

Lockdown with Montse Grases

Raymond, a physics major and a varsity-level chess player, discovered an inspiration for his own life of faith in the story of Montse Grases.

08/17/2020

Raymond is majoring in physics at De La Salle University, in Manila. He loves chess (he's part of the chess varsity team) and writes short poems for his friends. He's of Chinese ancestry. His grandparents were fishermen who migrated to the

Philippines on a fishing boat, fleeing Communist China. Though Raymond's family was Catholic, they were not practicing Catholics. He started living his faith more deeply as a teenager. This is the story of his friendship with Montse.

Download Montse's prayer card (PDF)

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 an occasional visit to Buklod, which was the only center of the Work for men in our whole island province, and 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 Saturday visits, I was scheduled to leave early for home so I could catch a ride sooner. But when my friend was accompanying me to the door, I happened to see a small prayer card lying on top of a side table. It showed the portrait of a teenage girl. I asked my friend who that girl might be, and I was told 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 help my sister and mother to get in touch with the Work. That's how my devotion to Montse began, whom I asked to intercede for my family.

Much later, during a Christmas break from school, I managed to drop by Buklod to attend weekday Mass in the morning. I also hoped to borrow

a book that I could read over the vacation. As I was scanning through the shelf of books, my eyes were drawn to a small yellow paperback. It was Montse: A Fun-Loving Teenager by J.M. Cejas, and I ended up taking it home for the holidays.

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

I also learned about the illness she died from, a rare type of bone cancer called Ewing's sarcoma. During this last phase of her life, I was impressed by how she continued to live with a

clear sense of direction, and a serene (and cheerful!) abandonment to God's will. It struck me that despite knowing the doctor's pessimistic prognosis, she never succumbed to melancholy. Despite the great pain she endured, she would still think of those around her first, as when she gave up her seat for a younger girl although her leg was hurting her. She also strove to make good use of her time by continuing to work on her studies, until her illness eventually forced her to stay in bed. And while in bed, she wouldn't refuse anyone her smile even though she was already feeling tired.

I pray that Montse intercedes for me, that I may do well in my own studies, and that I may also acquire the same level of filial trust that she had in divine providence.

Taking Initiative

Fairly recently, in light of my previous acquaintance with Montse, a friend and I tried to work on a small initiative during the quarantine. Since we couldn't hand out physical copies of prayer cards, we thought of creating digital versions to help people pray, but with a more youthful look-and-feel, in different sizes adjusted to Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, in both image and pdf format. You can download Montse's prayer card as a pdf **here**.

Among the various digital prayer cards, 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 pastel baby blue color, which to us seems to convey both her serenity and youthful cheerfulness. Moreover, since being a student was her profession, we incorporated some

design elements related to studying, such as a pen, a book, and a notebook. Lastly, to help spread the devotion to more people, we worked on several versions of Montse's prayer card in different languages, namely English, Spanish, French, German, and Chinese.

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

As for me, this little initiative that my friend and I started has also helped me to grow closer to Montse, and for that I am very thankful. I remember

her more often now than before, and I'll continue to ask for her help especially as regards my university studies. I have several tough subjects in the upcoming months, as well as thesis work. I'm counting on Montse to help me pull through!

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