

Brian J. Soliven

Whenever I look back in retrospect at my life, I am always humbled by the Lord for bestowing this great gift of studying for His holy priesthood. Born in 1980, in Honolulu, Hawaii to a Catholic mother and a protestant father, I had no intention of becoming a priest. Even when my father converted to the Faith by the time I was baby, religion was always something on the periphery for me, something to be tolerated one day a week and then forgotten. Being Catholic was a mere cultural label, intertwined with my Filipino heritage that meant nothing more than the brand of my jeans.

In all this, Jesus was still able to break through my holy indifference by sending His mother. The rosary became a huge part of my family's life by the time I was in middle school at Joseph Kerr in Elk Grove, CA. My parents prayed it unceasingly, especially my dear mother, whom could be found mouthing this ancient devotion seven times a day! In fact, when I was in high school at Laguna Creek, I have vivid memories of coming home in the early morning hours after a night out of the town, of my mother kneeling in front of our makeshift altar, engulfed in "Hail Mary's."

By witnessing my parents' fidelity, my own relationship with the Blessed Mother started to grow. I even took up praying the Rosary every night before I went to sleep. And like all good mother's, the Virgin Mary pointed me the way to her Son. Slowly, my appreciation for my childhood Faith began to grow but I think the Lord thought it was a little too slow for His taste. In my fresh year of college at Cosumnes River in south Sacramento, the the Lord smacked me over the head with the power of Grace. I had life-altering conversion experience on March 13th, 1999, not unlike St. Paul's pivotal encounter on the road to Emmaus. From that point on, I felt my Catholic Faith could no longer be lived on the fringes. I had to "set out into the deep" and embrace the personal invitation to follow our Lord—regardless of where that would lead. After all, if Jesus was the Creator of the Universe, he knew why I was called into existence.

By 2001, I transferred to the University of California, Davis. It was here I got involved with *Youth For Christ*, a Catholic student group on campus. It was here I began to hear the Lord calling me out even deeper into my faith. The idea of the priesthood suddenly pierced my thoughts and my heart. I said to myself, "Surely, the Lord couldn't be calling me. I'm not holy enough!" Yet, the calling persisted. Even when I dated and made other plans after graduations, the call remained, like a boulder in the middle of the freeway. It would not go away.

After graduating in 2003 with my BA in Psychology, I contacted the vocation director of the Diocese of Sacramento and told him the details of my story. Hoping he would tell me I was "crazy" and ask me to leave the building forever, I was accepted as a seminarian. Now five years into my priestly formation, I find myself at the Pontifical North American College in Rome (The American seminary) just down the street from the Vicar of Christ himself, Pope Benedict XVI. I am humbled every time I peer out of my window with the mighty dome of St. Peter's Basilica in the foreground and wonder how an ordinary kid from the streets of Elk Grove could end up with such an undeserved opportunity. In a word—*Grace*.