

The Wind: where does it come from and where does it go?

***Liang, Jie and Jing
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Introduction: As we seek the Lord, surprises often arise out of darkness, when we think that there is no way out. Even a smile or a few words of consolation can bring about a drastic turn-around in our life. The path of service can be filled with weariness and sweat, but the love of God already enfolds us before we invoke Him with the trustful heart of a child. Below are the testimonies of faith by three young people.

Liang: The Path of Grace

I was the youngest child in an old Catholic family. My parents and three sisters loved me very much. I had always taken my faith for granted. In my opinion, God is a transcendent being who is high above me. He is a God to be feared.

In the summer of 2007, I fell into almost complete hopelessness because of my poor results in the advanced level examination. I was angry with my parents, and even more I hated my fate. At a time when I had no sense of direction, my heart felt like it was suffocating. I knew that I could not rely on my parents any more. Rather, I had to find my own means and strength to carry on with my life. When I began struggling alone, to my astonishment the God who loved me stretched out His helping hand to me. Since my workplace was very close to the church, I began participating in the youth group there. We studied the Bible, prayed, conducted liturgical services and went on pilgrimages together. I felt very deeply the vitality and the sense of belonging among young Christians.

In order to find direction in my life, I resigned from my job in the summer of 2008, and began a self-study course with exams. Communities of young Christians organized gatherings at the school I studied in. Seeing the bright and joyous smiles on those young faces, I developed an ardent desire to be like them. Therefore, I began to serve in these youth groups in whatever way I could. I experienced tremendous growth. I felt even more strongly my profound desire to know the Lord and to experience His boundless love.

In the spring of 2010, I gladly took part in the formation of new recruits for the youth group. During these few months, God healed the hurts that lay deep in my heart, and rebuilt the relationship with my parents and the people around me. He shattered me completely and built me up again. I developed a profound, personal and intimate relationship with the Father, and learned to love Him. Towards the end of the formation period, through prayer and discernment, I discovered a deeper desire to dedicate one year to full-time service of young Christians from all over China. I was thankful to the Lord for fulfilling my wish. I stayed in the youth group for one more year.

I discovered that the year of service was really God's way of loving me more deeply! In the community, I learned how to get along with other people. I got to know spiritual directors who accompanied me in my growth. Most importantly, I met my present wife there. We got married in 2012, and now we have a lovely two-year-old daughter. In the process of serving in the youth group, my deepest impression came from Eucharistic adoration. The priest said to me, "Come and work in my vineyard. The labourer deserves his wages." Although I did not quite understand what these words meant, they left an indelible mark on my heart.

After I left the youth group, I worked in a few other jobs. The birth of my daughter inspired in me a sense of responsibility. I worked very hard, hoping to secure a stable life for my little family. However, my job deprived me of any motivation. I felt so anguished, confused and agitated that sometimes my heart filled with tears while I was drinking beer alone along the side of the road. I knew that, deep inside my heart, I still had a secret desire to serve the Church. However, I did not dare to allow myself to think too

much about this because, from my point of view, it was unrealistic. I asked God, “Where do you want me to go exactly?”

Although life was difficult, I was grateful for the chance to participate in a course on Ignatian spiritual companionship in 2013. This course helped me develop a deeper understanding of myself and to consolidate my experience in prayer and retreats in a systematic way. I was even more grateful to come to know a religious Sister in the process, who recommended that I teach in a novitiate. I was stunned upon hearing this, “Oh God! I have never thought of being a teacher in my whole life. What can I do?” I asked myself this question, and I asked God also.

In October 2014, I was glad to meet my spiritual director from the time when I served in the youth group. He suggested that I attend a conference about Ignatian spirituality in Hong Kong. Later, he sent me an invitation again, “Liang, are you willing to serve the young people with us?” I was much flattered again, “Oh God, who am I, that I can get such an invitation from you?” With a heart filled with gratitude and trust in the Lord, in January 2015, I resigned from my job at the school, and began my work with young Christians.

