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**NOT ONE FOR
STEREOTYPE**

■ ALINA ANN MATHEW



WHY CATHOLICISM?

GEORGE K PAUL





MARY, MY BELOVED MOTHER



Dear Mother, teach us to pray for all people. Guide us to the source of true life. Make us pilgrims going forward with your Church, whet our appetite for the Eucharist, the bread for the journey, the bread of life.

EDITOR'S ROOM

DR. CHACKOCHAN J NJAVALLIL



IN ALL THESE TESTIMONIES, IT WAS THE PRESENCE OF THAT ONE FRIEND, COLLEAGUE OR FAMILY MEMBER WHO INTRODUCED JESUS TO THEM.

ENCOUNTERING AND EMBRACING CATHOLICISM

This issue of *Kairos Global* includes several stories of youngsters of other faiths, who had personal encounters with Jesus and who chose to embrace Catholicism. Being the chief editor, I had the opportunity to go through them in advance and found them very inspiring. Surely we expect the same with our readers too. One thought which persisted after reading the notes was the importance and significance of person-to-person sharing of Jesus. In all these testimonies, it was the presence of that one friend, colleague or family member who introduced Jesus to them. Repeatedly all stories speak about the need for each and every person to be a herald of Good News.

These stories also reminded me about the magnificent ways in which God works in every person's life. Each of the authors had a unique and different story to share. It was also refreshing to realise that just as we all are unique, God has prepared a unique and special redemption plan for each of us.

Stories of people who traversed difficult terrains and later embraced Catholicism was very motivating. The reasons for their conversion to Catholicism are many; the font of grace in the sacraments, doctrinal clarity, the magisterium, the great diversity, inclusiveness, universality, the institution of priests and religious, and the Pope. The Catholic Church is the longest surviving institution in the world, the most significant contributor to humanity, education, caring of the sick, art, culture, literature and human values. Of course there are failures too. Sometimes we get the feeling that it is the traditional Catholics who less appreciate the beauty, importance and contributions of the Catholic Church.

One of the memories I cherish, that always reminds me about the beauty of the Catholic Church is the Holy Mass celebrated by Pope John Paul II during the 2002 World Youth Day in Toronto, Canada. Millions of youth from innumerable cultures, languages and styles who came together in that huge stadium was an impressive and inspiring sight.

Each one of us has the responsibility to share with our dear and near the Good News of Jesus, to help them enjoy the riches of the Church and embrace Catholicism.

Let me conclude with a question: Have you shared Jesus with somebody today?

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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He who does not love, does not know God.
1 John 4:8

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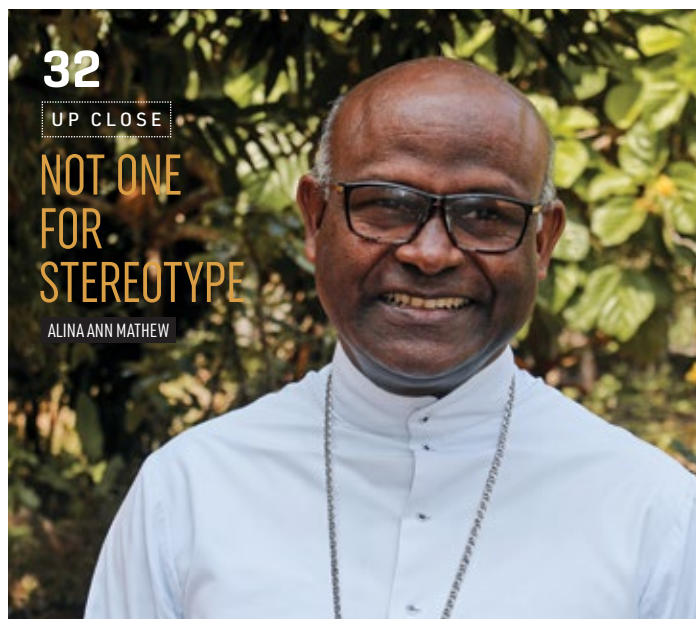
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ASK



FR. BITAJU

Fr. Bitaju Mathew, O.S.S.T. belongs to the Order of the Most Holy Trinity and of the Captives (Trinitarians). He serves as the Secretary Vice Provincial of the Order in India and is currently the Chaplain of the Jesus Youth International Formation Team.

Q. What historical evidence do we have of the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus?

Thanks for your important question. In responding I shall focus mainly on four sources that confirm the crucifixion of Jesus.

► **Early sources on the crucifixion of Jesus:** St Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (AD 55) contains an early Christian creed on the death and resurrection of Jesus. *That Christ died for our sins ..., that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures ...* (1 Corinthians 15:3-5). Scholars date this creed, an early oral tradition of the Christian Church, to within six years after Christ's death. On multiple occasions St Paul explicitly mentions 'Christ crucified' (1 Corinthians 1:23, 2:2), confirming the sort of death Jesus died.

► **Multiple ancient sources from non-Christians:** Roman historian Tacitus and Jewish historian Josephus from the first century confirm Christ's crucifixion. In *The Annals* Tacitus writes, 'Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus' (15.44). The Greek writer Lucian of Samosata (AD 120-180) in his book, *The Passing of Peregrinus* writes, 'The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day – the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on this account.'

► **Eyewitness testimony:** Scholars like Richard Bauckham convincingly confirm that the four Gospels are based on eyewitness

testimony. According to Bauckham, the four Gospels 'embody the testimony of the eyewitnesses, not of course without editing and interpretation, but in a way that is substantially faithful to how the eyewitnesses themselves told it.' Bauckham further argues that an eyewitness to the crucifixion wrote the Gospel of St John: *This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things* (John 21:24).

► **Embarrassing testimony:** The uncensored narrative of Jesus's suffering sparkles with authenticity. Scenes such as Jesus's agony in Gethsemane or his anguished cry of 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' portray a weakened, suffering Messiah. Michael Licona, a New Testament historian, in *The Resurrection of Jesus*, confirms that in antiquity 'a number of accounts existed of Jewish martyrs (i.e. the seven brothers in 2nd Maccabees, Eleazar and Stephen), who acted bravely under extreme torture and execution. In the light of these, reports of a weaker Jesus at his arrest and crucifixion could cause embarrassment in contrast.' In determining a source's reliability, historians consider the criterion of embarrassment to be important.

Moreover, nearly all non-Christian scholars and skeptics of the New Testament maintain the existence of Christ and his crucifixion to be 'historical bedrock.' In his book *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, critic John Dominic Crossan writes thus: 'Jesus' death by crucifixion under Pontius Pilate is as sure as anything historical can ever be.' Gerd Ludemann, an atheist scholar, in his book *The Resurrection of Christ: A Historical Inquiry* resolves, 'Jesus' death as a consequence of crucifixion is indisputable.'

We shall make a similar study on the Resurrection of Jesus in the next issue of *Kairos Global*.



YOUCAT 97

ARE THE JEWS GUILTY OF JESUS' DEATH?

No one can assign collective guilt for the death of Jesus to the Jews. Instead, the Church professes with certainty that all sinners share in the guilt for Jesus' death. [597-598]

The aged prophet Simeon foresaw that Jesus would become 'a sign that is spoken against' [Luke 2:34b]. And in fact Jesus was resolutely rejected by the Jewish authorities, but among the Pharisees, for example, there were also secret followers of Jesus, like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. Various Roman and Jewish persons and institutions [Caiaaphas, Judas, the Sanhedrin, Herod, Pontius Pilate] took part in Jesus' trial, and only God knows their guilt as individuals. The idea that all Jews of that time or living today are guilty of Jesus' death is irrational and biblically untenable.

DR. KOCHURANI JOSEPH

Prayer Intentions February

For religious sisters and consecrated women

We pray for religious sisters and consecrated women; thanking them for their mission and their courage; may they continue to find new responses to the challenges of our times.



Pope talk



The Church and society need to defend and support the family.

Forgiveness is a gift born of the grace poured out by Christ upon married couples whenever they turn to him and allow him to act.

Families should pray together every day for the gift of peace.



God comes into the world in littleness, teaches us to love littleness and wants us to understand that littleness is the way to authentic greatness.

The ancient Greek word eucharistia meaning thanksgiving was adopted by the early Church as a word for the sacred host, the Eucharist. For us Christians, thanksgiving is at the heart of our faith and life.

The value of a person is not determined by ability, but by the simple fact that he or she is a person, the image of God.

Let us learn from St Joseph how to cultivate spaces for silence, and his silence did not indicate passivity; it is a silence full of listening, an industrious silence that brings out his great interiority by which we got the Word, Jesus.

In the deepest sense, faith is not an idea or a system of morality, but a reality, a beautiful truth that does not depend on us and leaves us amazed.

JESUS YOUTH



Dr Edward Edezhath, one of the pioneers of Jesus Youth, gives us a glimpse of the growth of the movement.

Learning to stand on the shoulders of elders



'What, in your opinion, is the crisis of youth leadership today?' A young man raised the question during a post-dinner open time. This was a weekend training for Jesus Youth student leaders from different universities. 'Most of them never learn to "stand on the shoulders of the giants" as the saying goes. And thus, they either remain too small or start out big and then fall away.'

IMMATURE OVERCONFIDENCE

One unforgettable instance of this was that of Peter. He attended a youth seminar, had a deep experience and was eager to reach out. After a couple of follow-up meetings he disappeared. Of course, he was 'doing the work of the Lord' on his own, while his less talented friends were regular in the group. I met Peter after a few years, in a very shallow spiritual condition. And I learned, he was completely lost in a world he was unprepared to make a difference in. The disconnect had taken a toll on him.

One problem a new Christian may face, after the precious gift of a Christ encounter, is running too early and too fast, immersed in action, forgetting to deepen and grow. Christian life is to be a walk of discipleship: sitting at the feet of Jesus and walking with faithful

masters to learn from their example of following Jesus.

Someone humorously spoke about the growing trend of a 'spiritual cottage industry' of people eager to start groups and movements of their own. He was referring to leaders too eager to break away from groups to start on their own or build up independent initiatives. The tragedy is that if they are not organically linked to the parent groups and movements, these newborns will not share in the journey of maturity of their sources of inspiration. And failing to rise up in maturity, they either remain puny or very soon fall away.

REMAINING TALL AND SEEING FAR

The famous English scientist Isaac Newton famously said, 'If I have seen further than others, it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants.' Every great person builds upon the expertise of the experienced. An English poet elaborated it further, 'The dwarf sees farther than the giant, when he has the giant's shoulder to mount on'. Thus, walking with experienced elders, sometimes you even outshine them.

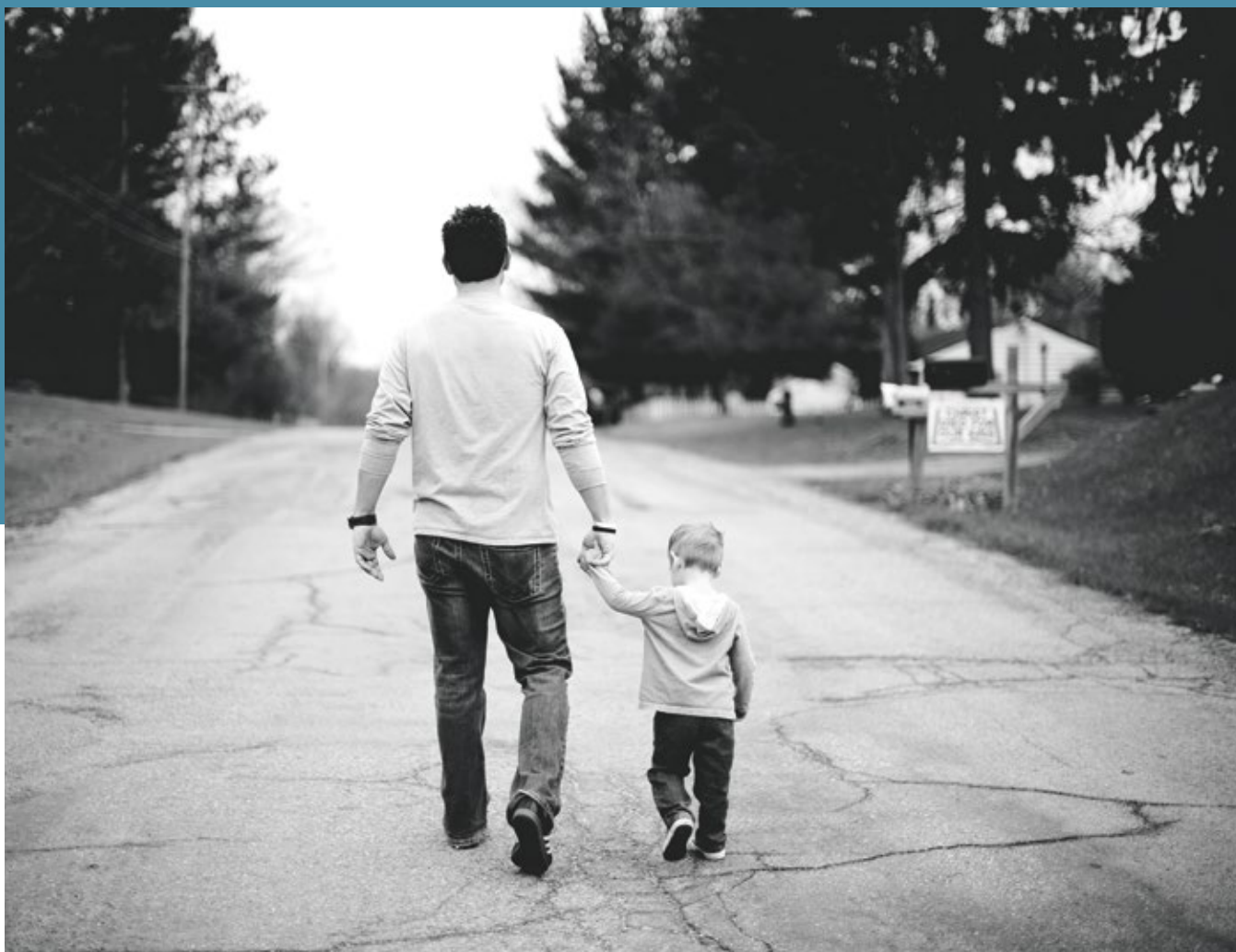
Children like to sit on the shoulders of their elders and boast, 'I am taller than all of you'. Also, in crowded places, kids sitting on others' shoulders enjoy a clearer view. A

journey of personal and community growth is somewhat similar. To see far and wide, you must climb on the shoulders of someone who is strong and ready to carry you. What is the secret of standing tall in your faith life? How do you get a vision that is clear and far reaching? Have solid persons and traditions to build your faith life on. In this way you build balanced and mature personal as well as community lives.

FINDING STRONG SHOULDERS TO STAND ON

One of the early formative Jesus Youth experiences was the yearly two to three week-long National summer camps we used to have at Bangalore. A good number of eminent spiritual leaders would be present throughout those camps. One of our animators, Alicekutty, used to insist that all young leaders never miss that rare opportunity to have a close walk with them. I believe that has been extremely important. A great tragedy of our times is that most people never come across giants – men and women of higher mental and spiritual capabilities. You grow up only by meeting grown up people!

A beautiful culture in the movement is the dynamics of helping youth be close to people of intellectual and



Christian life is to be a walk of discipleship: sitting at the feet of Jesus and walking with faithful masters to learn from their example of following Jesus.

spiritual stature. Most Jesus Youth groups and ministries continue to have interactions with significant elders, be that clergy, religious or other mature faithful. There is always encouragement in the movement to have an 'eldering' relationship with some significant senior person.

Apostle Paul when speaking of building strong communities mentions the importance of building 'upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone' (Ephesians 2:20). Having good leaders and developing

intimate relationships and strong loyalty to them are also foundational to building a strong Christian community.

HELPING YOUTH TO STAND ON SHOULDERS

In *Christus Vivit*, Pope Francis urges youth to have this filial, yet mature relationship with significant others. 'The word of God encourages us to remain close to the elderly, so that we can benefit from their experience . . . the long years they lived and all they have experienced in life should make us look to them with respect.' (188) 'This does not mean having to agree with everything adults say or approving all their actions. . . It is really a matter of being open to receiving wisdom passed down from generation to generation, a wisdom familiar with human weakness and not deserving to vanish before the novelties of consumer society and the market.' (190)

How to help youth stand on the

shoulders of elders? In a culture where freedom and independence become a priority, there is always a temptation to be on my own, forming 'my group', rather than building on the foundations already laid (1 Corinthians 3:11). So, it becomes important to have a counterculture and resultant dynamics in place. We need many mature elders for youth to connect; an ongoing encouragement to ensure continuity of relationship with them; an emphasis on humility and simplicity in the exercise of leadership; and also, a culture of communication that builds unity among leaders as well as in the wider community. Let us help our youth to stand on the shoulders of elders, so that tomorrow they too will lend their shoulders for others to stand on! ■■

.....

