

Personal testimonies: Discovering God's love in my life

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I belong to a Christian family, and it is at home that I began to discover God's love for us. I remember, when I was a child, how my mother had great faith and how she put it into practice. She was a catechist, and she was always helping other people, children and those most in need. She and my father made sure that I and my brothers lacked nothing, and they also took care that we should be aware that other people needed our help.

I shall tell you about the first time that I felt God's love. It was my mother who was my connection with God. We were at Mass. I was five or six years old, and the rest of the family went to receive Holy Communion. I wanted to go too, partly through curiosity, but also because I wanted to receive the Body of Christ. When my mother returned, I told her that I wanted to receive Holy Communion. Of course, she could not allow me because I had not yet received my first Holy Communion, but she did not want to disappoint me. She very simply said to me: "come close to my heart. I have just received the Body of Christ, so God is inside me. Jesus is here and he is listening to you. Speak to him, and he will hear you just as if you had received Holy Communion." This was an unforgettable experience for me. I am now 25, and I regard that as one of the occasions that most marked my faith. At that time it was a child's faith in the God of miracles, a kind of faith that we all have as children, but that was the first time that I really felt the love of God, and it was shown to me through my mother.

When I was eight years old, my mother died. Then I began to follow the example of my father and brothers. They were my reference points from then on.

When I was fifteen, I joined two of my brothers in the work they were doing in the town soup kitchen. A group of friends that worked with us went on to prepare for Confirmation. I was very impressed with that and wanted to do something like that, but I did not do it then. I was waiting to hear God's call.

God sometimes uses our interests to reach out to us. At that time I was learning to play the guitar, and one day I was invited to play at Mass. From then on I went to church every Sunday to play the guitar. At first I was not very aware of what I was doing, but I least I was committed to going and playing the guitar.

It was there that I met a Vincentian Sister, and some months later I joined a group of *Juventud Mariana Vicentina*. We met every week for Christian instruction, prayer and discussion of topics of interest. This group was also very involved in social work. Some of them visited the sick, some visited the elderly, some worked in soup kitchens and others visited prisons. I went to visit prisoners as this was the commitment with the group that I took with God. It was a beautiful experience. The first day we went, I brought along my guitar. There were five

prisoners. We began to sing popular songs. The prisoners applauded as if they were really impressed. It was a great joy for them, and also for me because I felt that they really appreciated what we were doing. In the following weeks more prisoners came. There were up to thirty prisoners and they all sang along, no matter what the song was. Then they clapped with great enthusiasm. It is a nice feeling to put your gifts at the service of people and to show them the way to Christ.

I would like to share with you a verse from Saint Matthew's gospel, chapter 25 verse 40: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me". That is why I try to feel and believe in this God, a God who is in these other people whom we must love and serve.

As I said, it is through my family and our love for each other that I first discovered God's love. That love made me observe them and want to be like them. It showed me how they felt and experienced God's love. Then I had to find my own path. It was never a lonely path, but one that I followed in a youth group, a community, a part of society, searching together to find the way to feel God's love and presence. Once I found this love, I felt it was moving me to action. As happens to us all, when we love and feel loved, we commit ourselves to that person simply because of love.

I do not have many experiences of my own, but I have the example of my parents, that to be Christian is also to be a good parent, to educate our children well, to be honest in our work, to put our efforts at the service of others and not keep everything to ourselves.

To conclude, I dare to say that love leads to commitment. Why do I say that? In Uruguay there are more divorces than marriages. In contrast, although my mother died sixteen years ago, my father still loves her the same. He has kept his commitment with her because he loves her. Thank you.