As I look back on my journey, God’s grace entered my life through my frustrations. Gradually I came to understand that God did not allow me to walk on a path set forth by human hands because He had a special way for me—and this is the path of grace. The crushing loneliness I felt while working in my previous jobs helped me to understand my profound desire—to be the heavenly Father’s younger son and work for the kingdom of God. God did not want me to be a slave, but to be His son. He invited me to share in the inheritance of His kingdom with Jesus Christ, my elder brother. This reminded me of the words that I did not quite understand a few years ago, “Go work in my vineyard. The labourer deserves his wages.” It was an invitation from God. I cannot help but exclaim, “How great are your works, O Lord! Your thoughts are very deep!” (Ps. 92:5)¹

¹ Translator’s note: All biblical quotations in this collection of articles are taken from the Revised Standard Version—Second Catholic Edition.

Jie: In the Lord, A Mutual Smile Condenses into Love

Since the Summer of 2006, I have been engaged in youth service in the Church. I shout with joy that comes from deep within my heart every time I see the glory of God shining on the face of my young companions!

I am 29 years old, but up to now I am still called a “big kid” by those who have just come to know me. Perhaps this is because I often play with young people, and this makes me less serious and shrewd in my way of getting along with people and dealing with daily matters! I have always seen this as one of my strengths. After getting to know the young people, often their first impression of me was my smile at the first time of our meeting!

This was exactly the comment I heard from Xiao Zhi.

As I remember it, Xiao Zhi was a boy who was not fond of the limelight. Every time he came to an activity, he was very “low-key”. Our interactions were limited to a nodding of heads, smiling and a little bit of chatting. After his graduation, he was assigned to work in the South. One day I got a sudden message from him on QQ, saying that he missed very much the days when he came to the church for Mass and other activities. He said that his workplace was very far away from the church, and his work was so hectic that all his time for rest was taken up with sleep. In order to quench his thirst for the faith, all he could do was to have distant chats online with his friends from Church. Through this, my interaction with him became more and more frequent. Sometimes I listened to his complaints about work and his knowledge of the faith through these online chats. I would also tell him what had been going on in the youth group.

In the winter of 2014, I got a phone call from Xiao Zhi, saying that he would pass by Lanzhou on his way home and that he wished to see me for a chat. I gladly accepted his invitation, and arranged to meet him at a restaurant which served roast meat. It had been five years since we last met. His face had not changed much, but his belly had obviously grown larger as he often had to feast with his boss. I could not help but smile.

When he saw me, his first sentence was: “Oh brother, you have not changed at all. You are still that cheerful big kid!” And then he said, “My deepest impression of you is your smile!”

We sat down and ordered a few servings of roast meat. As we talked, I allowed my friend from such a long distance away to taste the food of his homeland. He had not even finished the first few mouthfuls when he started the conversation. He told me that his days in Hainan were not very good. First he had a romantic relationship which later broke up. Then his family suffered some accidents, which caused him to have doubts about his faith. He asked me why he did not feel that God loved him, if God is really love itself. Instead, it seemed that God put many difficulties in his path which constantly aggravated him. In the most unbearable moments, he even hated everything around him! He said, “At that time, my curses and anger did not bring any change to my life. Instead, they made me even more desperate. He went on to say that when he quieted down, his mind was filled with joyous memories of attending Mass and gathering with his peers at school. It was also at these times that I naturally thought about you—I wanted desperately to find a way out, even if it were only to find a person who would listen to my complaints and confusion! This was why our occasional online chats helped to dissolve the homesickness for my hometown and the discontent towards my faith!”

I was astonished by what he said! I answered, “If you had not told me what happened, I would have thought that you were simply lonely over there, and that you simply wanted to talk to people from your hometown!”

“Yes, I couldn’t help but feel lonely when I began to work in a completely new place,” he said. “Perhaps I was too excited earlier. Then I felt exhausted, as if I was no longer being myself. I began paying more attention to my job, and I had some achievements in that too. Gradually I came to have some free time for myself, and I went back to Church again. At a prayer retreat, I could not stop crying after hearing the Gospel. I was stunned by my state at that time! Luckily the Catholics around me came and consoled me, and this eased my nervousness!”