Dr. Edward Edezhath, is a retired professor from St. Albert's College, Ernakulam. He lives with his wife Audrey in Kochi, India.

MISSION

TALK

CC MANOJ

CC Manoj speaks about how his whole family went on a month-long mission to Nagaland.

I am CC Manoj, a planter from Idukki district in Kerala. I live with my wife and four children in Kattappana.

Every Jesus Youth is a missionary. My Jesus Youth journey began in 1992. In all the training and formation programmes of the Jesus Youth movement that I attended, I had never heard of becoming anything less than a missionary. Going from one college to another to start small prayer groups was my first missionary experience. It was my daily goal to share my Jesus with at least one person I would meet that day. And every new conversation that happened in this regard was considered an achievement. I strongly believe that my sole existence in this world is for evangelisation, moreover to become a missionary.

I admired missionaries and gradually the desire to become a full-time missionary grew inside me and it became my passion. During the Jesus Youth conference of 1997, I got a chance to pray for the state of Mizoram¹ as it was the mission of my zone to pray and work

for Mizoram. That's how the Northeast Indian Mission came into my notice. The sharings of Fr Dheeraj and the missionary couple, Alexy and Shiny, strongly influenced and triggered the missionary in me. I was always eager to read as well as listen to missionary stories from across the globe. Along with that, my close friend Binish went for mission work to the state of Nagaland² and I was constantly motivated through his status updates and mission place stories.

I had always dreamt of a mission journey to the North-eastern states of India. But every time, it kept getting postponed due to family emergencies or professional uncertainties. Finally, I decided to undertake a one-month mission service to Nagaland, along with my family – Ushus, my wife and our children, Chrisline, Christoph, Staffan and Philan.

I am a cardamom planter by profession and leaving behind the plantations for a month was a huge question before me. I had to complete the harvest, process it and make other necessary arrangements. Entrusting my house to someone was my second challenge. But soon I began to witness God's providence and one by one everything was arranged. A neighbour of mine offered the services of his labourers for my harvest and together, we managed to complete it in three days – this in a normal scenario is a next-to-impossible task. This was the first miracle I witnessed since I decided on the mission trip. I was surprised to see how many steps God takes towards us when we take one towards him. My faith deepened when another neighbour of mine voluntarily agreed to look after our house till we returned. He actually came over and slept in our place every day we were away, to make sure our home was well taken care of.

We got ready for our travel and all of us were excited until my mother, who had come home and stayed over for a day, tested Covid





positive. All of us ended up with Covid and this left us utterly disappointed. But by God's grace, our recovery was faster than normal and all of us recovered completely. When our kids shared these miraculous experiences with the villagers of Nagaland, they were very surprised to hear our testimony. Our journey finally began happily on 21st October 2021.

Our pure intentions for the mission were to know and experience the culture of a different place and to share our Jesus with them. We also hoped that it would be a great learning exposure for our children. Sometime back, when we were travelling in Kerala, we stopped at a small way-side teashop. While we had no problems having tea and snacks there, our daughter began to find fault and complain about the 'cleanliness'. That she was finding it hard to cope with the food and local ambience there was an eye-opener for me. I wanted my children to know how people were living happily in other parts of our country, with minimum resources and facilities. I wanted to teach them through experience to face life the way it comes, with gratitude.

The excitement of being a part of the evangelistic mission of the Catholic Church was there on the other side. Receiving blessings from the Bishop of Nagaland and joining his missionary activities in the diocese was a dream come true for us. We felt like we were at the heart of the Catholic Church. It was a blessing as well as a proud feeling to be the official missionaries of the Catholic Church in the village of Konoma in the state of Nagaland.

Konoma is the first green village in Asia. 2% of the village inhabitants are Catholics, which may be around 1000 in number. There is one parish church in the village and two station churches under it. There are also schools run by the Church. The Catholic Church runs a beautiful mission in the place. Though majority of the villagers are farmers,

This mission has influenced all of us, especially our children. They have come back as totally different individuals with deeper understanding and firm convictions. They have a disciplined prayer life now and there is a vast improvement in their interactions and communication etiquette.

they enjoy a good standard of living now. It was a blessing that many of them understood English, though they weren't well-educated.

One incident surprised me. We were planning to do a Taize prayer in the Konoma parish church and by chance was able to get in touch with the church pianist. During one of our house visits, on All Souls Day, our lunch was arranged at the pianist's house and there I met her sister. While we were discussing the Taizé songs with the pianist, her sister intervened and took charge. She spoke English quite well even though she had studied only till sixth standard. She even translated one of our Taize songs from English to their native language and composed it with the help of her sister. Our Taize prayer became an unforgettable experience for my family, with their support and help.

Most of the parish activities are taken care of by catechists there. But I assume that a deep God experience is missing in the faith of the parishioners. A renewal experience can deepen their faith and convictions more.

This mission has influenced all of us, especially our children. They have come back as totally different individuals with deeper understanding and firm convictions. They have a disciplined prayer life now and there is

a vast improvement in their interactions and communication etiquette.

One day while sharing our experiences with the villagers, my eldest daughter also prepared a small sharing. On seeing this all the three younger boys too wanted to share like their sister and were ready. Though I helped two of them with it, I discouraged my youngest child, who was only 5-years-old, thinking that he might not be ready. But to my surprise, he requested the parish priest onstage, took the mike and said 'God bless you all' with confidence. I couldn't believe my eyes; were it not for this trip, my child wouldn't have gained this confidence at such a young age.

The mission also helped to shape our perception about missionary activities. We wish to spend the rest of our lives as true missionaries along with Jesus. We have dreams of arranging Taize prayers in the parishes of our locality, along with confessions. The children have already started learning music for this. We have given all our dreams to God Almighty and pray for his will in our lives. ■

^{1,2} Mizoram and Nagaland are states in Northeast India.

ENGAGE

SEEK JESUS, SEEK JOY

When life took him far away from the faith of his childhood, **Michael John** remembers how a long-forgotten quote suddenly stirred up his heart to a life of deeper fellowship in Christ.



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is an idea in psychology proposed by American psychologist Abraham Maslow that ranks human needs and consequent behavioral motivation. The original motivational model (imagine a pyramid) has the physiological needs such as food, water, warmth, rest, etc. as foundations or the base of the pyramid. It culminates in self-actualisation at the top - the achieving of one's full potential. The Bible says that every man in himself, in his best state, in his highest achievement, with his best step forward, is only vanity.

For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11).

I grew up in a middle-class family with loving parents who placed a lot of importance on providing a good education to their children, despite their financial circumstances. Along with that we had a religious upbringing – Catholic schools, daily Rosary, Sunday catechism (ever grateful to my parents for the gift of faith in my formative years). From early childhood, the sacrifices our parents had to make to provide my sister and myself with opportunities for a 'more comfortable life', made a profound impact on my outlook on life. Sounds like the quintessential story of every middle-class Catholic household in Kerala during the

90s. I can recollect from pre-teen years looking at education as my family's and my ticket to a better life. My pursuit of happiness would depend on my pursuit of success. In retrospect, I had a dream and hope of a better tomorrow, and I was willing to work hard for it.

I have seen everything that is done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind (Ecclesiastes 1:14).

Fast forward to my mid-20s, after having graduated from one of the most prestigious engineering universities in India, I was living in Mumbai with my dream job and everything that came with high-end living in the city. Yet, I was not happy. I tried to fill this void with pleasures of the world – friendships, movies, parties. My connection to my faith life had diminished to just a Sunday Mass. This was a time of great turmoil in my life. My certain 'master plan' for pursuit of happiness had come to a grinding halt.

Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee (St Augustine).

I don't know the exact moment, when this motivation stirred up my heart or what triggered this recollection of a quote by St John Paul II. It was introduced to me by a good friend during my college years, when I was part of a Christian fellowship group on campus (ever grateful to my friends from university, who helped nurture my faith, without whom my faith may not have survived the days of absolute freedom and callousness of youth). These were the words of St JP II during the World Youth Day: **'It is**

Jesus you seek when you dream of happiness, it is He who is waiting for you, when nothing else you find satisfies you; He is the beauty to which you are so attracted; it is He who provoked you with that thirst for fullness that will not let you settle for compromise; it is He who urges you to shed the masks of a false life;

it is He who reads in your heart your most genuine choices, the choices that others try to stifle.' I went to adoration and laid prostrate in front of the Blessed Sacrament, asking God to make me whole.

He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds (Psalm 147:3).

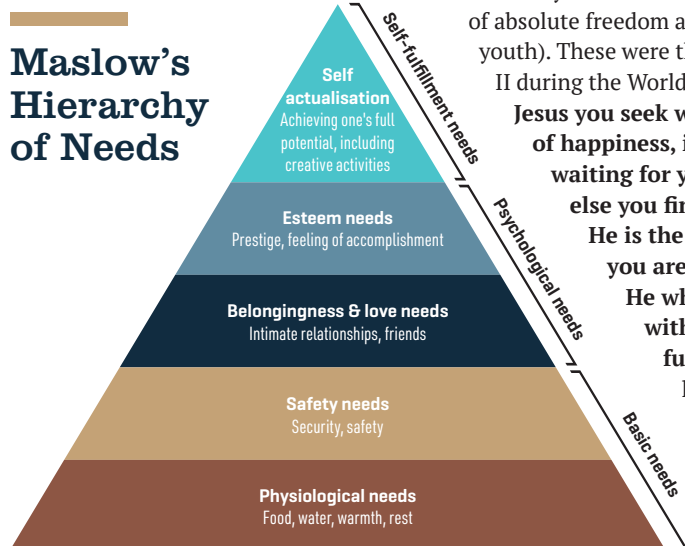
Around this time, by events that can be attributed only to divine intervention, I was transferred to the US by my employer. I took this as the sign to seek out a youth fellowship, the very first week I was in the US, at the local parish. I ended up in a small weekly gathering of Jesus Youth and I was moved by the joy these young adults and families had in their lives. This joy was distinct and different. It was not the fleeting happiness I sought through my possessions, but a deeper peace and joy even in struggles and difficulties. The very same God I prayed to for 'well-being', these youth, and families, absolutely, truly, madly, and deeply loved him. Jesus was not a distant God, but a friend walking side by side in their life's journey.

I have told you this, so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete (John 15:11)

What started out as just fellowship, led me to the Church, the Word of God, the sacraments and personal prayer, a desire for a deeper relationship with the person of Christ. He is everything that St JP II promised and so much more.

We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

So, regardless of your past experiences, present circumstances, and prospects, take a moment to reflect on the goodness of the Lord who created your inmost being; knit you together in the mother's womb. Remember, the mercy of God, who gave up his only begotten Son, so that we may be redeemed. Trust that he is waiting for you with outstretched arms to fill your heart with everlasting joy. Seek Jesus, Seek Joy!



Michael John lives in Houston with his wife Sona and their two children. He works as maintenance manager for an oil and gas company. Michael enjoys spending time with his family, going for fishing and watching movies.

EXPERIENCE

My Now and Forever Friend

Sanjana Jose shares her experiences as a youth awaiting the right spouse, getting acquainted with the Jesus Youth movement and experiencing the Holy Spirit during a long-awaited yet difficult pregnancy.

I was born and raised in a fairly modern Catholic household, and though exposed to the Catholic faith, it was not deep. Like many cradle Catholics, Sunday Mass and the sacraments were received mechanically.

In my twenties, whispers began to surface in my household that I came to realise were about my wedding. In due course these whispers became discussions and sometimes even arguments – I did not think I was ready for marriage while my family felt I did. Eventually a profile was made for me on a matrimonial site that I refused to look at. Soon proposals were being scrutinised – their height, education, family background, etc.

After going through several proposals, in comes this boy (now my husband), whose character was vouched for by several of our relatives and friends. Most opinions about him were: ‘The boy is part of Jesus Youth’, ‘He resigned from work and worked as a missionary’, ‘I have heard he prays a lot’, and so on. These were not the qualities in my list for my future spouse. And so I spoke to the ‘boy’ and my answer to him was ‘NO’. I remember telling my family it wouldn’t work, that he was not my type. Mothers can be persuasive and God has given that gift liberally to mine.

So here I was several days later, texting and talking to this ‘Jesus Youth’ boy, Davis despite my protests. Before I knew it, we were madly in love. We got married and I was off to the USA.

Jesus Youth came with Davis, it was his second family, and I had no way of getting away from it. Jesus Youths were my in-laws and like many may relate, I didn’t always want to meet them.

Soon we started to have weekly prayer meetings and I noticed that these were all normal human beings with their own struggles. The only difference between them and me was that they were TRYING – trying to grow in holiness, trying to help others and trying to be better human beings. I realised that that was probably what I ought to be doing, to try to be a better person.

Opening up to JY changed my life. Just sitting down and listening to people talk about God helped me learn so much. So many questions of mine were being

answered, so many misunderstandings being cleared. I met so many inspiring personalities. People who were trying to do good despite their own struggles. People who were saying yes to God knowing it would be difficult. People who would go above and beyond to help me know God.

My initial days in the US were very difficult. Even though I had a beautiful marriage, I felt lonely and lost in a strange land. In my sufferings, God started to intervene. During my first Pentecost night vigil, I received the gift of tongues at a time when I did not know about such a thing. It made me realise that I have a companion whom God sent, the Holy Spirit. A friend to accompany me in my struggles.

After our first anniversary, I began to suffer from severe back pain and was diagnosed with acute endometriosis (a disorder where the tissue that normally lines the uterus grows outside it). I was taken for emergency surgery but even after the surgery, I was unable to conceive. It was my life-long dream to be a mother and I was devastated. That’s when I met the Holy Spirit again. I felt the Spirit come into me during a praise and worship session, an experience I cannot express in words. In that moment, I felt an indescribable joy.

We moved to India and consulted with a few more doctors but they did not have solutions other than artificial methods. Two years passed and during that time I learnt that my endometriosis was in relapse. The doctor advised me that my time was running out and I was waiting in vain. We decided to leave things to God and stopped all treatment. We decided to accept his will for me. During Pentecost of 2020 while praying, I received a message that I was pregnant. I was reluctant to tell anyone but a few days later we did the test, and I was blessed. Praise God! We were ecstatic!

In my seventh month scan we encountered some problems. By the eighth month, the blood supply in my umbilical cord had almost stopped entirely. I had to be admitted and labour was induced. On 11th January, 2021 Amelia Davis was born preterm with several other complications but she was

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beautiful. During the first four months of Amelia’s life, we spent 45 days in the hospital. On other days, we were testing blood or taking scans. Things were so different from what I imagined it to be.

Davis had to leave two weeks after Amelia was born. Few weeks later, he tested positive for Covid and remained positive for over a month and was unable to come to see me. I was scared and losing hope. Again, the Holy Spirit came to me in the form of my mother and the prayers of my friends and family. I was in the paediatric ICU when something strengthened me. An experience that I again cannot express well in words. I felt a deep peace that I had not felt for several months.

Amelia is now a bubbly and active bundle of joy. Running around, giving flying kisses to everyone in her path. Now looking back, I understand what God did in my life. He called me by name and when I didn’t recognise him, he didn’t abandon me, but left the 99 and came for me. He wanted me to know him. I feel so privileged to be loved like that. When things refused to go as planned, when I felt I wouldn’t be able to move forward, the Spirit intervened, and he strengthened me. I know when struggles come in my life, he will give me strength. I know he’ll be there for me now and forever.



Sanjana is from Kerala currently residing in Gurgaon, India. Her interests are reading, writing and dance.

IN FOCUS



WHY CATHOLICISM?

George K Paul lists reasons
why converts to Catholicism are
drawn to the Catholic Church

When a person is convinced of the truth of Christianity, an important decision lies ahead—which is the true church? The idea of ‘mere Christianity’ is appealing to many in this day and age where arguments and debates on doctrinal differences between Christian denominations often yield more confusion than clarity. The number of ‘non-denominational’ and ‘spiritual-but-not-religious’ Christians are on the rise. Although ‘mere Christianity’ can serve as a platform to bring together Christians of various stripes in their defense of core doctrines of the faith against their atheist and non-Christian religious interlocutors, for serious Christians who have begun their spiritual journey, things will soon go beyond ‘mere’ and there comes a point where incomplete Christianity is not enough anymore.

FOUNDED BY CHRIST

Origins of a religion tell us what it really is. It derives its life and meaning from where it was born. No historian can challenge the fact that the Catholic Church can trace its roots all the way up to St Peter and the group of apostles chosen by Christ. The NT affirms that it was Christ himself who appointed Peter as the leader of the apostles and assigned him with the task of guiding his Church.

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18).

