

My Life of Faith in the Last Forty Years

Dominic

Translated by Eleanor Foo

The freshness of spring carries with it a muddy scent. Flowers blossom with their juvenile smiles. There lies in me a tinge of emotion and a sense of gratitude that is difficult to express in words. Time flies like a race car or a horse that runs at full speed and, without my being aware of it, I've turned forty. I've been a priest for fifteen years and a Christian for forty years. It is time to take stock and assess. This is an excellent chance. It is good to be asked to do a reflection. As I recall, it seems that my achievements in these years were all about being asked to do something. I feel that I am still very lazy. I should have written something earlier, but nobody asked me to do so. So I allowed myself to be lazy until now.

On 26th July, 1975, a long-awaited boy was born into my family, in which four successive generations lived together. I cannot remember very clearly the days of being admired, like the moon being surrounded by a myriad of stars; but I do remember the zeal of my family towards our faith—it is like a thick layer of ground coloring my growth. In my hometown, I was called by my baptismal name, Dominic (often translated as Duominguo in Chinese). Since the earliest point of time I could remember, I had been surrounded by the deeply religious atmosphere of my family and that of my relatives. I could breathe freely the breath of God, and it was in my family that I cultivated the habit of prayer. Before I learned to read and write, I came to memorise, without knowing their meaning, a large number of prayers. This was because I prayed every day with the adults in my family and listened to their prayers. Although there were many wrong words in the prayers I remembered, they became an indispensable part of my life. Consequently, I became the commentator at Mass in the church in our hometown once I learned how to read and write. The adults in

my family and the enthusiastic elders in the village were all very supportive of me and admired me. This was how I became the beloved child of the parish priest.

The twelfth year of my life was a time of awakening and a turning point. The pastor asked me to live at the church and I became an aspirant—this had been a wish that I had been keeping in my heart for two years. During the winter break and summer holiday, I began learning Latin, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, music and the Bible. At this stage, my journey of vocation began to coincide with my journey of faith. However, when I was thirteen, I began having doubts about my faith. At the age of fifteen, I experienced a crisis in my vocation.

When I entered lower middle school, I saw much chaos and a lot of bad example: students fighting with each other at school, teachers not being reasonable and sensible, the formalism of priests in the church, the open conflicts or hidden struggles among the nuns, the lay Catholics always trying to out-manoeuvre each other, as well as their bad example which corrupted the community. All these harmed my pure heart and was a tremendous blow to it. These things caused me to disbelieve everything that the adults said, and cast doubt on what the priests and nuns preached. Fortunately, my parish priest was so busy that he was often absent. He assigned me to be on duty at the parish. I was even in charge of his room. This gave me plenty of time to read the collection of Christian books in his room during the winter break and summer holidays. In those two years, I read a lot of books about the Church, including the more than 50 volumes of a periodical called *Tianzhujiao Yanjiu Ziliao Huibian* (Collection of Research Materials on the Catholic Church). I made summaries or copied the content while reading, and then I thought about what I read. Gradually I came to change my perspective, as I found the answers to the questions about my faith. My faith gradually turned towards God instead of being concerned with the bad example of other people.

At that time, I began experiencing the first impulses of puberty. I was both afraid and astonished at my vivid fantasies. Since no one was around to explain such things to me, I became increasingly frustrated, and wondered how I could get a satisfactory explanation of what was happening to me. In addition, the chaotic situation at

school only intensified my frustration. In the second year of junior high school, I was in the most undisciplined class at the school. Within just one year, the class teacher was changed three times. Finally the vice-headmaster came to take care of our class. But even his efforts proved futile. Teachers were almost always absent from our classes. Not to mention our academic performance—I got only 67 points in language, although I had put all my effort into my studies. I failed all the other subjects and got only 30 points in English. How I wished to get out of this school as early as possible, and to escape from this class of gangsters. Therefore, I dreamed day and night of entering the seminary after I graduated from junior high school. Meanwhile, I told myself many times to be patient with the current difficulties, for I had just one more year to go before I finally would graduate from junior high school (I had mistakenly thought that the seminary would accept graduates from junior high school). Right at this moment, I faced a crisis in my vocation.

The parish priest told me that the seminary would not accept graduates from junior high school. I remember very well how stupefied I was after hearing this. I was unable to speak for half a day. I kept thinking: “If I don’t get into senior high school, I will never be able to get into the seminary. But at this moment I do not think I can enter senior high school.” Finally I regained my senses. I ran into the church and said to Jesus before the tabernacle, “Lord Jesus, now I pray that you get me into senior high school by any means possible, because I want to go to the seminary.” Then I made my confession and received the Blessed Sacrament. I prayed repeatedly over this matter. After this, I moved to the school, lived there and studied hard. To my surprise, the school had changed drastically. My class teacher was especially remarkable, and I was greatly encouraged. There were other teachers whom I admired greatly too, and who were very helpful to me. I felt that God was listening attentively to my prayers. I was filled with such great motivation and faith that, shortly before the examination, when a teacher asked me what would I do if I did not pass, I answered that I had never thought of the possibility of failing the examination. He said, “But what if you cannot pass?” I felt that there was no “what-

if” in my mind. The teacher was stunned, and I was stunned too, when I saw him looking at me with astonishment in his eyes.

