

A CONVERSION

Christine J. Gill

What makes a person become a Catholic? The answers are as varied as the persons who convert. In this narrative of her conversion Christine Gill discounts any sort of Damascus experience, although her trip to Guadalupe in Mexico did play a part. Her interest in God grew under the influence of good friends—friends who lived their faith in a simple, straightforward way and were not reluctant to try and influence her for the good.

'A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter; he that has found one has found a treasure. There is nothing so precious as a faithful friend, and no scales can measure his excellence. A faithful friend is an elixir of life; and those who fear the Lord will find him. Whoever fears the Lord directs his friendship aright, for as he is, so is his neighbour also' (Sir 6:14-17).

When I started College in Ealing, West London, in 1978, at the age of nineteen, the last thing I thought I would become was a Roman Catholic. Religion was simply not important. I had been baptized and confirmed in the Anglican Church but I had not been to church for years.

So why did I suddenly start going to church when I started College? Ealing, although a respectable suburb of London, was very different from the village of Castle Donington which I had left behind. I missed that family atmosphere one finds in a small village community. I think I was trying to re-create that. I have heard converts describing their conversions as 'coming home' and maybe I was at the beginning of my journey.

Trangmar House, a Hall of Residence of Ealing College, where I lived during my first year, was, you might say, quite 'religious'. A good number of students went to church—Anglicans to St Mary's, Catholics to Ealing Abbey or the Polish church, others elsewhere, leaving me in bed!

in 1980 and saw her image on Juan Diego's cloak. My Catholic friend insisted on looking at it twice—the cloak is viewed by passing by on a moving walkway. I couldn't understand why at the time because I had never thought about who Mary is or had any idea of asking her to intercede for me before God. I also had the Medjugorje experience owing to the enormous interest in the media in these reported apparitions in 1980. The local parish was taking a group on pilgrimage and I joined them, mainly because I enjoyed travelling abroad. I was unmoved by the 'hype' but certainly our Lady smiled on my cynical efforts—after all, I did go through the motions of prayer and penance which are so much part of this pilgrimage!

In 1984 I set off again, in a minibus this time, with some friends (all Catholic except for two of us) from London to Avignon in the South of France for a long week-end. One of our stopping places was Ars, as some of the group had an intense desire to see the body of the Curé of Ars and the church where he heard so many thousands of confessions. Funnily enough, I disliked that experience, whilst it was the 'final straw' for the other non-Catholic of the group in effecting for her the grace of conversion. God certainly has a sense of humour!

People often ask me how I became a Catholic. I always want to say that one day something strange and unusual happened—it didn't! God deals with every soul individually and differently. Conversions are made in heaven.

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