When the church talks about ‘apostolic tradition’, it encompasses the content of what the apostles received from their teacher—his words, actions, and attitudes. There is no other place in the world where this memory of the incarnate Son of God has been preserved without contamination. According to *Dei Verbum*, ‘Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church.’

THE MAGISTERIUM

An inherent weakness of the ‘Sola Scriptura’ position is the problem of multiplicity of interpretations of the Sacred Scriptures. The ‘deposit of faith’ requires a faithful custodian, who can interpret the ‘word of God’ to audiences across time and space, without error or dilution. Just as the sacred deposit of the Word of God is entrusted to the Church, the correct interpretation of the divine word is also the Church’s unique prerogative. The magisterium of the Catholic Church is the Church’s authority or office to give authentic interpretation of the Word of God, ‘whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition’. The Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, ‘who leads us into the whole truth’, has remained the faithful interpreter of God’s written word throughout the centuries, clarifying and deepening our understanding of divine revelation in response to challenges and questions posed against the faith at various times.

The Great Commission, as given by Jesus, provides a biblical foundation for the Church’s teaching authority— *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you* (Matthew 28:19–20). It is also reflected in the Church’s mission to be the *pillar and bulwark of the truth* in the world (1 Timothy 3:15).

‘Only the Catholic Church existed in the tenth century, in the fifth century, and in the first century, faithfully teaching the doctrines given by Christ to the apostles, omitting nothing. The line of popes can be traced back, in unbroken succession, to Peter himself. This is unequalled by any institution in history.’ (*Pillar of Fire, Pillar of Truth*, Catholic Answers)

ORTHODOXY

GK Chesterton defined orthodoxy as ‘not only the only safe guardian of morality or order’ but also the ‘only

logical guardian of liberty, innovation and advance.’ *The Catholic Encyclopedia* defines it as signifying ‘right belief or purity of faith,’ and that ‘right belief’ is not merely subjective, as resting on personal knowledge and convictions, but is in accordance with the teaching and direction of an absolute extrinsic authority. This authority is the Church founded by Christ, and guided by the Holy Spirit.

The ‘purity of faith’ described here can be achieved only if the content of the faith can successfully trace its origins to Christ and the apostles. As explained earlier, it is the Catholic Church that can legitimately lay claim to a chain of succession that goes all the way back to St Peter and the Lord.

FULLNESS OF TRUTH

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth (John 16:13).

Truth is more than a human value or category. In the words of Pope Francis, ‘Jesus is exactly this: the Truth that, in the fullness of time, “became flesh” (Jn 1:1, 14), and came to dwell among us so that we might know it. The truth is not grasped as a thing, the truth is encountered. It is not a possession, it is an encounter with a Person.’

.....

‘ONLY THE CATHOLIC CHURCH EXISTED IN THE TENTH CENTURY, IN THE FIFTH CENTURY, AND IN THE FIRST CENTURY, FAITHFULLY TEACHING THE DOCTRINES GIVEN BY CHRIST TO THE APOSTLES, OMITTING NOTHING.’

The Catholic Church preserves the apostolic deposit of faith (gained from being the disciples of the Truth, Jesus Christ), and is its guardian. But there is a growth in depth of clarity, in the understanding of those truths, without essential change. In other words, the Church's subjective understanding of doctrines has grown over time without fundamental change in doctrines or dogma. Theological or spiritual knowledge did not cease to grow or expand after the apostles. We still reflect upon doctrines today. Ecumenism and theology of the body, for example, have advanced significantly in recent decades.

'The Holy Spirit, who thus keeps the memory of Christ alive in his Church at prayer, also leads her toward the fullness of truth and inspires new formulations expressing the unfathomable mystery of Christ at work in his Church's life, sacraments, and mission.' (CCC 2625)

TEST OF TIME

The Catholic Church is, according to historian, Mark A Noll, the 'world's oldest continuously functioning international institution.' During its long history, what the Catholic Church stands for has been unaffected by changes in culture. The Catholic Church's beauty stems from the fact that it has endured persecution, attacks, and blasphemy throughout history and still stood firm in proclaiming and witnessing the truth of the Christian faith. In doing so, the Catholic Church has acted as the major driving force behind the emergence of the Western civilisation. Rooted in Christian moral principles, the Church has been instrumental in the spreading of literacy and the foundation of universities, hospitals, the Western tradition of monasticism, the development of art and music, literature, architecture, contributions to the scientific method, just war theory and trial by jury.

BY THEIR FRUITS THEY SHALL BE KNOWN

The Catholic Church has always been at the forefront of healthcare and education and presently it runs 5,500 hospitals, 18,000 clinics, 16,000 homes for the elderly and those with special needs, with 65 percent of them located in underdeveloped and developing

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countries. The Catholic Church's institutional apostolate for the sick gave rise to the gradual development of a more systematic nursing and medical care of today. In the words of Benedict XVI, the church remains 'an expert in humanity' who proclaims the Gospel of love and justice.

In his scholarly volume, *Atheist Delusions*, David Bentley Hart remarks, 'among all the many great transitions that have marked the evolution of Western civilisation, whether convulsive or gradual, political or philosophical, social or scientific, material or spiritual, there has been only one—the triumph of Christianity—that can be called in the fullest sense a "revolution": a truly massive and epochal revision of humanity's prevailing vision of reality, so pervasive in its influence and so vast in its consequences as actually to have created a new conception of the world, of history, of human nature, of time, and of the moral good. To my mind, I should add, it was an event immeasurably more impressive in its cultural creativity and more ennobling in its moral power than any other movement of spirit, will, imagination, aspiration, or accomplishment in the history of the West.'

The Bible, sacred Tradition, and early Christian texts all attest to the fact that the Church teaches with Jesus's authority. One voice rises above the din in this day of myriad rival religions and cults, each yearning for attention: the Catholic Church, which the Bible calls '*the pillar and foundation of truth*' (1 Timothy 3:15). The testimony of history underlines the unique place held by the Catholic Church in God's plan of salvation. ■



George Paul is a Communication Designer currently working with the Catholic Health

Association of India. An avid student of Theology, Philosophy and History, George is still active in JY, helping youngsters connect with the Catholic intellectual tradition.

THE PURPOSE OF MY EVERY PAIN

Childhood struggles, living through the anti-Sikh riots, losing loved ones – all these played a vital role in his conversion, shares Dr Balvinder Singh.



My name is Dr Balvinder Singh. I was brought up in Delhi¹ and am a medical doctor by profession. As you can tell from my name, I come from a Sikh background, came to know Jesus through Jesus Youth retreat 'Maranatha 2000' and got baptised in the Catholic Church by the Archbishop of Delhi in 2006.

Before this retreat, I never had any Christian friends and was unaware of Jesus Christ. My childhood was one full of pain and suffering and this changed me as a person. In 1984, after the death of the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi², we saw mass killings of Sikhs right before our eyes. Our houses were burned and looted, our neighbours burnt alive in front of us. Somehow, amidst all the violence, my two elder brothers managed to escape death. But four years later, my eldest brother was killed in an accident. This was a big blow for my family and me. Years of pain and struggle, then the violence and horrific massacre that I had to witness, and eventually losing dear ones resulted in the deterioration of my health. I became a diabetic at the age of 14 and had to take 3-4 injections daily before meals. Along with that came painful ailments like appendicitis, hypertension and kidney stones. Skin diseases, dental problems, cervical spondylosis, hyperthyroidism, and so many other health problems. My heart somehow still functioned but that too had to suffer the pain of heartbreak when I fell in love, futilely.

That, I realised, was the worst pain that one could bear – heartache – more painful than all the physical pain I had endured till then. It was bearable to have diabetes, hypertension or even cancer or AIDS, but it simply was not to have the heart suffer. The Word of God in Sirach 25: 13, 14 also confirms this, that there is no wound greater than the wound of the heart.

Unaware of my condition, Newshia Augustine, my colleague at the hospital I worked at, invited me to attend the Jesus Youth 'Maranatha 2000' retreat. Reluctantly, I agreed and attended the five-day residential retreat in Delhi. Listening to Jesus for the first time, two messages made a huge impact on me – these were on love and forgiveness. The next year in March, I attended the follow-up retreat directed by Fr George Kumblumootil. During the session on Baptism of the Holy Spirit, my friend Anil Thomas laid his hands on me and prayed for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

There were so many questions rising within me as we prayed. Who was Jesus? Why was he beaten so badly? Why was he cruelly insulted, killed by crucifixion, and made a mockery of? What was his crime?

I felt a whisper of an answer: Jesus had been speaking of something. But questions began to assail me again. So Jesus was killed for speaking about something? But what had he been speaking about? What was so important that he was ready to give up his life? To whom was he saying such important things?

Again, the answer whispered, 'Yes, whatever Jesus spoke was so important that he was willing to give his life up. Imagine a person who has the key or map to a huge treasure – but is being hunted by evil people and will definitely die. To whom will he hand over this key to the treasure?'

It would definitely be to the one he loved most, I thought. So who was that No. 1 person for Jesus? Was it the people with him on Calvary?

'No!'

People in his city? 'No!' In his country? 'No!' People in his world?

'No! Not only the people in his world but to all the people in the world and those generations yet to come.'

That means – even my generation too? That means each and every person irrespective of religion or caste? Everybody? Even those sitting in this retreat hall also?

'Yes!'

That meant me too?!

That realisation stunned me – Jesus died for me on the cross?! And then the whole focus shifted on me. Whatever Jesus had been speaking, he was saying that to me. I was the one he loved the most. I was unable to believe this.

But despite all my questions and doubts, the answer was the same: It was I in that No. 1 place, whom Jesus loved and it was to me he was speaking to.

Immediately, I saw a scene. I saw Jesus in a hall, tied to a pillar. He was being whipped by soldiers. A soldier lashed at him, tore his skin and it began to bleed. And Jesus said, 'Balvinder, I love you'. The soldier struck him again and Jesus said, 'Balvinder, listen to me'. They continued whipping him and he kept saying, 'Balvinder, listen to me. I love you. I love you. Believe in me. I am going to die and will gain nothing. But what I say is because I love you.'

At that moment, I realised that I was not listening to him. I was busy in my own world – busy with my parties and listening to my worldly friends but not to my best friend, Jesus. Immediately I remembered the pain of my heartbreak and how unbearable it was. How could I have caused this to happen to another?

As soon as this awareness struck, I saw myself running towards Jesus. From far, I could see that Jesus was on the cross. He was barely alive. As soon as he saw me running towards him, a beautiful smile came on his face, he took his last breath, and died. When I reached him, he was dead. I was deeply hurt and disturbed with grief – Jesus died because of me, because I was too late to respond to his call, to listen to him, to his love.

I realised that Jesus died only because of my mistake. Nobody else was responsible for his death. Therefore it was none other but I, who beat Jesus, kicked, slapped, spat on him, made mockery of him and finally nailed him to the cross with my own hands. I am not a sinner, but the biggest sinner in the universe. I am the murderer of the most Holy, I did all this to him in my insanity. How could I recover this loss? Jesus is dead now. How can I revive him?

Then the answer came, '*Forget what has happened. But now onwards do not repeat this mistake of not listening to him.*'

And I immediately decided that I would leave everything and would first listen to him. I would give first place to his words in my life – the Word of God. Whether I understand or not, I believe that what he says is the truth. Jesus gave his life to prove his faithfulness.

Decision to be a part of the Catholic Church

Initially I was not ready to be part of any church. I decided to only follow Jesus. Meanwhile, I began to attend a prayer group, from where I kept regularly getting information about the Catholic Church.

From my experience, the Catholic Church is like a university, and other Christian denominations are like various levels at school. There is a huge difference between school and university. A school student would not be able to understand subjects taught at the university. Similarly, it's very difficult for ordinary people to understand the Catholic Church. Even many Catholics leave the Church because of their lack of understanding. I was able to learn and study all about the Church – its history, Mother Mary, the saints, the Pope, the Rosary, the priests and religious, their sacrifices, missionary work, and so much more. And then Holy Mass, the sacrificial offering of Jesus himself. I learned how this ritual was incomplete without partaking of the body and blood of Jesus, about which Jesus said in John 6:53 '*Truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.*'

Jesus was challenging me, 'I have given my all for you, my life, sacrificed my body and blood; it's now your turn to take it. If you do not, then the whole

of my sacrifice is lost'. I responded to his call and prepared myself to be baptised in the complete Church, that is, the Catholic Church.

One day I prayed to Jesus and said, 'Jesus, you are my master. Please give me your command.' Then Jesus gave me Mathew 28:18-20: *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always to the close of the age.* At this initial stage, I was not ready to accept this message. But because of my commitment that I would give the first preference to the Word of God, I was compelled to follow it.

At the same time, I started getting job offers from outside Delhi. Mark 16:15 says, *Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.* So, I went to remote places, border areas, mountains and jungles of Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, UP, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra³ and abroad to Oman also. As directed, my basic job was one-to-one evangelisation.

The Holy Spirit taught me how to deliver Kerygma in medical style. Before seeing patients, I would pray and surrender myself to Jesus. I would keep the Bible, a photo of Jesus and a rosary with me. After listening to and examining the patients, I would show Jesus on the rosary's crucifix and tell them, 'I am giving you a treatment in his name. His name is Jesus. He died for our sickness. There is no proof greater than the life a man sacrificed to prove his faithfulness. And if we still do not believe, then nothing can make us believe – we would be most cruel. So we should believe. If you will believe and pray in the name of Jesus, then your healing is guaranteed. Now the ball is in your court, whether you believe or not'.

So many people believed and were miraculously healed. Many times I got to lay my hands on them. I saw blind getting vision, deaf hearing, dumb speaking, and paralysed walking; healing of neuro-problems, skin problems, dental, arthritis, mental illnesses, deliverance from demons and evil spirits.



Again, the answer whispered, 'Yes, whatever Jesus spoke was so important that he was willing to give his life up. Imagine a person who has the key or map to a huge treasure – but is being hunted by evil people and will definitely die. To whom will he hand over this key to the treasure?'

Acts. 4:20: *For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.* It now became impossible for me not to speak about Jesus, even if my family members, relatives, and friends thought of me as insane. Many of these patients of other religions gave witness that Jesus appeared and spoke to them. Most of these people had not even seen a picture of Jesus. When I asked them to describe Jesus to me, they would invariably describe Jesus from the Divine Mercy – with one exception. These people saw Jesus holding

a rosary in his right hand.

When I came back from Assam, the Protestant nurses at the hospital told me, 'Everything is ok, but you should not speak about Mother Mary.' I told them, 'How can I tell people about Mother Mary when the people don't even know Jesus. This is Jesus himself who is introducing Mother Mary and not me'. I cannot speak to people without showing them the crucified Jesus. A cross without Jesus is of no value to me. And that is how there was nothing to stop me entering into the Catholic Church, the complete Church.

What I like about the Church

1. Scripture and dogma: John 21:25 says: *But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.* I believe that Scripture was based on the experiences of disciples during that time and it's continuing still through his disciples now. The Word of God is present everywhere.

2. Birth and authority of the Church: In John 21:15-19, Jesus reinstates Peter as the first pope. Jesus wishes that all his disciples, even those of coming generations should remain in unity. The Catholic Church is the only church founded by Jesus Christ.

3. Respect for elders, Mother Mary and Saints: We respect elders to receive the blessings and wisdom from their experience. There is a special place and

devotion to Mother Mary and the saints in the Catholic Church. The Holy Bible affirms this in John 19: 26-27. *When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold is your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!"*

4. Intercession: It's inevitable that we have to fight the snares of the devil 24x7x365 and intercession helps us in this battle.

5. Declaration of saints: There is a set procedure and protocol to declare a person as saint and ample research is done to verify it.

6. Church administration: Catholic Church has the best administrative system in the world.

7 Priests and religious: They live a sacrificial life. They leave everything behind, they serve the Lord. They serve society selflessly.

8. Witnessing life: Matthew 7:17-18 says *So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.* It's not just the knowledge of Scripture but your attitude too which determines your quality as a Catholic.

9. Sacraments: All sacraments are precious. Confession is special to me – a way to cleanse your conscience from sin.

10. Holy Bible: Catholic Bible is the complete collection of books which are not found in other denominations.

11. Crucifix: John 3:14 *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man must be lifted up, that whoever who believes in him may have eternal life.* Without looking at Jesus on the cross, no sinner can be saved.

12. Still Standing: Two-thousand years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Catholic Church still stands for the faith. ■

^{1, 3} Delhi is India's capital territory, while Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, UP, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra are states in India.

² The anti-Sikh riots of 1984 and the subsequent massacre of an estimated 8000-17,000 Sikhs were the aftermath of the assassination of Indira Gandhi by two of her Sikh bodyguards.

My Encounter with Christ
The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard. (Acts 22: 14-15)

I was born and brought up in a Hindu family. By the time I was 16, I began to search for God to love him and to serve him. I became an ardent devotee of Krishna (the Hindu god). This devotion was so strong that when I reached my twelfth standard, I had decided to become a Hindu religious.