Later, one week before the examination, I got heatstroke and had a high fever. I fell sick, and was unable to read and write for a whole week. Although I was very anxious, I was confident. Fortunately, I was able to walk three miles to the school on the day of the examination, even though I felt dizzy, tired and sleepy that morning. I got my examination pass and walked a further five miles. Once I stepped into the examination hall, it began to rain. I do not know what I wrote. I could not even remember the essay I wrote. The ordeal lasted three days and it rained for three days. Finally, when the examination was over, the sky became sunny, and I had also recovered from my illness. I walked home facing the sunset. I was especially relaxed. After a month’s vacation, I went back to the school to get my report. I had received 541 points on the examination. I stood there saying to myself, “Oh Lord, now I know that you want me.” This was because not only did I manage to get into senior high school, but I got into the tracked class for bright students. This was how I returned safely from the crisis of my vocation. This was an experience of faith that I will never forget in my whole life. It was a milestone of growth in the journey of my vocation. Since then I have never had doubts about my vocation even up to the present day.

In my senior high school years, I was very clear about the direction of my life. I studied in order to get into the seminary; I trained my body in order to get into the seminary; I learned various skills in order to get into the seminary. I felt especially easy and free from anxiety; I never felt weary. Before the advanced level university entrance examination, I thought about postponing my entry into the seminary. This was because my academic performance was very good, and I was expected to bring greater glory to the school by getting into a good university. However, once I stepped into the examination hall, I entered into a state of rumination because, to my surprise, I could not answer most of the questions on the paper. As I stared at the blank paper, I realised that it was wrong for me to think of postponing my entrance into the seminary. At this moment, I was reminded about the promise I made to God. I had prayed to God that He might help me get into

senior high school so that I might enter the seminary, not the university. Therefore, three days after the advanced level examination, I went to the house of the bishop and made an application for my entrance into the seminary. I was thankful to God for reminding me of my relationship with the Lord at that moment, so that I did not fall into a swirl of vanity and of desire for fame.

When somebody asked me on the eve of my entrance into the seminary at 18 years of age, "Why are you entering the seminary?" I answered without much thinking, "This is because I saw the serious formalism in the inner circle of the Church, and I want to go and change her." Indeed, in the first two years of my life at the seminary, my difficulty was the practice of faith in Jesus, which often contrasts with the limitations and weaknesses of priests and nuns in reality. I found it hard to reconcile. I was scrupulous in picking the splinters out of the Church's eyes. I could not tolerate even the tiniest bit of sand in my eyes. I was very eager to see that the inner circle of the Church would be pure and impeccable, but the reality always made me disappointed. I would become outraged. I had arguments with the bishop, the priest in charge of my class and my classmates; in fact, I was the one criticizing them. It seemed that all of them did not understand me, and they were not striving for perfection. I could not think the matter through. Once I wrote eight pages in one sitting about all the frustrations in my heart, and I brought them to my spiritual director. He saw that I wrote so much about this, and so he asked me to see him again the following week as he needed time to read through them slowly. A week later, I went to see him. When he saw me, he asked only one question, "Are you sure that what you wrote is 100% correct?" I replied immediately, "I cannot say that it is 100% correct, but it is at least 99% correct." I was astonished and speechless right after I said this. I asked myself, "Why aren't you 100% sure of the correctness of what you wrote? Why do you doubt the remaining 1%?" All of a sudden I understood my problem. I paused for a moment and then said to my spiritual director, "OK, now I understand. I will go now." Since then, I began changing my perspective gradually. Originally, I thought that my faith was all about protecting the holiness of the Church; but my life and my deeds were all based on my way of

thinking and on my perspective. At that moment, I came to realise that the object of my faith was not God—it was more myself.

In February 1995, I heard the theme song of World Youth Day for the first time, in particular the words: “TELL THE WORLD OF HIS LOVE.” This song had a great impact on me. “For God so loved the world, He gave us His only Son.” (John 3:16) God’s love appeared in my horizon of faith. This was a particularly exhilarating moment for me. For three months, I was immersed in God’s love. I was so stricken by God’s love that, without realizing it, I no longer had the intention to find fault in other people. At the same time, I saw more and more clearly my mission, “For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved.” (John 3:17) I am a Christian; I believe in Jesus; I am a follower of Jesus. So Jesus’s mission should be my mission too. Once I was going in the exact opposite direction, but now I realized that I needed to get back on the right path. I should follow Jesus’s example of saving the world instead of judging the world. In particular I should tell the world of God’s love. Since then, my life in the seminary was infused with a new motivating force. On May 2, 1995, I established the first Bible sharing group in the seminary. I led this group for five years, until I graduated. Between 1996 and 1997, it even grew into nine small groups. The atmosphere in the seminary changed a lot. I discovered within myself a profound transformation. I discovered the driving force behind it—in particular, the force of God’s love energized me to such an extent that I can remain proactive and inexhaustible in all circumstances, up to the present day.

After my priestly ordination in 2000, I felt even greater joy because I can forcefully proclaim God’s love during Mass. I can also provide guidance for lay Catholics to put God’s love into practice in their everyday lives. In particular, I have provided guidance for young people for more than ten years, so that they might live out and pass on God’s love. This has made me feel that my life is enriched and meaningful. This is solely because Jesus is the Way. It is so great and so fortunate to be Jesus’s disciple! I hope that people from all over the world may experience and receive God’s love, and then tell the rest of the world about His love.