



My story is rather different than most other seminarians in that I entered the seminary when I was twelve. To the eyes of some people, it may seem like I am throwing away my life, but since the moment we were conceived, God had a plan for each one of us: I was just blessed to be able to respond to His invitation at an early age, and responding to the Lord can only mean happiness and joy.

Well, it all began with family. I was brought up in a Catholic family: my father was a cradle Catholic, and my mother converted to Catholicism before marrying my father. We did not live out the Christian life in any spectacular way: our practice of the faith was merely Sunday Mass, and less than five minutes of prayer every night. This may not seem like much, but this made all the difference because the little we did do was always regular and done together as a family. It gave me a habit of prayer and instilled in me reverence for God.

The turning point in my relationship with God was when my parents and I went to Việt-Nam to visit family, and were invited by some relatives to make a pilgrimage to Notre Dame de Tà-Pao. This Marian shrine had a concrete statue erected on a hill. Since it was a feast day, there were thousands at the shrine, so much so that we were packed in like sardines. There we had Mass and Rosary. However, during the rosary, a miracle occurred: the concrete statue began to make motions of inhaling and exhaling, was glowing, and its demeanour turned into a smile. Everyone present saw this miracle, and loud exclamations and cries were uttered. I myself simply stood and observed this spectacle.

This miracle convicted me of the importance of the Christian Faith, and I returned home with a deep thirst to learn more. I opened up all my old Christ Our Life catechism books, I attempted to read through the Bible (after reading parts of Leviticus, my parents had to reprove me for refusing to eat pork), and I began to attend weekday Masses. Serving at Mass put me in contact with Chiến, who still helps out in the sacristy. He gave me several good books – two books on the lives of the saints, and one book on Eucharistic miracles. These gave a deep desire for sanctity, and a great love and devotion to the Blessed Sacrament.

What is more, serving at Mass put me in closer contact with the parish priest at the time, Father Richard Au,

who always had a large heart for youth, and especially for us altar servers. He invited me to attend the next Vocation Live-In, which is an open-house for the Seminary. My first experience of the seminary was fantastic. Up till then, I never felt so much peace and joy, and I knew that this was the place that God wanted me to be.

Because I am an only child, it was very hard for my parents to allow me to leave for seminary, but eventually they gave in. The high school seminary is different than other Catholic schools because its purpose is to form boys into Catholic gentlemen with an aim for the priesthood. What stands out to me the most is the monastic influence and accompaniment, being steeped constantly in the presence and life of men who have dedicated their lives to God. Without the high school seminary, I can honestly say that I would not have had enough maturity to freely accept the possibility of a priestly vocation.

Over the years, I have come to see that when we follow God's will, God does not just bless us, but everyone around us, especially our family: I am overjoyed to see my parents grow into deeper Faith, Love, and conviction as I myself grow in these.

I am now about a year away from, God-willing, Deaconate ordination and Priestly ordination soon after.

Becoming a priest or not is actually a secondary – albeit important – consideration. My main cause is to follow where I think the Lord is calling me day by day, moment by moment, and the God Who calls and loves me will not fail to bring me where He wants me to be.

Not all of us will be convicted by a moving statue, but I always say that the true miracle I experienced was not that of the statue, but that of the heart. The true miracle is when a soul turns to its heavenly Father. Not all of us will see miracles, but God has a specific plan for each one of us, a plan for happiness, joy, and peace.