During my twelfth standard final examinations, I was placed in a Hindu-run hostel and would go to the temple every day. One evening, as I was praying in the temple I

heard a voice, 'Open your eyes'. The voice continued to ask me, 'You are a human being, why do you worship this stone and serpent?' (It was kept there). At that very moment, I lost the Hindu faith without any effort or decision on my part. I left the temple with a firm decision never to go back again. When I reached the hostel, my roommate, a Christian, was doing her personal prayer. Just as I entered the room she handed me her Bible saying, 'Regimol, there is a Word of God for you'. Without sharing anything about what I had just experienced, I took the Bible and read the verse which she showed me. It was: 'Don't keep your leg in two boats'. That Word touched me and I decided to keep my feet in Jesus's boat. That moment itself I started

to experience God's presence and grace. My whole life changed, engulfed with enthusiasm and love.

The Power of the Word of God

When I returned back home I bought a Bible and started to read it. It was very difficult for me to understand at the beginning. Slowly I became so eager to read it and in it I discovered the meaning and purpose of life and experienced a transformation taking place in me.

One day I had a dream where I was asked to fast the following day. So, the next day, I fasted from all food and drink. That evening, around 6pm in the evening, as I was in my room praying, someone came to the house. My mother had just gone out, so I went to see who it was. An old man was waiting

Chosen for Christ from a Temple

From a fervent Hindu devotee to an ardent Christian and a religious,
Sr. Maria Jess SD writes about her journey to the Catholic Church.



for me with an empty vessel and he asked for food. As I filled his bowl, I tried talking to him but he just smiled and didn't speak a word. He left the house just as my mother came home and I told her about the strange old man who had just walked past her. Mom said that she had not seen anybody. It shocked me and I realised that I fasted because of the dream and the person who came to accept my fasting was the Lord. Another event happened when I was at home. A man came from Tamil Nadu¹ and said he was sent from Vailankanni Church² by Mother Mary, who showed him my house. He said that Mother Mary had a message for me – that I would wear a white dress, would travel many places and would follow Christianity. At that time, what he said made no sense to me.

While studying for my undergraduate course, another incident occurred. During a Bible convention, I asked Jesus in prayer, 'Are you really a living God? If so, I want to see you now'. As I was praying, I saw a bright light come upon me and it went through my whole body. I really experienced the powerful love of God and fell down because I was unable to withstand that wonderful experience. From that moment onwards, I started to experience the living presence of Jesus in my life. He started to talk to me and transformed my life. As a student, I was not interested in studies but after meeting Jesus, I began to excel in all my examinations.

Jesus Youth and My Vocation to Religious life

When I started to live with Jesus I desperately felt the need for Christian fellowship. I began to go to church for Holy Mass. I joined Jesus Youth in college and it again changed my outlook about life. Prayer meetings gave me the thirst to live for the kingdom of God. I dedicated my life and time

to that, because of which I faced many obstacles from family, relatives and friends. But through Jesus Youth, I was able to endure all my difficulties and grow in faith. After my graduation, I joined the Congregation of the Sisters of the Destitute. There I received baptism. Before my baptism I had a dream where I saw my old name and a new name. It was written in golden letters on the sky in an unknown language. I heard a voice telling me to turn and see. The new name was written under the picture of Mother Mary (Maria Jeas). After this, I experienced many miracles and encounters with Jesus in my life.

Why I accepted the Catholic Church

When I attended Holy Mass in the Catholic Church, I started to experience God's presence, especially in the liturgy. When the Host was raised, I could truly experience the real presence of God in the Eucharist. I longed to receive him but it was not possible. So I would touch the garments of those who had received Jesus during communion. The lively participation of sacramental life, especially regular reception of sacrament of reconciliation is another factor which attracted me to the Catholic Church. Priests, religious, lay organisations like Jesus Youth gave me life giving expressions of faith in the Church. The life, faith, love and unity among Catholics drew me towards the Catholic Church. Though other Christian denominations also invited me to join them, it was the Eucharistic Lord to whom my heart belonged. Another important factor is the presence

When I attended Holy Mass in the Catholic Church, I started to experience God's presence, especially in the liturgy. When the Host was raised, I could truly experience the real presence of God in the Eucharist.

of Mother Mary in the Church. My life and vocation are closely related to the Mother of my Jesus. Many miraculous interventions came from her. My sister, who had been married for many years, was unable to conceive and bear children. Once, when I visited a shrine of Mother Mary, I heard a voice telling me that my sister would be blessed with children. I knelt down before the statue of Mother Mary and promised to bring them there if it happened. My sister was blessed with two children and they visited this church and gave their testimony (St. Mary's Basilica, Bangalore³).

What I like about Catholic Church

The universality and the compassionate approach towards the poor and destitute. I belong to the congregation of the Sisters of Destitute, where I was taught to see the face of Christ in the suffering humanity and I found it. The disciplined faith formation, the work of the Holy Spirit and the way the Church is open to challenges and crises show the living presence of Jesus in the Church. I see in her a mother who is patiently guiding and rearing her children in faith and a bride who is waiting and enduring to receive her bridegroom. ■

^{1, 5} Tamil Nadu is a state, Bangalore is a city in India

² Shrine Basilica of Our Lady of Health Vailankanni is a famous Marian pilgrim centre in Tamil Nadu.



Sr. Maria Jeas SD belongs to the Congregation of the Destitute, Delhi province. Professed in 2000, she

has been the social work coordinator of Simla Chandigarh diocese, preacher and counsellor in Divine Retreat Centre, Delhi and a formator in the province.

WON OVER BY THE ONE TRUE

Monisha Mohan traces her journey from a proud-to-be-a-Hindu to a Christian, joyful-in-Jesus.



Previously, I was a Hindu – and proud to be one too – who got humbled after encountering the Saviour – Jesus. Five years ago, I came to Canada for my higher studies. Religiously, I would go find and visit temples in the areas I lived to continue my Hindu upbringing. But when I was diagnosed with a deadly neural disease and struggled with that for years, a helping hand reached out to me through the offering of prayers. He prayed for me and my illness with the members of the Montreal Jesus Youth group for months. Initially, I found it strange, funny even, that a group was praying for another person's sickness – for one who was from another religion. But when the doctors who had been treating me were astonished at the miraculous healing of my fatal illness, I had to convince myself that this person, this group, their prayers and their LORD were not a joke.

Days went by. One fine morning, I woke up having seen a dream where I was ignoring a poor man who badly needed my help. It was with a heavy heart for not helping that man that I woke up from the dream. Suddenly my eyes fell upon the face of Jesus from a Divine Mercy image, hanging on the wall of my room. With shock, I recognised that face – it was the poor helpless man from my dream. I understood then that he was choosing me for something. Soon after, I came across a Bible verse that

changed my life forever: John 15:16.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you.

When my family began to search for Hindu grooms for me, I boldly stuck to my decision to lead a Catholic life. Even though there were plenty of struggles, I waited for two whole years until my parents agreed wholeheartedly to my new life. Finally by God's grace, I received a new birth in the Lord Jesus in November, 2020.

Coming from a religious world of thousands of gods and goddesses, the notion of believing in Jesus, who is the Son of God, attracted me to the Catholic Church. And also since I had directly encountered my one and only Lord. The concept of togetherness and unity under one umbrella, that's what drew me to Catholicism.

I'm genuinely pleased with my new life in Jesus and the Church. I've learned to trust Jesus completely by surrendering all the suffering and pain coming my way. The holy sacraments help make my life stainless and meaningful. When I consider the difference between my previous life and my re-birth, I can only rejoice at God's work of redemption – and submit myself to him in praise.



But when the doctors who had been treating me were astonished at the miraculous healing of my fatal illness, I had to convince myself that this person, this group, their prayers and their LORD were not a joke.

Monisha Mohan is an IT professional from Ottawa, Canada.

A CHOCOLATE BAR OF GOD'S LOVE

When faith was a source of dilemma, an overheard Rosary and a chocolate bar drew **Prashanth Kumar** to the love of God in the Catholic Church.

Born to a Catholic father and a Hindu mother, my faith was always a dilemma; but God in his infinite wisdom had planned everything out for me even before I was conceived! It all began 23 years ago, in 1998, when the Lord decided that it was high time I came to taste his love and know more about him.

Being a part of a huge joint family, all of us, including the families of my father's siblings used to stay together. One evening, a voice coming from my aunt's house caught my attention. On checking it out, I could see a group of people kneeling down and reciting the Holy Rosary. Even that brief glance showed me the immense joy and fellowship they shared. This wave of joy enticed me to join them the following day onwards.

In the initial period, all I could do was to follow whatever the others were doing – when they knelt, my knees also met the floor, whenever they lifted their arms, mine went up as well, and slowly, I started reciting the Lord's Prayer and Hail Mary, referring to a prayer book. Even though I could not understand what I did or what I said, the peace and serenity it brought drew me more to it. Since I was not used to kneeling and praying, when pain got the better of my knees, I would stop after reciting one decade. After the prayer, my aunt would distribute chocolates to all of us. And even though I was happy to get one, I later realised that I was given only one, while others got more! When I once asked my aunt about this, she said that I was given only one chocolate because I had prayed only one decade; the more

I prayed, the more I would get. As I returned home, I would have it – tasting God's love through that chocolate bar!

Soon I began to help my aunt with the daily family prayer arrangements, participated and enjoyed the love of God very closely. My aunt started to take me to church and afterwards, I decided to go to church daily.

My enthusiasm to grow more close to God continued with catechism and serving God as an altar boy. The Holy Eucharist became a huge part of my life, I began to be active in all church activities and was also encouraged to take up the parish youth responsibility. Being active in various roles in the parish, His Excellency Bishop Paul Maipan encouraged us to attend a Jesus Youth cultural exchange programme in 2004. It was a joy to witness the faith in such a multicultural setting and having closely seen the commitment of JYs, I decided to commit myself for one year to God through full-timership.

I became part of the 14th batch full-timers (2005) and served my one year commitment in Assam among the tribal youth. This helped build me up very strongly in faith and I decided on a lifelong commitment.

The Catholic Church itself is a missionary call and through Jesus Youth it has helped me to continue to live as a missionary. **H**

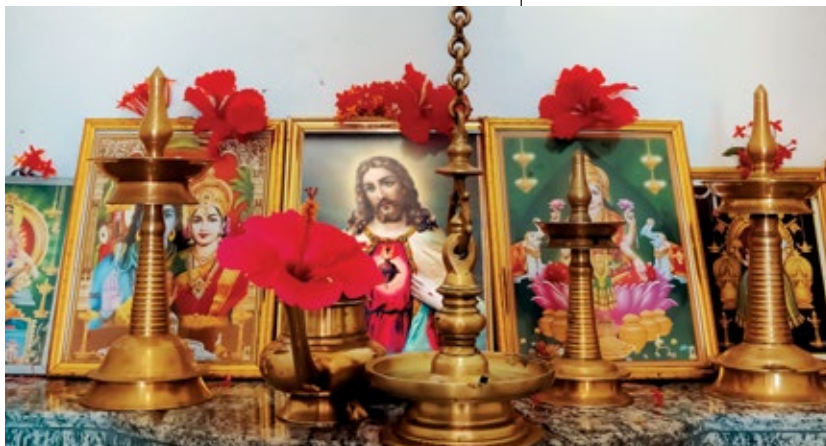
Even that brief glance showed me the immense joy and fellowship they shared. This wave of joy enticed me to join them the following day onwards.



Prashanth Kumar is an elder for the Telugu region Jesus Youth. He currently works in TCS, Telangana, India.

JESUS IN THE PUJA ROOM

From a daily temple-goer, **Shaji Antony** shares how he journeyed from Hinduism to the Catholic Church.



As a Hindu, it was habit to visit the temple every day, from my childhood. We had a puja (Hindu worship) room in our house and one day I noticed that a picture of Jesus Christ was placed there, among the other gods. My grandmother asked me to light a candle for Jesus during my daily prayer. One day, we visited St Antony's Shrine, Chettikkad¹ along with my neighbour – my first time to a Catholic church. And then, my mother happened to attend a retreat at Divine Retreat Centre, Muringoor². This made my mother a strong Christian believer and it was a turning point in our faith journey. Though this incident influenced my faith, I continued to be a passive believer. I would pray only for my personal gain, without any conviction or God experience.

Time flew and I began to work in the UAE. Life went on smoothly until the day my father, who was also working in the UAE, was jailed for failing to repay a debt. We were isolated by our relatives and were even strongly criticised that our Christian faith was the reason for all the crises in our life. But instead of losing it, this incident actually strengthened my faith.

I got married to Saumya who was a Hindu by birth, but Christian at heart. The first thing she asked for after marriage was to receive baptism, but I was reluctant. Years passed by and we faced many challenges in life. We did not have children, I faced problems at work, and so on.

One Friday, my wife asked me to go for Holy Mass. I went half-heartedly but towards the end of the service, was filled with an unusual happiness and peace of mind. That day onwards, I longed to go for Mass every Friday and it changed my life. I came to know

about the Jesus Youth movement there and their fellowship was a great consolation to me. Unfortunately, attending daily Mass began to become both unaffordable and time consuming. So, on an insight received at a prayer meeting, we decided to give our best time in the morning for Jesus every day by reciting 101 Hail Marys for this cause. By God's grace, we were able to find a person going by car to church daily from our place! We believe that God arranged him seeing the desire of our heart. I attended Holy Mass daily for two-and-a-half years before my baptism.

The Middle East conference was happening in Jerusalem in 2016 and I decided to participate in it. My friends suggested that if I was willing and ready, they could arrange for my baptism there. I agreed and my baptism took place in Jerusalem in the River Jordan.

The Holy Mass is my stronghold and answer to all my problems. Every Catholic is part of the Body of Christ and the realisation that I have a unique place in the Church brought me closer to her. The love and devotion to Mother Mary, who is an inseparable part of the Church is another reason for my being a part of the Catholic Church. This is something unique about the Catholic Church. The presence of our dear saints in the Church makes it even more precious to me. ■

We were isolated by our relatives and were even strongly criticised that our Christian faith was the reason for all the crises in our life. But instead of losing it, this incident actually strengthened my faith.

^{1,2} Chettikkad and Muringoor are places in Kerala, India.



Shaji Antony works in a private firm in Abu Dhabi, UAE. He is currently a member of the JY regional mission team.

PEACE – MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH CHRISTIANITY

Kiran Jadhav shares how the Catholic Church dispelled all her confusions and brought clarity to her journey of conversion.

Praise God! My name is Kiran Jadhav. I work as a staff nurse in Government Medical College, Bhopal¹. As my name indicates, I am from a Hindu family. Growing up, I did not believe in God much and lived my life the way I pleased.

In 2012, I joined the BSc Nursing course in Indore². I had to stay away from home during that time, for long. Studies too were tiring and I was exhausted, homesick and worried about my sick father most of the time. One of my roommates frequently attended a prayer meeting in the hostel and one day I too decided to join her to kill my boredom. Many of my seniors and juniors were a part of it.

During the prayer they asked whether I had any prayer request and I immediately mentioned my father's health condition. Everyone prayed together for my father and I felt very peaceful after that. That was my first encounter with Christianity.

I felt like I was at home when I attended prayer meetings and became a regular participant there. I also started going to church with them. One day, I had a vision where I saw my father slip while walking but suddenly, Jesus came and took hold of him. I kept wondering why I had this vision. It was only later that I came to know that my father's BP and sugar levels had risen abnormally, back at home and these came back to normal before getting serious. This was an unusual experience for me.

And I started to realise that there was someone who was taking control of my life and protecting me in a wonderful way.

Eventually, I decided to get baptised. But during my college days, I had also participated in the prayer services of other Christian denominations too, and so I began to have doubts as to where to get baptised. On returning home, my Muslim friends motivated me to join their community while my Hindu family and friends were compelling me to remain Hindu itself. I was totally confused.

At that point, I prayed hard to the Lord. I told him that I believe in only one God, who created me, the one who protects me from all unwanted things, who took care of me until now and who will take care of me in the future too.

Soon, I got a job in Bhopal Medical College as a staff nurse. I had two of my college friends working with me in the hospital. One of them was a Catholic and a Jesus Youth. Slowly I began attending JY prayer meetings with her. This was a turning point. My understanding about faith began to clarify because of the Catholic Church and this further deepened it. I got closer to Mother Mary too. I had found my home and felt filled with grace.

It was the happiest moment when my mother too accepted my faith and allowed me to get baptised. In the presence of my family and Jesus Youth friends, I received the sacrament of baptism in November 2020.

Before my baptism, I had so many confusions in life, but now I realise that the decision to be a part of the Catholic Church was the best decision of my life and I will declare that without even thinking twice.

