

Road to Faith

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China is an atheist society. In such a society, religious faith is rarely found. As I reflect upon my life so far, I am surprised by the profundity and consistency of my faith—faith in an omnipresent and omnipotent God; faith in the mysteries of the Blessed Sacrament and resurrection of the body. I am a person who gets lost easily. Even unimportant matters can affect my faith and cause me to doubt. Yet I have never been totally lost in my life owing to the miraculous providence of God when I encounter crossroads, i.e. when I have to make decisions.

I was born in a small parish. To be more exact, my mother was the only Catholic in the whole village at the very beginning of this parish. My father was a teacher. He did not have strong opposition towards religion, but he was not enthusiastic about it either. Owing to the limited conditions of my family, I went to live with my grandmother when I was five. My grandma was my first teacher in the Christian faith. However, we were the only Catholic family in my grandma's village. My grandfather was a Protestant Christian; my three uncles were not very serious about their faith; two of my uncles' wives were non-Christians. Even in such a circumstance, the religious formation that my grandmother gave me became deeply rooted in my mind. I have never ceased my quest and exploration of the faith even in frustrating and hopeless situations.

When I was a child, my deepest impression about faith was my grandmother's prayer. Every morning, when I woke up from sleep, the first thing I saw was my grandmother kneeling in prayer; the last thing I saw every night before I went to bed was my grandmother praying with the rosary beads in her hands. Every time I made a mistake, my grandma would admonish me to confess my sins before God and promise Him not to make the same mistake again. She often talked to me about Jesus' suffering and God's

mercy. Every Sunday, participation in Mass caused me, a little child, great pain. At that time, Sunday masses began at 5am. My grandmother and I began our walk to the nearby church at 3am. It was especially chilly in winter, but I dared not whine about it. I just wanted to arrive at the church as quickly as possible so as to sleep comfortably there. It is important to form one's faith since childhood. There were numerous times when I had doubts about God's existence, but my grandmother's teaching and the two pairs of footprints (one big and one small), so deeply marked in the snow, would burn in my heart, giving me the motivation to continue my quest for the truth of my faith.

I encountered the first crisis of faith when I was in junior secondary school. When I was a child, I listened to my parents' teachings and always obeyed them, but I began developing my own perspectives on the world and on life as I grew up. As I learned to think independently, I began asking questions like the existence of the world. At that time, I was innocent enough to think that religion was nonsensical. How come there are people who are so silly to believe in it? This was especially so when I gained knowledge of science. Why are people so silly as to believe in things that are impossible? From primary school to junior secondary school, I was the only Catholic among my peer group. Often I heard people talk about being laughed at or ostracised because of their faith. Such things, however, have never happened to me. I love the part of me that makes me different from others. I was always the first one to acknowledge my identity as a Catholic. But at the same time I am a person who loves seeking the truth. Although I was surrounded by non-Catholics, I loved reading—I tried to understand my faith, which is both strange and familiar to me, through all the Christians books I could get hold of. Yes, I was only a twelve- or thirteen-year-old child, but I was already asking questions about the souls in purgatory and the mystery of Mary's immaculate conception. I knew the lives of many saints and had glanced through the Bible a few times. Yet I could not accept everything I read there. Faith and the education I received were just incompatible with each other; faith just did not fit into the world I lived in. When I looked at my faith from the perspective of the real world, everything seemed like a farce—Mass, prayers, etc., do look like stage performances. They

are glamorous but unreal; they do not have any real ground for me to believe in them.

When I graduated from junior secondary school, homework was so busy that I became lazy and forgot about prayer. Faith had become something like chicken ribs—I could not give up my faith because I was so used to it. It had become part of my life, but I just did not understand and accept it because I could not find any reason for me to believe it. The martyrs who had so firmly insisted upon their Christian faith, miracles that took place continuously and in many different ways, priests who were virtuous and well-respected, and the elderly Catholics who are devoted and enthusiastic about their faith.... I know all these; I have heard about all these; but they are just too distant from me, so distant that they seem unreal. Just at this time, I joined the first summer camp for senior secondary school students organised by the diocese. I cannot say that I experienced a complete change during the camp; after all, it was just a seven-day camp. I cannot say that I was totally transformed there. But it was the first time I came to know that I was not alone! I realised that there were many people of my age who shared the same faith, and who were thankful, and who worshipped the Lord. It was like recharging my batteries. My faith, which was almost depleted at that time, was enlivened with new strength. In the same year, my paternal grandmother, who was paralysed for eight years, got baptised before she passed away peacefully. In the next year, my whole family—there were more than forty of us—were baptised.

My mother spent more than ten years helping the whole family accept the Christian faith. Her effort had great impact on me. In fact, my mother did not do anything about it. She did not really preach the Good News; she did not talk about miracles or the Bible. She just took care of my grandmother for eight years, and she had never got into conflicts with the neighbours. I came to understand that faith is not only about theories and knowledge; it is about concrete action. Prayer is not only about pronouncing praises unceasingly, but sincerity of heart and conversion in our actions.

