

Nothing Is Impossible with God: An Interview with Brother Ruan Shijun

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Seminarians are the future of the Church. They have to face many challenges coming from society, the Church, and themselves. The Church is concerned that the seminarians make the most of the grace God gives them during their years in the seminary, to form and prepare themselves for their future work in the Church. In order to have a closer look into this matter, *Fang Zhou* interviewed Ruan Shijun, a seminarian in his final year at the Zhongnan Seminary. Hopefully we will gain some insight from his sharing.



***Ruan Shijun
(right) with
interviewer
Ye Fei (left)***

Ye: (Seminarian Ye Fei, interviewer, hereafter called Ye.) Brother Ruan, greetings. Thank you for accepting to be interviewed. The

20th anniversary of the seminary is approaching. May I ask you what has impressed you most during your years in the seminary?

Ruan: (Seminarian Ruan Shijun, hereafter called Ruan.) I entered Zhongnan Seminary in September 1999. Before that I had been teaching language in a secondary school for eight years. I first got in touch with the Church in early 1997, and was baptized on Easter 1998. Life has been totally different for me after I believed in God. It is especially so during these few years in the seminary. I think God “has been overdoing it” with His grace to me. When I was baptized, I just expected to see some changes in my way of living. But God has given me much more than that. He is bringing me closer and closer to him. Words cannot express my happiness in knowing God. Although quite often I still feel that I am rather despicable, yet God has never forsaken me. This is mystery. God’s love is beyond comprehension. We can only bow down and adore Him, just as Mary did, when she answered “Yes” to the mystery of God. This is faith. Of course, from a human point of view, our environment is not very satisfactory. Even today, there are still many problems in the Church in China, and sometimes we find the atmosphere suffocating. But placing our trust in God, and knowing that He will hold us in his almighty arms, we are full of strength. “When a woman is in labor, she is in anguish because her hour has arrived; but when she has given birth to a child, she no longer remembers the pain because of her joy that a child has been born into the world.” (Jn 16:21) I think this is the path that the Church in China must follow, because it is only through suffering that it will mature. Perhaps this is God’s way of taking care of us.

Ye: You had eight years of teaching experience, with a stable working environment and good remuneration. Why did you give up all this and choose the road to the priesthood?

Ruan: This is a challenging question. I would like to use the Angel Gabriel’s reply to Mary during the Annunciation to answer your question. Mary was perplexed when Gabriel told her that she would bear a child and become the mother of the savior. The angel comforted her, saying, “Nothing is impossible with God.” (Lk 1:37) Mary immediately believed. Indeed, “nothing is impossible with God.” “For human beings it is impossible, but not for God. All

things are possible for God.” (Mk 10:27) I think this is my situation too. From the human point of view, I am amazed by what has happened to me; but through the eyes of faith, from the very beginning this was already in God’s plan. Just as God said to Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you.” (Jer 1:5) This is what we always say, namely that the vocation of each person is a mystery, which cannot be clearly expressed in words.

Ye: What was the greatest benefit you received during your years of formation in the seminary?

Ruan: The Psalm says, “How good and how pleasant it is, when brothers dwell as one!” (Ps 133:1) I think this is the greatest benefit I have received. Can you imagine anything more pleasant on earth than people with the same faith and the same motivation living together? Moreover, we have the saints in heaven and the souls in purgatory closely linked to us. So we are never alone on the road of faith.

Ye: What did you focus on during your years of study in the seminary?

Ruan: I think I put my emphasis on the deepening of my faith. You know, all philosophy and theology should serve this purpose. And we should not put the cart before the horse. Of course some social knowledge is necessary, but we cannot let secondary things supersede our primary purpose.

Ye: What do you think is the greatest challenge facing us, people who offer their lives to God, in today’s society?

Ruan: Every era has its challenges. Faith is not a flower protected in a greenhouse. The key to the matter is whether or not we believe and trust in God. I think the most serious problem today is that people ignore the laws of God, and seek happiness elsewhere. This is very dangerous. Those of us who have faith should witness to our faith. We should prove by the way we live that God’s words are not empty. Rather, they are living, real, powerful, and trustworthy. For example, Mother Teresa, who is about to be beatified, bore witness

to God by her way of living. So it is by witnessing to God with our lives that we can change society.

Ye: What qualities do you think seminarians should have in order to dialogue with people of our time?

Ruan: Seminarians should have a profound faith, and have sufficient knowledge about God, the Church, and their faith, in order to dialogue with society. This is very straightforward: we can only give what we have. We must first believe ourselves, before we can share our faith with others. If we are doubtful about our faith, how can we share it with others?

Ye: How can one coordinate virtue and knowledge in order to achieve a balanced development?

Ruan: I think we should go back to the viewpoint of Socrates, who said, "Knowledge is virtue." This means that all genuine knowledge should promote growth in virtue. For us Christians, our knowledge about God definitely increases our faith, hope and love. This is different from society's view, which looks upon knowledge as an instrument to make money and to raise one's personal status. This is wrong. I think that many people are aware of this problem, and want to help knowledgeable people become persons of virtue too. I know many such people. They are doing quite well, and they deserve our emulation.

Ye: As a member of the graduating class, what experience or thoughts do you wish to share with the new seminarians?

Ruan: First of all, I would like to express my respect for them, because it requires a lot of courage to respond generously to God's call in today's social environment. In them I see hope for the future of the Church. I am sure that future seminarians will be more outstanding than us, and will be more blessed by God. However, I feel obliged to remind them that our vocation requires nurturing, and it is a lifelong matter. We must always be vigilant, and not be too comfortable. This is especially so when we encounter difficulties. We must not become careless. We must always be ready to seek God's help. He will not turn a blind eye to us. Similar to the experiences of Mary and Abraham, when we are faced with uncertainties in the world, God will provide. (Gn 22:8)