I appreciate the inclusive nature of the Catholic Church and the devotion to Mother Mary.



Before my baptism, I had so many confusions in life, but now I realise that the decision to be a part of the Catholic Church was the best decision of my life and I will declare that without even thinking twice.

^{1,2} Bhopal and Indore are cities in India.

FAMILIA

Fragrance of Medjugorje

Joffin Chowalloor shares experiences he and his wife Riya had of their visit to Medjugorje and incidents that followed it.

Shalom dear brothers and sisters.

I am Joffin, a physiotherapist who has been working in Qatar since 2015. My wife is Riya and we have three children- Michelle, Mihail and John.

We were blessed to have been able to visit Medjugorje and the experiences we had there have changed our lives. Medjugorje is a well-known pilgrim destination in Bosnia & Herzegovina where Marian apparitions are said to have occurred to six visionaries since 1981. In the Croatian language, Our Lady is known as 'Gospa'.

Psalms 127:3 says, *Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward.* All our children are great blessings from the Lord, however our third child was born in a miraculous way on 7th October 2019, on the Marian feast, the Feast of Our Lady of Rosary. In 2021, we desired to celebrate his birthday in Medjugorje with Gospa on her feast day. But we had no clear plan as to how it would happen.



A vision and a pilgrimage

One day Riya and I had gone for Holy Mass and she had a vision of beautiful white feet with well-shaped toes. After Mass she shared the vision with me but we were unable to understand what it meant. However, without sharing about the vision, Riya asked one of her elders, Johnson from Jesus Youth, for prayers to discern our vacation plan. Through him, a group of priests and nuns gifted with prophetic intercession, it was revealed through a vision where Our Lady was coming from a mountain full of snow towards Riya and blessing her. This vision helped us decide to make the pilgrimage to Medjugorje. It was a sacrifice too, as we had not visited our home country for years.

The Covid-19 pandemic was a big hurdle to the trip and left us with many doubts. But as in every situation in our day-to-day life that left us confused regarding which decision to take, we continued our practise of praying and seeking direction from the Bible. Together, we prayed intensely and got a passage from Acts of the Apostles where St Paul was travelling to different parts of present-day Europe. This convinced us that God was calling us to travel to Medjugorje – which is in Europe.

After that, everything fell into place. Information about our itineraries, lodging and visa requirements were provided by our JY friends, Reynold and Cynthia, who had previously been to Medjugorje, and Mary, our trip organiser from UAE. We were told by each of them that if a person desired to go to Medjugorje, Our Lady would arrange everything for them. As St Paul travelled, we started our journey from Qatar transited through Turkey and entered Bosnia and Herzegovina, a beautiful country where a small village called Medjugorje is located.

We spent ten days in Medjugorje, and as was God's plan, celebrated our son's second birthday on 7th October 2021 with Mother Mary. During our time there we could feel God's presence and love in the Holy Eucharist, made thorough confessions, had chances to adore the Blessed Sacrament in silence, met many people and listened to their testimonies, and shared ours too.

When we climbed the Apparition Hill (site of the original 1981 visions that is marked by a white statue of the Queen of Peace), Riya noticed the beautiful feet and toes of Our Lady's statue – the same from her vision during Holy Mass – that was now fully revealed to us. This was a confirmation that our visit was indeed God's plan.

We felt Our Lady's presence everywhere we went in Medjugorje. When we departed back to Qatar, we deeply missed Our Lady's motherly presence, the beautiful village, innocent people, nostalgic music, and the beautiful moments experienced there. The emotion we felt on leaving that place was the same emotion we always feel when we leave our parents and our hometown after holidays. All of us were crying and we

assured Our Lady that we would come back soon.

Tumour and a forgotten memory

Back at Qatar, many people asked us whether we had been able to see Mother Mary in Medjugorje. We told them that though we had not seen her, we felt her presence everywhere. But their questions did leave us a bit disappointed that we had not seen her. During our stay at Medjugorje, Riya noticed a painful lump in her breast which annoyed when she carried the children or climbed the Cross Mountain. On our return, we consulted a doctor and did the ultrasound scan he advised. The scan revealed that it was a tumour. The doctor informed us that it would need to be further investigated and referred us to a chest surgeon in one of the government hospitals. Riya became so depressed and it seemed as though all the graces we received at Medjugorje were quickly drying up.

Next day our elder told Riya to attend an online weekend retreat from Gagultha Retreat Centre. He said that the retreat was being conducted especially for those in the Middle East and it would have a special focus on healing. This would be of great help for Riya and it would give her the strength to face this difficult situation.

During those days, Johnson, Riya's elder, asked her to share about her meeting with Gospa. When she told him that we had not met her, he said that the prayer group previously mentioned had received another vision where Our Lady had come to Riya and blessed her and our family. Johnson said that the message was received amidst a lot of prayer and that it was highly unlikely that it was misinterpreted. He also said that Our Lady could have come to us in human appearance and he asked us to remember all the people we met in Medjugorje.

We started recollecting them one by one. Suddenly Riya reminded me about meeting an old lady while we were attending Holy Mass. I thought back to that incident but there was nothing significant I could remember from that. We used to go for daily Holy Mass at 10 in the morning. It is specially organised for the English-speaking community at the Yellow Hall, just behind Medjugorje's St James Church. The Mass was celebrated by Fr Leon along with other priests. Sometimes the bishop would also celebrate this Holy Mass. Each Holy Mass was filled with our living God's love, especially during communion. Most of the people attending Mass had tears in their eyes. It was a blessed moment of God's mercy.

To avoid the disturbance caused by our little kids while attending Mass, we would sit at the last row of the hall. One day, at the end of Holy Mass, while singing a hymn to Mother Mary, an old Lady in her 70s or 80s came to us. She was in the traditional attire and had a graceful face with wrinkles all over – that reminded us of St Mother Teresa of Calcutta. She came

to us, touched Riya, and looked at me and the children with a beautiful smile, and stretched out her hands as if in a blessing. I tried to speak to her, but she didn't say a word. She gave us a graceful look and continued to bless us. We thought that she couldn't speak English. Later, she went away and we also left the hall.

We had not given any thought to our meeting with that old lady. But when Riya's elder told us to recollect the incidents, two things convinced us that the old lady was Our Lady. First, almost all the people attending that Yellow Hall Mass met regularly every day, both before or after that encounter. But it was the only time we ever saw that old lady in Medjugorje. Second, why would a non-English speaking old lady come to attend an English Mass when Masses are celebrated in various other languages every day?

From that moment onwards we felt a great joy in our hearts and knew that Gospa physically visited and blessed us in Medjugorje.

As normal lay people, we thought we needed divine confirmation too. I contacted Br Josy, who is a frequent pilgrim to Medjugorje. When I shared our experience, Br Josy and his wife told me about a Hindu person named Om Prakash from the UAE.

The Woman and her lost coin

This testimony inspired and filled me with great joy. But I still needed a strong personal confirmation from God. I went to the Adoration Chapel of Our Lady of Rosary Church, knelt and prayed before the Blessed Sacrament. I asked the Lord if the old lady who blessed us in Medjugorje was Mother Mary, to give me a strong confirmation through the Word of God. My dear brothers and sisters, as I have already shared earlier, in many instances of our life, Jesus has talked to us personally through the Word of God. After praising and praying, I opened the Bible and got Luke 15:8-10, the parable of the lost coin. I started reading the verses slowly:

"Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?"

And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost.' Just so, I tell you there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

After reading this passage a great joy filled me, one that I had never experienced before. Jesus clearly revealed to me that the woman in this passage, who was searching for the lost coin, is His Mother. He told me, 'I have seen my Mother searching for a lost coin, lighting a lamp and sweeping the house carefully until she finds it. Once it is found she will call the neighbours and rejoice with them. In a similar way my Mother searches for lost souls of sinners who have strayed away from me. She is still searching carefully

How Om Prakash became John Paul

Om Prakash had been living a sinful life when he had an encounter with the Lord, converted and was baptised a Catholic, John Paul. He had taken as his mission to spread the Good News about the Lord's Kingdom, in the UAE and to the ends of the earth.

Br John Paul had a very rare form of tumour – a large one – in his brain. On his first visit to Medjugorje, he was accompanied by a group of people of different faiths. One day, on top of Medjugorje's Cross Mountain, they met a tall, old lady in her 70s or 80s, who spoke to them in a strange language, with her hands extended. The only word that Br John Paul could understand was 'tumour'. He thought she too had a tumour like him and was requesting prayers. After prayer, this lady moved away from them and later disappeared from their sight. A boy from the same group later saw a lady with blue eyes sitting at a corner while they were praying together in the hotel room. They strongly believed that the lady was Mother Mary.

Back in India, a repeat MRI on John Paul revealed that the size of the tumour had become smaller within 15 days. Not only that, all those who had accompanied Br John Paul, together with their families came to a strong Catholic faith.

until she brings them back to me'. Jesus gave me a new conviction that in the parable of the lost coin, he is talking about his Mother. He revealed a Mother Mary, hidden in the Gospel.

Dear brothers and sisters, each one of us is either one of the lost souls she is searching for or one whom she has already found and rejoicing over with the angels of God in heaven. We know that by reciting the Hail Mary we are asking her to intercede for us, sinners the world over, now and at the hour of our death.

I came out of the chapel and called another brother, Santhosh, whose question soon after our return, 'have you seen Mother Mary in Medjugorje?' kept haunting my mind. I told him that we met Gospa there. Hearing this over the phone gave him goosebumps. Then he told me that he too had an encounter with Mother Mary and while sharing the testimony, the listeners had a similar experience. Recently his entire family got baptised into the Catholic faith. His name is now Antonio.

Yes dears, when I shared our testimony with people, they all had different experiences. Some people had goosebumps, some started crying with extreme joy, some could not stop the smile on their face. Once I saw some extraordinary things happening in the sky. All these events convinced me that when we share about Mother Mary, listeners feel the presence of Our Lady. They will be anointed by the Holy Spirit, as in Luke 1:41-44.

And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the child leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the child in my womb leaped for joy"

The following evening, Riya, our younger son and I went for Holy Mass. After Mass, I told my wife to go and pray in front of the Blessed Sacrament. Once she entered the chapel, I prayed to Jesus. 'Lord, yesterday you spoke to me and gave me confirmation through Luke 15:8-10 that it was indeed Gospa we saw in Medjugorje. Today, Riya is before you in the Blessed Sacrament. Please give her the same Word.' When she came out, Riya had an open Bible in her hands and joyful tears in her eyes. She had prayed in the chapel, opened the Bible and got the same verses that God had given me the previous day; another great confirmation from the Lord that we were really blessed by Mother Mary in the Yellow Hall, at Medjugorje.

A healing

Riya had also been attending the online retreat as she was directed. On the last day's anointing prayer, Rev Fr Benny Peter, Director of Gagultha Retreat Centre announced that a lady with a lump in her breast and worrying that it is a cancer, was being healed by Jesus. Riya accepted with great faith and during the feedback meeting held immediately after, shared her testimony. All of them prayed specially for her and right after the feedback meeting, she noticed that the lump had completely disappeared and that area was not painful anymore. Acts 4:12 says, *There is no salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.* Yes, dear brothers and

sisters, we strongly believe that His name is Jesus, Jesus Christ our mighty Lord. He is the only one who healed her. All glory and praise to God.

A gift

I would like to share another incident that happened when we went to Apparition Hill. Riya saw a blue-coloured rosary in one of the shops near the Blue Cross, at the foot of which Mother Mary assured that she would always be present. Riya liked it a lot and asked me to buy it. I suggested that we look for the same rosary in other shops as well. But we couldn't find a similar one anywhere else. Later on, as we came by the Blue Cross, we found the shop closed. Riya was very sad and despite my trying in several other shops, we could not find a similar one. Finally, I bought a different blue rosary for her but she was not satisfied. One day before our departure back to Qatar, we visited the Blue Cross again. Riya said that if Mother Mary wishes, the shop would be open and we would be able to buy the blue rosary. Surprisingly the shop was open, and we bought it. After returning to Qatar, we were amazed to discover a beautiful fragrance from the rosary. Even after holding the rosary, the fragrance remained in our empty hands! What a beautiful gift for Riya from Mother Mary.

'Look deeply into your hearts'

Dear friends, the Rosary is a powerful tool to bring lost souls, including our own, to Christ. St Padre Pio says, 'The Rosary is the weapon for these times'. Please take the rosary in your hands and pray it often.

All these events helped our family have an increased faith, deepened our love for the Word of God, enlightened us with the Holy Spirit, helped us to leave our sinful life behind and lead holy lives.

Our Lady appeared to the Medjugorje visionary Ivan on 23rd May 2020 and gave a message. 'Praised be Jesus, my dear children! I call you to look deeply into your hearts and to decide to try to be closer to God in prayer. Be converted, dear children, my little children. Leave sin and evil and everything that hinders you on your way to holiness. Decide for the love of God. Thank you, children, for having also today responded to my call. Go in peace, my dear children!'

I would like to dwell once again on the words of Our Lady: 'Look deeply into your hearts.' Mother Mary calls us to make a turn, to turn our eyes away from the past and to turn our own hearts to where God dwells. Our Lady calls us to look deeply into our hearts, to throw away our sins and all that hinder us on our way to holiness, to peace, to good, to love – so that we are able to receive the Holy Spirit and the graces that the Lord wishes to give us.

Let us pray for all those who are like the lost coins, leading sinful lives. May they turn back to God.

Hail Mary...



UP CLOSE



Not One for Stereotype

Alina Ann Mathew speaks with Bishop of Punalur, Dr Selvester Ponnumuthan about his mother, vocation to priesthood, the Church, advocating for the marginalised, and the youth.

An unusual example of simplicity, the epitome of love, an extraordinary vision, versatile and a person of grace-filled interaction, Bishop Dr Selvester Ponnumuthan surprises and blesses everyone who comes in contact with him. He was born on 10th August 1956 in Uchakada village in Thiruvananthapuram¹ as the fourth son of Ponnumuthan Nadar and Thankamma.

He joined St Vincent's Minor Seminary and completed his pre-college education in St Xavier's College. In 1975, he joined St Joseph's Pontifical Seminary, Carmelgiri and was ordained a priest on 19th December 1981, by Bishop Jacob Acharuparambil and served four months as assistant parish priest before taking over the charge of prefect of St Vincent's Minor Seminary for eight years. Later, studies for his doctorate degree brought him to Gregorian University Rome. In 1996, he joined Carmelgiri Seminary as lecturer and was appointed vice rector of the seminary in 1998, and its rector in 2008. He was ordained the third bishop of Punalur diocese on 28th June 2009.

When your mother decided to embrace the Catholic faith, the Church got the

gift of an extraordinary bishop, Dr Selvester Ponnumuthan. Please tell us about your mother.

My mother was a Hindu by birth and got converted to the Catholic Church on her marriage. Inter-religious marriages are common to the culture of Christians in the southern part of Kerala. Initially she was reluctant to practice the Catholic faith and the family neither compelled nor expected her to follow Catholicism. But the practise of faith and peaceful ambience in the family deeply moved her and within a year, she decided to own Jesus and embrace the Catholic Church with love.

She surprised everyone with her love for the Holy Mass and in the number of Rosaries she would recite every day. She would constantly encourage us children to go for daily Holy Mass. Now she is 98-years-old and her strong Catholic faith is the foundation of our family. Each time someone goes out of the house, she still blesses them and begins her intercession for them as soon as they leave. I strongly believe that the precious five Rosaries she recites for me daily holds me together as a priest as well as the Bishop of Punalur Diocese.

How did you discern your vocation to become a priest?

One of the neighbouring families were devout Catholics and my mother was very close to them. They played a huge influence on our faith. Their daughter was my catechism teacher as well as my tuition teacher. On our way to Mass every day, she would speak often about the Eucharist. She too aspired to be a nun at that time. Her constant chats on the Eucharist on our way to daily Mass deeply influenced me and it was my initial motivation. Now she is Sr Nirmala FMCK, zealously continuing her missionary work for the Neyyattinkara diocese in Kerala.

My mother's strong prayers and my love for the Eucharist finally motivated me to join the seminary in 1972, after completing my 10th standard. I am the fourth of seven children to my parents. Somehow, I strongly believe that it was a call from God. I became associated with the charismatic movement when I was studying philosophy at Aluva² seminary in 1975. Fr Augustine Pallikkunnel, a professor at our seminary, inspired me a lot, and through him I got closely acquainted with the charismatic movement in Kerala.

I had been praying for a unique God experience during my philosophy days and one day the question from Mark 8:29 *And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?"* struck me from within. This became my point of reference and my point of departure. I came to a realisation that I was called to give a personal response to God. Wholeheartedly, I pursued my studies from then on and was ordained as a priest on 19th December 1981 for the diocese of Trivandrum.