After listening to his sharing, I was deeply touched and felt tremendous joy for him. The experience of tears was such a great

consolation for him amidst the pain he was going through. After going through so many hardships and muddled times, love finally comes to fill our hearts. I saw God's wondrous hands in Xiao Zhi's sharing of his experiences. Unbeknownst to me, God and I were listening to Xiao Zhi. I had thought it was only a casual chat with a young person who lived far away from his home. It turned out a simple, courteous smile made me his companion as he went through the dark valleys in his journey. This helped me see my role in other people's lives. It was just an unimportant spark, yet it was a spark that God had planned for him beforehand! I could not help but rejoice. Apparently God does not reject me. Instead, He uses a simple person like me as His vessel!

If I am asked: What is the best thing in the world?

I would answer: The best thing in the world, of course, is God's providence!

This is because a smile at the first encounter can be a foreshadowing of God's love.

Isn't this a wonderful thing?

Jing: Being a Big Brother with Love

Because there were many children at a summer catechism course for young people, more male helpers were needed. So I stayed and helped out with the whole program.

Every day we woke up and prayed at around 5am. We woke the children up, maintained their daily routine and led some activities between classes. In the evening we planned and supervised the boys' extra-curricular activities, then it was time for shower and sleep. The children were very energetic, often playing around and were unwilling to go to bed quietly. So I was busy until 11pm every night. I felt extremely tired and fell asleep immediately after a simple prayer.

There were several boys with whom I played and "fought". Six or seven of them would hit me all at once, but every time I was successful in making them "surrender." Even the naughtiest one listened to me and called me "big brother". I liked them very much, and I tried to love them in the best way possible.

One day at Mass, the priest said in his homily, “Often we are called ‘big brother, big brother’. But what responsibility does a big brother have? What does a big brother have to give? The answer is love.” At that moment, I felt it was a reminder. God spoke to me through the words of that priest. I felt God’s love and consolation in my heart. I was filled with profound peace, and I could not stop my tears from pouring out. The hard work and exhaustion that I felt previously were at once cleared up. At that time, I was sitting near some of the “naughty” boys. They did not know what to do when they saw me crying. I guessed they were blaming themselves for the acts of mischief that they often carried out intentionally. So they all came and showed concern. They looked at me with wide-open eyes, and asked, “What’s wrong?” One of the older ones—he was the only catechumen in the group—turned to me and said in a sad voice, “Don’t cry, teacher, now I believe that God really exists.”

I was touched by his child-like manner of consolation, but I believe that he spoke from the heart. At this moment, I was completely stricken by God’s love. Tears streamed down my face like a river breaking through its banks. Although my eyes were blurred at that moment, my mind was exceptionally clear. My heart was filled with joy and peace. I knelt down, held his head close to my chest and said to him, “Don’t worry. I was just deeply touched by what God the Father was saying to me.” He was thus comforted, and my heart was filled with love and tenderness. Tears continued to stream down my face until the end of Mass.

Conclusion: This is the age of the Holy Spirit! Through listening to the sharing of three co-workers, we cannot help but marvel at “where the wind comes from and where it goes”. Liang went from hopelessness to hope. His journey seemed typical. But each step was under the amazing guidance of the Holy Spirit. The same Holy Spirit was present in Jie’s smile. It became the perfect vehicle for his friend to encounter the Lord. The same inexplicable Spirit dissolved Jing’s spiritual poverty and exhaustion, and helped him understand the blessings of being a “big brother”!

These three are only representatives of thousands of young Christians on the Mainland. God sent out many invitations to humble young people like these to take part in His work of

salvation, so that the Catholic Church on the Mainland might be infused with a new energy. We would like to invite all readers to pray especially for the conversion of China to the Lord. May God's love, through the salvation won by Jesus Christ on the Cross, blow freely like the wind of the Holy Spirit throughout China. May many more young people be inspired to sow the seeds, and to plant and harvest them in this land that belongs to the Lord. Amen!