometimes miss Sunday Mass, but the formation I received helped me to love this obligation, and to confess my sins with faith in God’s mercy. In time, I

was encouraged to hear Mass daily and to love the Sacrament of Confession. I remember when I would hear Mass every day despite 36-hour hospital shifts and daily classes in Medical School. The days when I heard Mass despite tiredness were much more bearable than days without Mass. Surely, it was God's grace that multiplied my time and energy, like how He multiplied the loaves and the fish.

I had some struggles in the Faith as well. I was tempted to stop going to Mass because of someone I liked, who was a non-Catholic Christian. I tried to keep an open mind, and talked to the people at the center, who recommended good books on the Faith. I recovered my peace and became even more convinced of the teachings of the Catholic Church.

In 2018, I met my husband-to-be on a Catholic dating site, and I introduced

him to the Work in Mumbai. My husband started attending activities of Opus Dei after I introduced him, and in a year of knowing the Work, he discovered his vocation to be a supernumerary! I discovered mine soon after his. We dated long-distance for 4 years before getting married in 2022, on the feast of our Lady of Mount Carmel.

As a wife, my formation in the Work teaches me that my marriage comes first and that I can love God best by loving my husband.

On August 4, 2023, my husband and I met the Prelate of Opus Dei, Msgr. Fernando Ocariz, in a big get-together in Cebu! My heart is still overjoyed at the thought that the Father has seen us and we have heard him speak, and that he greeted us for our first wedding anniversary. In fact, I was smiling ear-to-ear the whole time and forgot to focus on

what he said because it was so surreal! Good thing there was a recording.

I told him that we were moving to Mumbai soon and probably to Canada afterwards. He reminded us to count on the communion of saints, and asked us to build the Church wherever we may be. He assured us of his prayers, and asked for prayers too.

I am very consoled that God has given me the gift of faith, my vocation, my loved ones, and nothing less than Himself each time I go to Mass and receive Him in the Holy Eucharist.

Sonali Fernandes

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of-faith-my-vocation-and-himself/  
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