What do you admire about the Catholic Church? What face of the Church is your favourite?

My love for the Catholic Church grew day-by-day as it has a universal outlook and an all-embracing nature, beyond cultural and language barriers. The compassion of Jesus is the compassion of the Church and this compassion is my favourite face of Catholic Church. Even when the Catholic Church is being tortured, criticised and hunted down, it holds on to forgiveness and mercy as taught by Jesus Christ; this is something unique and unusual.

Catholicism is not about looking into the eyes of Jesus, but being able to look and see through his eyes. Jesus was compassionate enough to go to the sick and heal them, to prepare dinner for his disciples even after rising from the dead, to be with them in their workplace and daily life – God is truly Emmanuel.

Music, plants, social work – you are breaking all clichés. We are not used to bishops like you.

It's all personal interests and convictions that motivate me to take less travelled paths.

During 1997, when I was in the Aluva Carmelgiri Seminary, I had started a Musicology Forum to encourage and enkindle a passion for mission among seminarians. Their artistic skills too were nurtured in this forum, from which many superhit devotional songs were born.

The seminary was a powerhouse of zealous professors and enthusiastic aspirants at that time and it laid my music foundation. I had a very clear vision to build a Christian basis to Carnatic music so that our aspiring musicians could praise our Lord Jesus while learning and performing. Along with Carnatic music veteran, Kumbalam Baburaj Bhagavathar I have penned around 30 Carnatic hymns and numerous other devotional songs. All this was part of my humble effort to contribute to Carnatic music literature from a Christian perspective for our coming generations.

I really appreciate the way movements like Jesus Youth use music to evangelise. When we look at the agricultural sector, we need both short-term crops and long-term crops. We need both tapioca and coconut, both paddy and plantain for wholesome consumption. Similarly, we need all kinds of music and other tools to reach out to people of every type. Jesus Youth bands do an amazing job in bringing youth closer to the Church. But they should be able to include all types of youth in their groups and avoid falling prey to elitism.

We can have a mass impact through music, but a one-to-one impact too is important. Amidst the pomp of massive outreaches, we shouldn't forget to recognise individuals.

We should learn this from Jesus Christ. He gave the Gospel to a crowd of 5000 as



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well as to a sick man abandoned for 38 years and to the one who hid on a tree-top too. There was space in his heart for both crowds and individuals, men and women, untouchables and critics, labourers and capitalists, sinners and gentiles, and even children.

And regarding plants:

We have more than 300 varieties of plants in the Bishop's House garden and the credit goes to our Chancellor, Fr Johnson. I have a strong agricultural background and I love plants. I always encourage organic methods in the garden. In order to make it a bit more useful we have identified and labelled all the plant varieties in the campus in association with the botany department of All Saints College, Trivandrum. We have also published a book, *Ortus Planta, Garden Plants at Bishop's House*, Punalur in 2011 which includes all these details.

It would be nice and a great achievement if we could all have an interest in domestic farming and growing plants. But ultimately it depends on individual interest. It's high time we realise the pitfalls of feeding culture and regain our self-sufficient culture.

Being with people and fighting for their rights may create more enemies and disturb your calm. So why do it?

I feel fulfilled and happy. I was the chairman of the Dalit³ commission for 6 years. It's their constitutional right to live a life of dignity in this country and I am constantly trying my best to bring this point to the attention of political leaders and other policy makers in the state.

We have to respect the dignity of every human person. Genesis 1:27 reminds, *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him*; we should be able to see his image in every human being.

Movements like Jesus Youth have a big role to play in this context. Dalits are a talented community in all aspects, especially music and crafts. We should be able to bring their inborn talent to forefront and deepen our fellowships to ensure that they too are identified and appreciated. Mission should initially begin here. We should have the broad-mindedness of Jesus Christ.

Do you still have hope in our younger generation?

If we can orient them spiritually, youth definitely are our asset and strength. I am proud of the youth in my diocese and I strongly believe that youth are the backbone of the Church.

Most of our present-day youth may not be religious or serious about faith, but they all need God. It's our responsibility to travel the extra mile to make sure that they have a personal God experience. Faith comes from personal experience and conviction. Rather than bombarding them with too many messages, the compassion of Christ should touch them. Our life, compassion and love should motivate youngsters to build a rapport with Jesus Christ.

We should be able to understand them and accept them – their style and attitude as Jesus Christ would do in our place. Love them personally and unconditionally. I am often surprised by their dedication and unity.

The Catholic Church is going through a difficult phase with criticisms and conflicts. What should our attitude and response be to this chaos?

Chapter 13 of *Porta Fidei*, the Apostolic Letter of Pope Benedict XVI has already answered this question.

'One thing that will be of decisive

importance in this Year is retracing the history of our faith, marked by the unfathomable mystery of the interweaving of holiness and sin. ...

During this time we will need to keep our gaze fixed upon Jesus Christ, the "pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). ...

By faith, Mary accepted the Angel's word and believed the message that she was to become the Mother of God. ...

By faith, the Apostles left everything to follow their Master (cf. Mk 10:28). ...

By faith, the disciples formed the first community, gathered around the teaching of the Apostles, in prayer, in celebration of the Eucharist, holding their possessions in common so as to meet the needs of the brethren (cf. Acts 2:42-47).

By faith, the martyrs gave their lives, bearing witness to the truth of the Gospel. ...

By faith, men and women have consecrated their lives to Christ, leaving all things behind so as to live obedience, poverty and chastity with Gospel simplicity. ... By faith, countless Christians have promoted action for justice so as to put into practice the word of the Lord, who came to proclaim deliverance from oppression and a year of favour for all (cf. Lk 4:18-19).

By faith, across the centuries, men and women of all ages, whose names

are written in the Book of Life (cf. Rev 7:9, 13:8), have confessed the beauty of following the Lord Jesus ... in the family, in the workplace, in public life, in the exercise of the charisms and ministries to which they were called.

By faith, we too live: by the living recognition of the Lord Jesus, present in our lives and in our history.'

A close examination of church history reveals both sin and virtue competing for prominence all throughout. Both scandals and sanctity held equal positions and it's going to be the same eternally.

Keep just one thing in mind: 'Love and criticise the Church'. Criticism is a prophetic mission when done with love.

Pro-life mission is considered foolish by a large majority of young families and the older generation too. What is your opinion?

Life is the gift of God. If my mother had listened to society and stopped with two children, I wouldn't even be here.

No one talks about the challenges of small families and the scarcity of love in their homes. Movements like Jesus Youth and Neocatechumenate are giving notable contributions in this regard. Pro-life attitude should come from personal conviction. We should try our best to promote pro-life messages but at the same time we should respect the freedom of couples too. The Catholic Church respects every human being and their freedom of choice. I personally talk to young families and have observed that peer groups greatly influence their attitudes. We should make genuine efforts to ensure that life is respected. ■

^{1,2} Thiruvananthapuram and Aluva are places in Kerala.

³ Dalit is a name for people belonging to the lowest stratum castes in India, previously characterised as 'untouchable'.



A Catholic mother and science journalist, **Alina Ann Mathew** is also a soft-skills trainer and content developer. She lives in Kottayam, India with her husband and two kids.

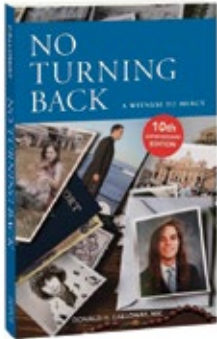


SOUNDREPLY



BOOKS

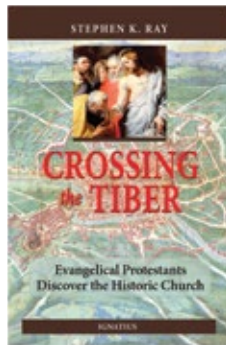
THE CATHOLIC SHELF ON BECOMING CATHOLIC



NO TURNING BACK: A WITNESS TO MERCY

Donald H Calloway MIC

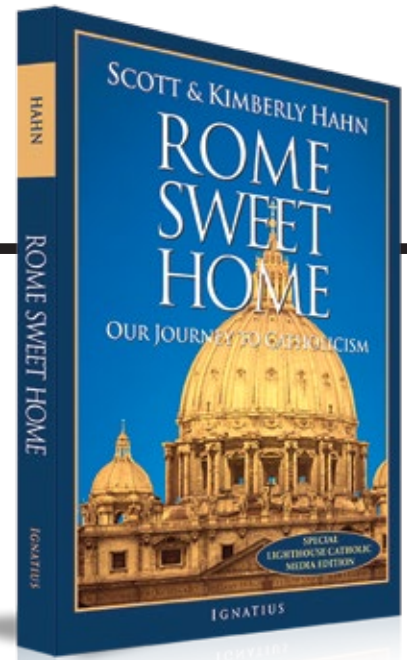
The story of Fr Donald Calloway – from a rebellious teenager to his conversion to the Catholic faith and eventually a priest. An incredible journey of faith and radical conversion, this book illustrates how Divine Mercy and Our Lady touched his life.



CROSSING THE TIBER: EVANGELICAL PROTESTANTS DISCOVER THE HISTORICAL CHURCH

Stephen K Ray

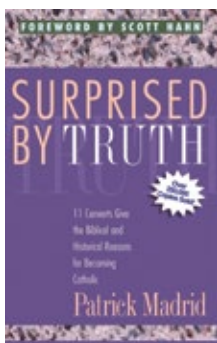
An exhilarating conversion story of a devout Baptist who relates how he overcame his hostility to the Catholic Church by a combination of serious Bible study and vast research of the writings of the early Church Fathers.



ROME SWEET HOME: OUR JOURNEY TO CATHOLICISM

Scott and Kimberly Hahn

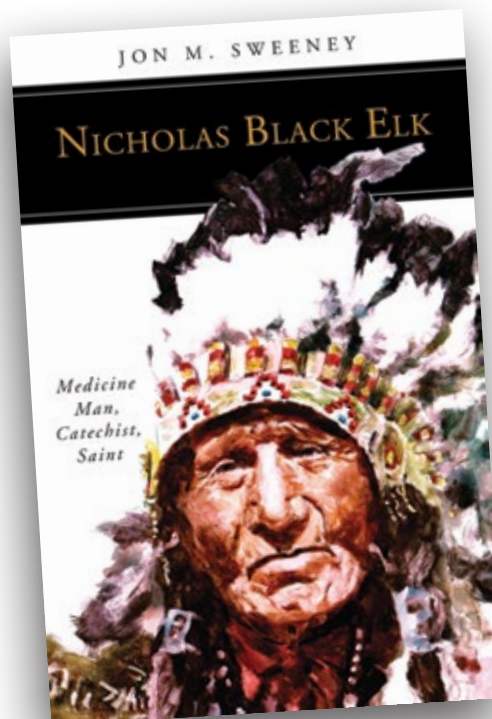
The beautiful story of how Scott and Kimberly Hahn journeyed to the Catholic Church. Their conversion story and love for the Church have kindled the hearts of many, bringing them back to the Catholic faith. An unputdownable classic.



SURPRISED BY TRUTH TRILOGY

Patrick Madrid

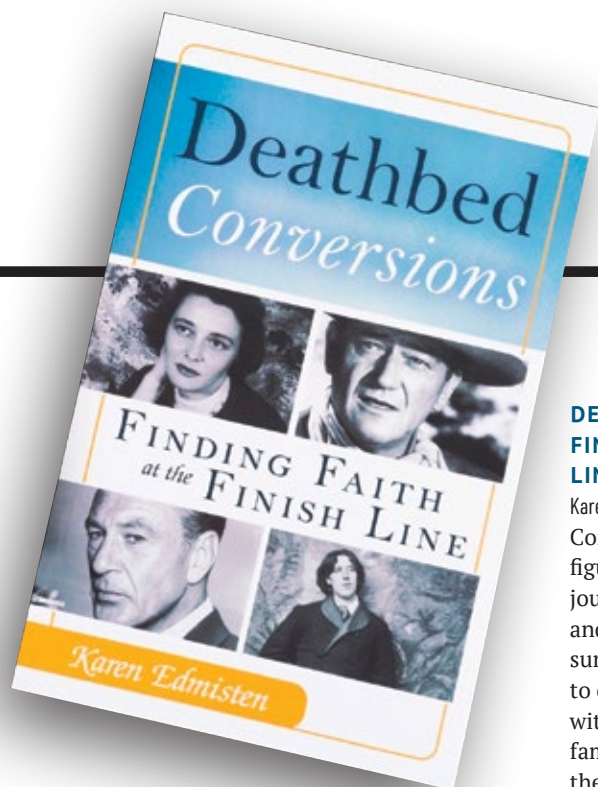
This trilogy of essays tell the dramatic conversion stories of various Protestants. These books are a great basis in Apologetics. They also give an inside view of the flaws of belief systems that beckon unwary Catholics.



NICHOLAS BLACK ELK: MEDICINE MAN, CATECHIST, SAINT

Jon M Sweeney

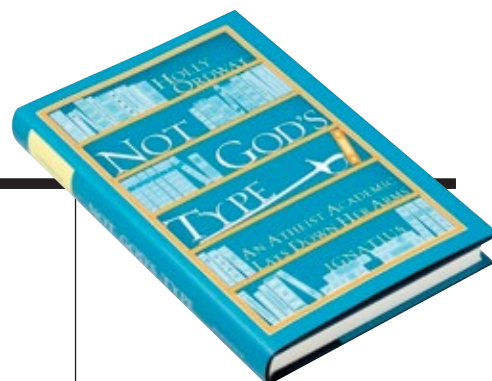
Servant of God Nicholas Black Elk lived a fascinating life. A traditional Oglala Native American, he converted to Catholicism in his forties and became a catechist, while still continuing his Lakota medicine. An insight into an extraordinary life.



DEATHBED CONVERSIONS: FINDING FAITH AT THE FINISH LINE

Karen Edmisten

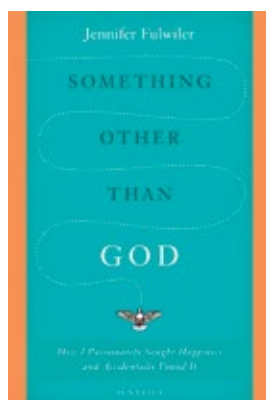
Conversion stories of eminent figures in cinema, literature, journalism, art, crime, royalty and science. These stories summarise how in their search to quell that deep-seated hunger with everything else, these famous figures finally found what they had not sought – God.



NOT GOD'S TYPE: AN ATHEIST LAYS DOWN HER ARMS

Holly Ordway

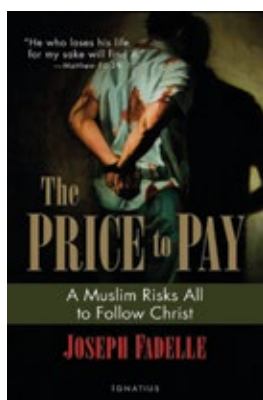
From atheism to Evangelicalism to finally the Catholic faith, English Professor Holly Ordway recounts her unusual journey of becoming convinced of Christianity on rational grounds. 'The story of a glorious defeat.'



SOMETHING OTHER THAN GOD: HOW I PASSIONATELY SOUGHT HAPPINESS AND ACCIDENTALLY FOUND IT

Jennifer Fulwiler

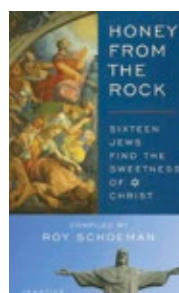
'*Something other than God* is a poignant, profound and often funny tale of one woman who set out to find the meaning of life and discovered that true happiness sometimes requires losing it all.'



THE PRICE TO PAY: A MUSLIM RISKS ALL TO FOLLOW CHRIST

Joseph Fabelle

During his military service, Mohammed finds to his dismay that his roommate is a Christian. When he tries to convert the roommate, he ends up getting converted. Having renounced Islam, the baptised Joseph has now to deal with threats, prison, torture and persecution. Despite the long Calvary, he does not give in.



HONEY FROM THE ROCK: SIXTEEN JEWS FIND THE SWEETNESS OF CHRIST

Roy Schoeman

Jewish convert to Catholicism, Roy Schoeman highlights clear links between Judaism and Catholicism in these inspiring stories of sixteen Jews, through their spiritual journeys to the Catholic Church.



EDITH STEIN: THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE PHILOSOPHER AND MYSTIC WHO LOST HER LIFE IN THE DEATH CAMPS OF AUSCHWITZ

Waltraud Herbstrith

The story of Edith Stein, the Jewish woman and philosopher who converted to Catholicism, became a Carmelite nun in Germany, and who was put to death in a Nazi concentration camp.

SPORTS



FAITH STORIES

FROM TOKYO 2020:
WRESTLING THEIR
WAY TO GLORY

In this continuation of the Faith Stories from Tokyo 2020 Olympics, **Joseph George** writes about two American women wrestlers.