Time flew quickly during my senior secondary school education. My life in the university was about to begin. My results in the Advanced Level exams were not good, so I “exiled” myself to a faraway city. My original plan was to attend Sunday masses

happily, but there were not many Catholics there and it took me three years to find a church. God showed His mercy to me—I began my own journey of faith. I read many books and documents about the Catholic faith in the library. I began my research into Scholastic philosophy, Confucian classics, theories of Daoism and even the teachings of Buddhism and Islam. I was eager to know many, many things. I wanted urgently to understand my faith more deeply. Since the beginning of human civilization, there have been many great predecessors who spent their whole lives and all their efforts seeking the truth. I just wanted to have a glimpse of the tiniest bit of it. As I came to know more, I came to think more too. Yet all these theories and knowledge I gained were not supported by things in the real world. This made me very frustrated. The flamboyance of university life and the weekend parties gradually distanced me from God. In the final class of philosophical debates, the words of one of my classmates hit me really hard, “I don’t like getting along with religious believers. Although they are nice to others, they are the most selfish. They treat others nicely just for the sake of going to heaven in the future. How can it be called charity when it is actually specious sacrifice?” At that moment, I was unable to answer. The faith that I cultivated in the last twenty years was at once shattered.

God always calls me back to Him. Once, by chance, I made my confession to a priest whom I did not know personally. I told him my worries and doubts, even asking him whether the decision to be a priest was purely out of selfishness. The priest asked me, “Well, if it is just out of selfishness, and if everybody loves other people in order to get into heaven, for what reason, then, did Jesus love?” Then he led me out of the cul-de-sac of my thoughts step by step. I took one big step forward—God is love. Later on, I came to know that this priest was in charge of the evangelical work of the Church through mass media. I promised to serve the Church for one year during my practicum in the university. The university authorities tried to stop me many times, but finally I succeeded and fulfilled my wish. During my one-year service at the bishop’s house, my understanding of the faith changed drastically—it was no longer something purely imaginary, but a real cornerstone. Every day I had to handle Church documents, translate materials written in foreign languages and organise Church files. I spent most of my

time interviewing lay Catholics. I even got in touch with numerous cases of paranormal events.

Not to mention the grace of attending Mass every day; not to mention a life of joy and offering; not to mention the numerous cases of demonic possession and prophecies; not to mention the interviews with lay Catholics who insisted upon knowing the Lord's teachings, and who were always nice and selfless.... It just took one ordination Mass with eight new priests and five new deacons to drive me into tears and to boost my faith. In the past, my faith was just like a reflection of the moon over a river. I could see the reflection on the surface of the water, and from this reflection I knew that the real thing existed; but all that I saw was only a reflection. In the blink of an eye, I felt like emerging from the water and began to see the real world out there. This is a world in which God's presence is found everywhere; this is a world in which Jesus is always at my side; this is a world in which the least of the brothers are the same as Jesus. It was such a real world. It felt like having another door opened before me, and I was reunited with Christ.

When I served at the diocesan office of mass media, I served in the formation centre for young people at the same time. I came to know many young people and listened to their pain in both faith and in everyday life. Therefore, I went to Daejeon in Korea for the Asian Youth Day of 2014. In spite of many difficulties, I was able to go to Daejeon under the wondrous arrangement of God. I traced the footsteps of the Korean martyrs and immersed myself in God's greatness. My prayer was no longer a mindless repetition of words, but a conversation with God as my Father and with Jesus as my brother. I wheedled and told them my joys and sorrows. And God always listens to my prayers. Even though my prayers may be really wild, God quietly gives me surprises like all fathers in the world who love and almost spoil their daughters.

As I reflect upon the past, I realise that I have encountered many challenges to my faith. These can be summarised into three points. First of all, I learned to think independently in junior secondary school. The environment around me posed great challenges to my faith. Without the positive and proper guidance of the Church and my parents, it would have been very easy for me to

get lost spiritually, and to mistake faith for superstition, stupidity and ignorance. Secondly, the busy life of senior secondary school took away the time for prayer and Mass. Parents often put the academic achievements of their children before their religious formation. Third, I got in touch with comprehensive knowledge and various schools of thought during my university years. I learned to think more deeply about the questions I raised. Without the proper explanation and guidance of priests and nuns, I would very likely get stuck in a dead-end, unable to convince myself to accept the Christian faith.

Now I praise God and pray to Him every day with a joyful heart. Although He does not always give me a manifest miracle in response, I am always able to come up with my own solutions to the problems I face. If I am really in Him and He is really in me, then I realize that His silence is due to His knowledge that I have enough strength to face the challenge. I would like to dedicate a poem to the Holy Trinity. I will love you throughout my life, and I will never regret it even in face of death!

People talk about reincarnation, the law of cause and effect

But I know

You are my destiny

No matter whether it is a happy or sorrowful ending

I will keep this promise for a thousand years

How can you cling so obstinately to your course?

You know very well how it will begin and end

But you unbendingly hold onto your original goal

Without saying a word

You bear all sorts of cruelty with joy

I heard that you loved all mankind

Was there one instance

You turned your gaze upon me alone?

Whether I am in love or hatred

You have never let me down

Knowing that for half a lifetime

I have always been passionate about you.