In this edition of faith stories, we focus on two American women who wrestled their way to glory in 2021 while proclaiming their faith. In fact, Helen Louise Maroulis (Rio 2016) and Tamyra Mariama Mensah-Stock (Tokyo 2020) are the only two American women wrestlers with an Olympic Gold medal in their kitty. They wrestled their way to Olympic glory in August 2021, and followed that up with Wrestling Worlds success in October 2021.

While our daily wrestling against the odds may or may not be as frequent in life, for wrestlers, struggles and setbacks are a given in their everyday life. Major injuries can curtail a career easily. The determination and will power required to overcome obstacles and to fight till the end separates the best from the rest.

Genesis 32:24-26 *Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him. Then he said, "let me go, for the dawn is breaking." But he said "I will not let you go unless you bless me."*

Jacob came face to face with God and yet his life was persevered. Then with the Lord's blessing, Jacob became Israel. The Israelites to this day do not eat the tendon of the hip which is on the socket of the thigh, because he touched the socket of Jacob's thigh by the tendon of the hip. The fight was real but at the end of the day Jacob earned the blessing; that's what we all crave for. In order to receive the blessing, wrestling might not be enough, we need to return to God, we need to observe kindness and justice.

Hosea 12:4-6: *Yes, he wrestled with the angel and prevailed; he wept and sought his favour. He found him at Bethel and there he spoke with us. Even the LORD, the God of hosts, The LORD is his name. Therefore, return to your God, observe kindness and justice, and wait for your God continually.*

HELEN LOUISE MAROULIS (USA)

Women's Featherweight Gold Medalist at Rio 2016, Helen Louise Maroulis won her third world title on 7th October 2021. She defeated India's Anshu Malik in the final, earning a victory by fall. This was her 5th medal in Wrestling Worlds after securing Silver in 2012,



Bronze in 2014, and Gold in 2015 and 2017.

'Walking by faith, wrestling by fate' reads Maroulis's Instagram and Twitter bios.

At Rio 2016, Helen Maroulis upset three-time Olympic champion Saori Yoshida, arguably the greatest wrestler, in the final to become the first American woman to win a wrestling gold medal.

Someone who delivered on her potential and talent, would have been an automatic choice to be in medal contention for the big events in future as well. A look back at the Wrestling Worlds medals will reveal a gap between 2017 and 2021, which was the period when Helen Maroulis had two serious concussions, and was diagnosed with PTSD; she briefly retired before returning to the mat.

The traumatic brain injuries had taken a toll on her, but she decided to walk by faith and eventually qualified for the Olympics in April 2021. She glorified God for bringing her this far with the following tweet:

"Who am I, Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?" (2 Samuel 7:18).

Can't believe I get to go on this Olympic journey... AGAIN!!!! #2xolympian #glorytoGod¹

Few months later, she took the centre stage at Tokyo 2020. Even though she lost the semi-final, she was more than happy to wrestle her way to bronze, her second Olympic medal. This one was even special considering the struggles she had to go through in between the two Olympic Games.

After winning her second Olympic medal at Tokyo 2020, Maroulis quoted Mark 9:23 in her Instagram post: *And Jesus said to him, "anything is possible to him who believes."*

¹'Never lose faith, never give up.'²

Maroulis didn't lose her faith, she didn't give up her wrestling career. It was a brave call to return to the mat after those traumatic brain injuries. To come back from retirement, and to fight it out on the mat wouldn't have been an easy decision. Doctors reassured her that 'the brain and the body are resilient'. She believed that completely, and it also showed how deep her conviction and faith were. Two months after the Olympics, she was back on the mat again, to wrestle her way to the Wrestling Worlds gold medal. Her third gold medal underlines her never-say-die attitude and is a testament to walking the faith.

TAMYRA MARIAMA MENSAH-STOCK (USA)

In 2016, Tamyra Mariama Mensah-Stock won the 68kg category at the US Olympic trials, but she failed to qualify for her place at the Olympic Games. She still travelled to Brazil as a training partner and observed the proceedings from close quarters. She bounced back from that heartbreaking experience to win Bronze in 2018 World Championships and a year later was crowned the world champion.

Mensah-Stock preferred athletics during her school days. Her twin sister Tarkiya, persuaded her for a wrestling practice session in grade 10, but Tamyrah wasn't impressed with the sport. Yet, she stuck with the sport for a month until the first meet, which she won and decided to hang around. The decision to hang around was also partly due to the presence of Jacob Stock in the wrestling team, whom she later married.

More than a decade later, Tamyrah Mariama Mensah-Stock cemented her place in the history of the sport she once wanted to quit – becoming the first black woman to win an Olympic gold medal in wrestling. She also became the second American woman after Helen Louise Maroulis to win the Wrestling Gold in Olympics for America. She defeated former World and Olympic champion Sara Dosho in the quarterfinals by 10-0. She outscored all four opponents by a combined tally of 34-5 at Tokyo including a 4-1 victory in the 68kg final against Nigeria's Blessing Oborududu to make history. In August 2021, she was proud to profess her two loves that go hand in hand, 'I am also married to an amazing man of God, Jacob Stock and guess what, I've known him as long as I've been wrestling'.³

She is regarded as one of the most upbeat athletes at Tokyo 2020. In a post-match interview, she was asked what the first thing that went through her mind was, her response: 'Thank God it's over. She hit me so hard!' and she laughed⁴. Tamyrah can be hilarious,

While our daily wrestling against the odds may or may not be as frequent in life, for wrestlers, struggles and setbacks are a given in their everyday life. Major injuries can curtail a career easily. The determination and will power required to overcome obstacles and to fight till the end separates the best from the rest.



open, and friendly. But once she steps on to the mat, the smiling Tamyrah exits and wrestling Tamyrah enters – unbreakable and unstoppable. If you knock her down, she will get up and wrestle again with her champion mentality.

She's a devout and unabashedly proud Christian, who incorporates her faith into every aspect of her life. Her father died in an accident after returning from their match, early in her career. Even though she thought wrestling was responsible for that, she overcame that hurdle in faith.

She turned to her faith when the coach pushed her through grueling practices which ultimately yielded the Olympic Gold. 'There were moments like that that were incredibly hard and I didn't think I was enough. But once I got to the mat, I was like "let go, let God"'.

Her faith propels her to excel on mat and in her everyday life. 'Don't be afraid to show who you are. I am a child of Christ. That's who I am.'

She wasn't afraid to show her appreciation to another Olympic Gold Medalist and firm believer Sydney McLaughlin: '@sydneymclaughlin16 you are an inspiration and you said this so amazing. I love this and I couldn't agree more! I haven't met you, but I know I could learn so much from you! CONGRATULATIONS ON BEING YOU. A SISTER IN CHRIST #championsleague #olympics #blessedlife #blessings'

She is an active presence on social media with her charismatic and fun nature. This was her first post on twitter after becoming an Olympic champion which is a positive message to everyone out there, 'Don't let anyone diminish your light, I know it can be hard sometimes to believe, but you are a light in this world and you are meant to blind people with your gifts from God so shine bright!'⁵

¹ https://twitter.com/helen_maroulis/status/1378804896191950854

² <https://www.instagram.com/p/CSNso5ShJqD/>

³ <https://www.instagram.com/p/CSMPdR8F5ba/>

⁴ <https://firstandpen.com/for-olympic-gold-medalist-tamyra-mensah-stock-faith-family-and-wrestling-are-her-foundation/>

⁵ <https://twitter.com/MensahTamStock/status/1424090252751249411>



Software engineer turned sports management professional,

Joseph George is currently sports consultant with Sony Pictures Sports Networks – India. He has worked as producer, commentator, statistician and sports analyst across multiple sporting events in the recent past.

Catholic Church – the fullness of Christ's revelation



A monthly infographic by **Tena Conil**, illuminating the mysteries of our Catholic faith and values, one pixel at a time.

NOT ONE AMONG MANY RELIGIONS

Catholicism provides a coherent, logical and intimate understanding of God revealing himself to mankind. From primitive nature-religions to medieval claims of divine revelations, the many attempts over history to connect with the Creator were like 'the mouse's search for the cat' (C. S. Lewis). Only the Catholic Church can claim to be founded by Jesus Christ nearly 2,000 years ago. *No man has seen God at any time... (but) the only begotten Son* (John 1:18); *I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father, but by me* (John 14:6). No other religious founder has ever claimed to be God. The Holy Spirit launched the Church at Pentecost for people of all ages to encounter God's love.

THE PILLAR AND FOUNDATION OF TRUTH

The church of the living God, (is) the pillar and foundation of truth (1 Timothy 3:15). The Catholic Church, having been given authority by Jesus Christ and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, compiled the Bible as it exists today. She has as its sole rule of faith, the entire Word of God – the twin deposits of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition (oral tradition). All of the Word of God was at one time (after the death of Christ, before the compilation of Bible) passed on orally. We have an unbroken lineage of Popes and consecrated priests who have transmitted the Catholic faith since. We are the Church of the Eucharist – the living Word made flesh at each Holy Mass – founded by Christ at the Last Supper (Luke 22:7-38). From the early Church, we have consecrated bread and wine in obedience to him. *Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you* (John 6:53).

THE CHURCH EXISTS FOR NON-MEMBERS

We profess in the Creed our belief in the 'One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church'. She 'forms one Body (and) is given life by the one Spirit. (She) is holy (since) the Most Holy God is her author; Christ her bridegroom, gave himself up to make her holy' (CCC 866, 867). 'The communion of all the faithful of Christ, those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified, and the blessed in heaven, all together (form) one Church' (CCC 962).

The Church is perhaps the only entity which exists primarily for non-members: 'She is missionary of her very nature' (CCC 868). *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* (Matthew 28:19-20).



PATH-BREAKING, RECORD-SETTING CHURCH

Catholicism is the most widespread religious denomination in the world and is the largest Christian Church:



1.33 Billion Catholics

Catholic monks taught the world to read and developed written languages. We educate more children than any other scholarly or religious institution in the world:



62.2 Million Students, 1.4 Million Schools
across Primary & Secondary Catholic schools

Scientific method and the laws of evidence were developed by the Church and the Western College system was founded by us:

1231 AD

First Universitas Guild approved by the Vatican



1,358 Colleges

Catholic universities & higher education institutions

We are the largest charitable organisation on the planet, bringing relief and comfort to those in need. We founded hospitals to care for the sick, orphanages for the abandoned and are the largest non-government provider of health care services in the world:

18,000 Clinics

16,000 Homes

for the elderly & special needs

5,500 Hospitals

65% of them in developing countries



Chandeliers

☀ *Converts and Cardinal Virtues*

By Steffi Siby

The following are saints who converted to Catholicism. This article shows how these saints imitated the four cardinal virtues as outlined in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross - Prudence

Edith Stein was born in 1891 in Breslau, Poland, the youngest child of a large Jewish family. She was an outstanding student and proficient in philosophy. Eventually, she became interested in the Catholic faith, and in 1922, after reading the works of St Teresa of Avila, was baptised. Eleven years later, Edith entered the Carmelites and was sent to the Carmel at Holland.

The Nazis rounded up all Catholic Jews in Holland on 2 August 1942 and Teresa Benedicta was arrested by the Gestapo while she was in the chapel with the other sisters. Her last words to be heard in Echt were addressed to Rosa, her sister: 'Come, we are going for our people.' Most of the women and children were sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau where they died in the gas chamber soon after their arrival. Eyewitness accounts of Teresa in the transit camps describe her as calm and composed, practical, compassionate, a peaceful influence on all around her.

Teresa commented, 'I never knew that people could be like this, neither did I know that my brothers and sisters would have to suffer like this. ... I pray for them every hour. Will God hear my prayers? He will certainly hear them in their distress.'

When she was canonised in 1998, St Pope John Paul II called Edith Stein a passionate 'seeker' of and devotee to freedom and faith. He said, 'The love of Christ was the fire that inflamed the life of St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. Long before she realised it, she was caught by this fire.'

'Prudence is the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good



Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross



Saint Josephine Bakhita

in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it; "the prudent man looks where he is going." (CCC 1806)

St Teresa was dedicated to finding the truth, sharing the truth and living out the truth even though this ultimately led to her death.

Saint Josephine Bakhita - Justice

Saint Josephine Margaret Bakhita was born around 1869 in Sudan. As a child, Josephine was kidnapped by Arab slave traders. For many years, she would be bought, sold and given away numerous times. She spent so much time in captivity that she forgot her original name. She was brutally abused and left with 114 scars on one occasion.

In 1883, the Turkish general sold her to the Italian Vice Consul. He was kind and she begged to be taken with him to Italy. She was given away to another family and became their nanny. When her mistress decided to travel, she placed her in the care of the Canossian Sisters in Venice. Josephine came to know about God and was deeply touched and discerned a call to follow Christ.

When her mistress returned, Josephine refused to leave and remained resolute. This led to a complaint to Italian authorities on her behalf. The court found that slavery had been outlawed in Sudan before Josephine was born, so she could not be lawfully made a slave.

For the first time in her life, Josephine was free. She chose to remain with the Canossian Sisters. She was baptised on January 9, 1890, became a novice with the Canossian Daughters of Charity and took her final vows on December 8, 1896.

She was known for her gentle voice and smile. She even went on record saying, 'If I were to meet the slave-traders who kidnapped me and even those who tortured me, I would kneel and kiss their hands, for if that did not happen, I would not be a Christian and religious today.'

She always remained joyful. If anyone enquired how she was, her profound reply would be, 'As the master desires.'

'Justice is the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbour.' (CCC 1807)

Justice was not upheld in St

Josephine's life as a slave. However, she was later set free and dedicated her life to God. Incredibly, she did not resent her slave traders but instead loved them for leading her to Christ thus rising above the world's view of justice and extending forgiveness.

Blessed Bartolo Longo - Fortitude

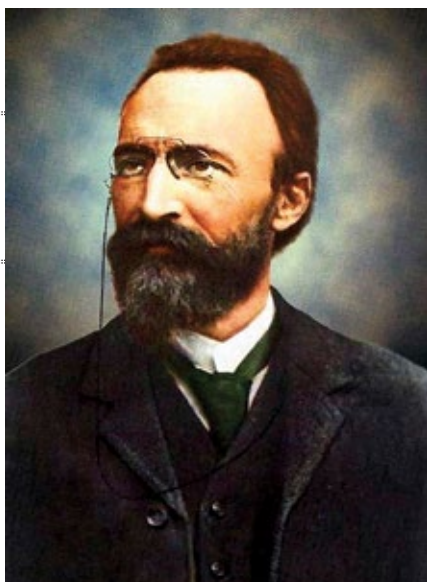
Bartolo was born to a devout Catholic family in Italy but began to lose his way after his mother died. In his confusion, he got involved with the occult. Soon, he was consecrated a satanic priest. He began to conduct satanic services and to preach against the Church.

His family tried to change his mind without success. Professor Pepe, a Catholic professor, began to meet with Bartolo and forced him to confront the state he was in. He eventually convinced him to see a Dominican priest, who after many discussions, on the feast of the Sacred Heart in 1865, was able to welcome Bartolo back into the Church and give him absolution.

After that, as a voluntary penance, Bartolo worked in the Neapolitan Hospital for Incurables. He prayed, making a promise of celibacy to serve God with all his heart. He tried to do reparation by returning to his satanist hangouts, holding up the Rosary and publicly renouncing his old ways.

'I heard an echo in my ear of the voice of Friar Alberto repeating the words of the Blessed Virgin Mary: "One who propagates my Rosary shall be saved."' After hearing this, his life was dedicated to promoting and imitating the mysteries of the Rosary. He built Pompeii's famous Basilica of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary, founded elementary schools and orphanages, and wrote books on the Rosary. It was from Blessed Bartolo's writings that Pope John Paul II found the idea of the Luminous Mysteries.

'Fortitude is the moral virtue that



Blessed Bartolo Longo



Saint Kateri Tekakwitha

ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life.' (CCC 1808)

Despite completely losing his way and becoming a satanic priest, with the grace of God, Blessed Bartolo was able to not only return to the faith but also persevere and become a beautiful witness of God's mercy.

Saint Kateri Tekakwitha - Temperance

St Kateri Tekakwitha was born in 1656, in the Mohawk village of Ossernenon. She caught smallpox at four which scarred her

skin, a source of humiliation. Her whole family died during the outbreak. Kateri was then raised by her uncle, who was the chief of a Mohawk clan. She was known as a skilled worker, who was diligent and patient.

At age 19, Kateri Tekakwitha converted to Catholicism, taking a vow of chastity and pledging to marry only Jesus Christ. Her decision was very unpopular with those around her. They could not understand why she refused to work on Sundays and so they would not let her eat on Sundays. Some would throw stones at her and insult her as she would walk to the chapel. On one occasion, her uncle even sent a warrior to frighten her, as he pretended to attack her with a hatchet. To avoid persecution, she had to travel to a Christian native community south of Montreal.

According to legend, Kateri was very devout and would put thorns on her sleeping mat. She fervently prayed for the conversion of her fellow Mohawks. She often fasted and when she would eat, she would taint her food to lessen its flavour.

Only a year after making her vow, she became extremely ill. On April 17, during Holy Week, Kateri Tekakwitha passed away aged 23. Those who assisted at her death were honoured to witness a miracle, the first of many that would be credited to her. Although St Kateri's face had been scarred by smallpox her whole life, as her soul ascended to heaven, her skin became clear and radiant.

'Temperance is the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods. It ensures the will's mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honourable.' (CCC 1809)

St Kateri practised extremely severe fasting as penance for the conversion of her nation. It was remarkable that she managed to do these things not just for her own good but for the good of others. ■■

Secret Truth

We are called to an intimate relationship with God, to be filled with the truth and to put love to action, says **Anil Israel**.

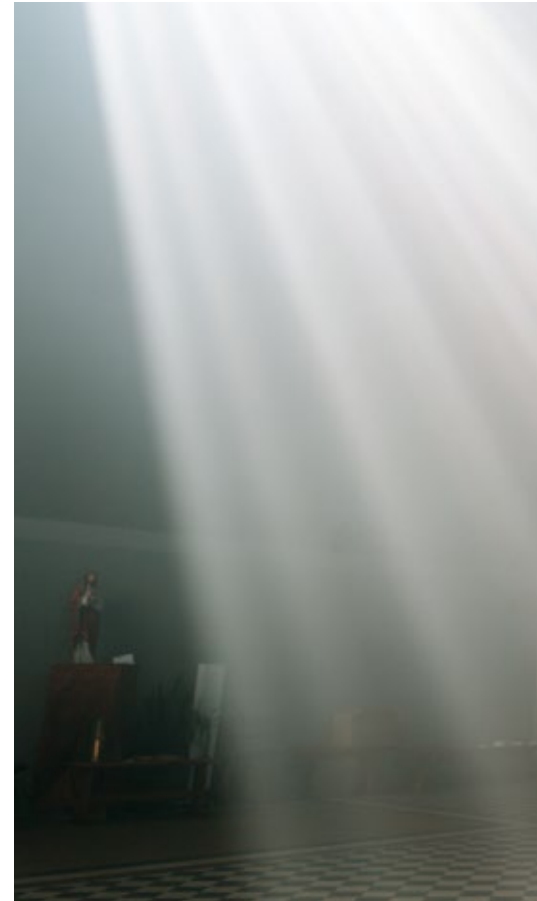
Once heard in a retreat that ‘pagans’ are those who do not ‘know’ that God is their Father. If believers are meant to be those who ‘know God’ and unbelievers as *Gentiles who do not know God* (1 Thessalonians 4:5), then we who call ourselves Christians ought to ask ourselves, am I truly a believer? What is my personal understanding of what it means to ‘know God’? Interestingly, knowing about something and knowing something are not necessarily the same.

If I grow up in a place where a certain fruit or for that matter any other uncommon thing is not normally available, then I can know a lot about that thing by reading about it or learning about it from several sources of information at my disposal. However, if I do not taste that fruit or have a tangible experience of that which is not easily accessible in my vicinity, it continues to remain alien to me. I might know something about it, but I am still to know it fully. The same can unquestionably be said about God. I can expose myself to a lot of information about God, about his attributes, about his works, but still,

I might not yet ‘know God’. ‘Does that really matter?’ one might ask. The short answer: It’s all that matters.

As a young adult, like many others, I too happened to put myself on the irresistible quest-for-truth, my self-initiated search for answers to all of life’s most sought-after questions. In this journey of discovery, it dawned on me that the answers to some of the most fundamental questions were already made known to us through childhood catechism. ‘Who made me?’ *God made me*. ‘Why did God make me?’ *God made me to know him, to love him, to serve him and to be happy with him forever in eternity*. It was as simple as that. However, somewhere on the search for a concrete answer to the purpose of human existence, these fundamental truths somehow were unconsciously left behind, eventually getting lost under a heap of other intellectual pursuits.

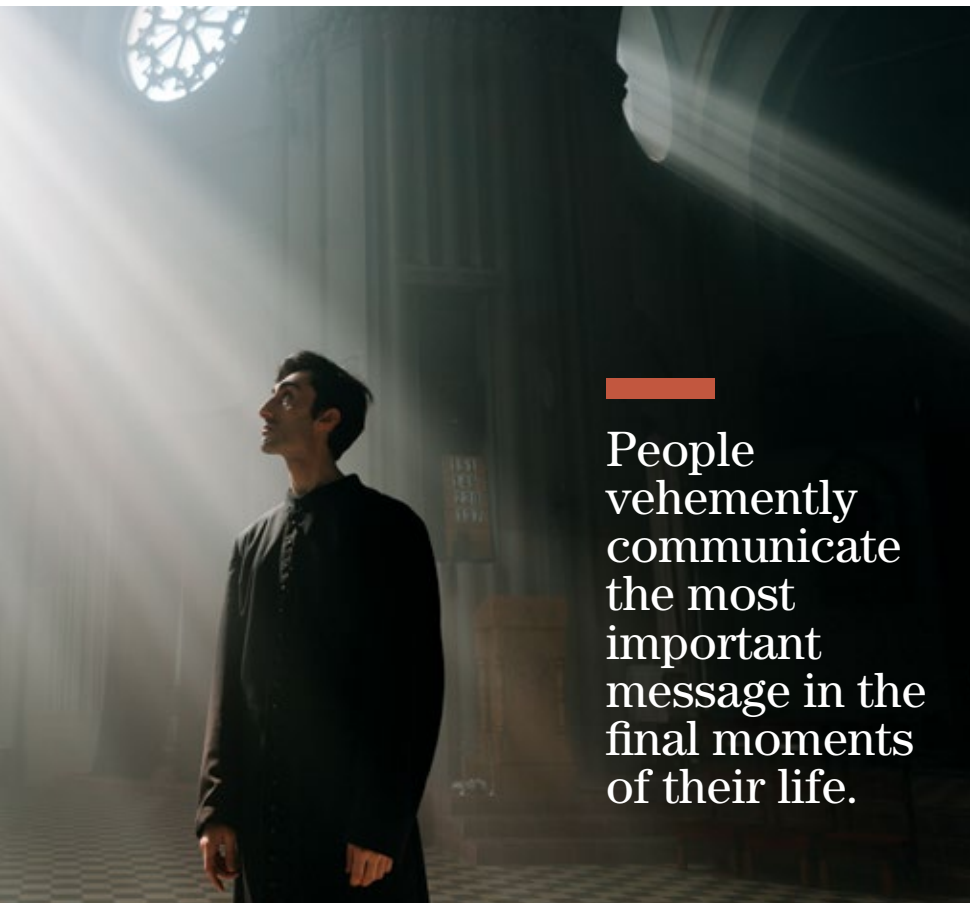
In biblical language, ‘knowing’ is akin to ‘spousal relationship’ – the most intimate relationship that can be envisaged on earth. *God himself is an eternal exchange of love... and he has*



destined us to share in that exchange (CCC 221). God desires us to be *partakers of the divine nature* (2 Peter 1:4). Interceding to the heavenly Father, Jesus earnestly prayed: *That they all shall be one, just as you, my Father, are in me, and I am in you, so that they also shall be one in us* (John 17:21). God desires that we be one with him – that we share the most intimate relationship with him – that we ‘know’ him.

So knowing God is all about experiencing his love, tasting his love, having a personal encounter with him. This personal encounter further leads to deepening and growing in an intimate relationship with him. Jesus’s yearning for souls on the cross: *I thirst* (John 19:28) echoes ‘God thirsts that we may thirst for him’ (St Augustine).

THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU › JOHN 15:12



People vehemently communicate the most important message in the final moments of their life.

Secondly, we have been given the commandment to love. *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength* (Mark 12:29-30; Deuteronomy 6:4-5). *You shall love your neighbour as yourself* (Mark 12:31). This is a synopsis of the Ten Commandments. Deuteronomy 6:6-9 further encourages us to constantly remind ourselves of our topmost priority and to even diligently teach our children to uphold this in their hearts.

It is said that Alexander the Great made the following three wishes on his dying bed: I want my physicians to carry my body alone because I want people to know that no doctor can cure people's illnesses, especially when they face

death... so don't take life for granted. I want the path leading to my grave to be strewn with gold, silver, and precious stones... because I want people to know that not even a fraction of gold will come with me. I want my both hands to keep dangling out of my coffin because I want people to know that we came empty-handed in this world and we will go empty-handed. It is also reported that Steve Jobs too, expressed in his deathbed speech: 'we should pursue other matters that are unrelated to wealth'.

People vehemently communicate the most important message in the final moments of their life. In his farewell discourse, Jesus too reiterated the new commandment: *love one another, as I have loved you* (John 13:34; 15:12). *If you love me, you will obey my commandment* (John

14:15). *If you love one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples* (John 13:35). Our lives therefore sum up to the measure of love with which we live our lives.

Further we learn more about love from the epistle of St John - the evangelist of love. *And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments* (1 John 2:3). *He who does not love, does not know God* (1 John 4:8). So, we see that loving God is a sign of knowing God. They both are inseparable. *Whoever claims that he knows him, and yet does not keep his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him* (1 John 2:4).

Now, we know that *the truth* (John 14:6) is a person - Jesus Christ - the Word incarnate. *Your word is truth* (John 17:17). Jesus also taught: *If you dwell in my word, you are my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free* (John 8:31-32). If our hearts are filled with the Word of God, our hearts are filled with the truth. And this truth gives us the freedom to choose God and his will.

Finally, we are called to serve - to put love into action, to *fulfil our ministry* (cf. 2 Timothy 4:5), to *excel in good works* (Titus 3:14). For we are called to be *not hearers but doers of the Word* (cf. Romans 2:13) for *faith without works is dead* (James 2:26). Our good works are meant to *shine like stars* (Phil.2:15) so that others *may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven* (cf. Matthew 5:16).

It is God's Word dwelling in our hearts that bear the lasting fruits of good works. *The unfolding of your word gives light* (Psalm 119:130) and enables us to be *children of the light* (Ephesians 5:8). Let us embrace this *secret truth* (Romans 16:25) that *if we love one another, God abides in us* (1 John 4:12).



Anil Israel lives in Mannheim, Germany, with his wife Sunitha and their 5 children. He is the current National Formation Coordinator of JY Germany.

Quiz Time



Mail your answers to quiztime@jykairosmedia.org before 28th February 2022.
The winner will be rewarded with 1 year subscription of Kairos Global



PART A

Animals in the Bible

- 1 Balaam journeys to meet the king of Moab on this animal.
- 2 When Samson was prevented from seeing his wife, he took hundreds of this animal to wreck revenge.
- 3 This creature brought Elijah bread and meat when he hid by the brook Cherith.
- 4 Those who disobeyed the order of King Darius were to be punished by being thrown to this animal.
- 5 When Jesus was presented in the Temple, Mary and Joseph brought these to offer as sacrifice according to the law of the Lord.
- 6 'It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to ___', Jesus said to the persistent Canaanite woman.
- 7 Jesus instructed Peter and the disciples to find this creature. In its mouth would be a shekel to pay the collectors.



PART B

Name them

1. Three Israelite kings.
2. The blind beggar at the gate of Jericho.
3. Jacob's eldest son.
4. Jacob's mother and grandmother.
5. Moses's wife.
6. The renamed place where Jacob had the dream.
7. Place where Abraham lived originally.

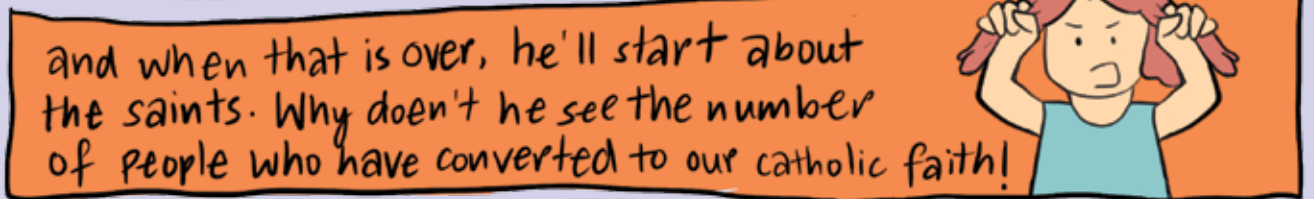
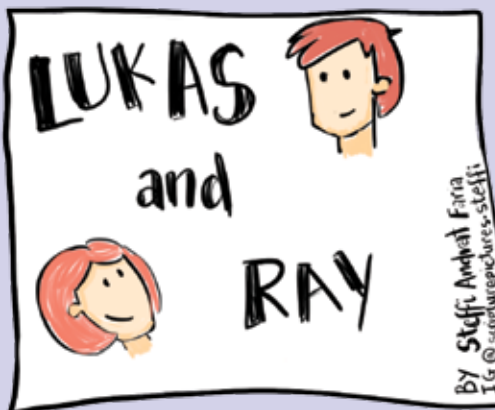
ANSWERS TO QUIZTIME ISSUE 46

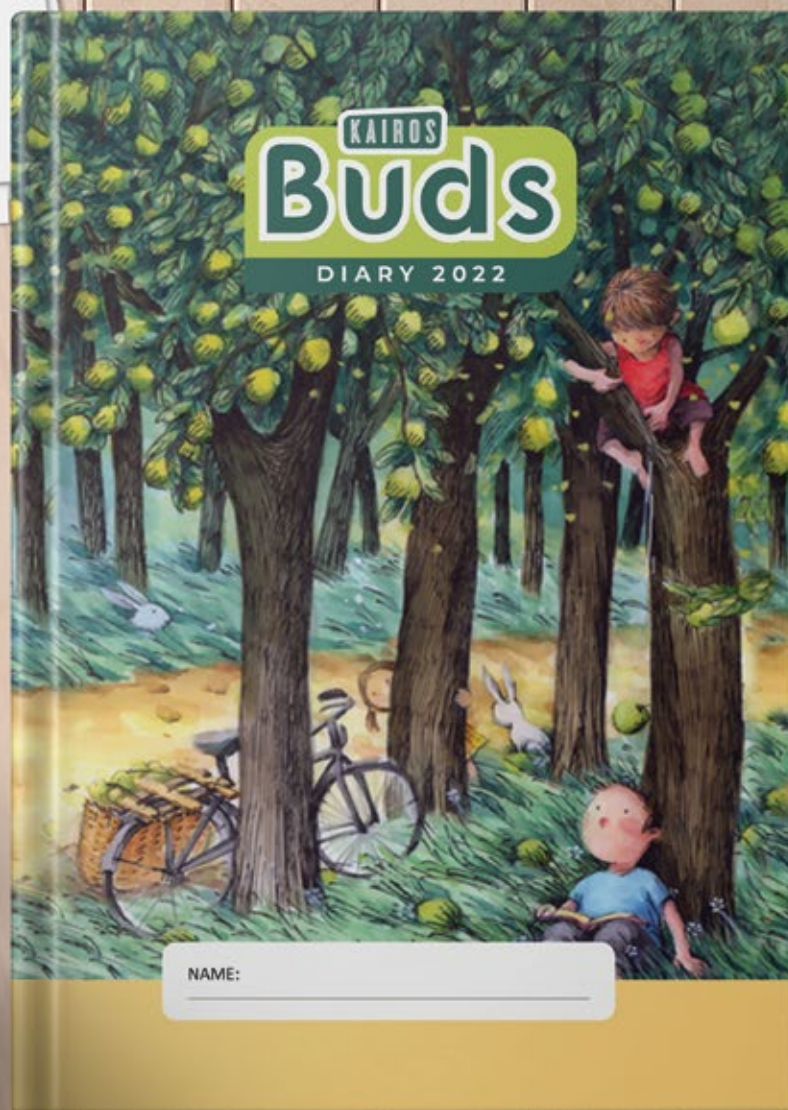
Part A

Across: Sarah, Rachel, Rahab, Bathsheba, Esther; **Down:** Rebekah, Leah, Ruth, Miriam, Hannah

Part B

I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.
Psalm 13:6





Tailor-made for children!

From drawings to design, careful choice of content, Bible verses at the page's top, wise sayings at the bottom, the whole package is very child-friendly. The best part is the traditional set of prayers, so heavily relied upon by the Church for centuries and such an ideal start to a new day! A saint's story for each month offers a role model to follow, while puzzles, colouring pages and other God/creation-centred activity will certainly be fun for the little ones.

A JOSEPH ANTONY, HYDERABAD, INDIA



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