

Fr. Joe Chapter 4 ~ Convert

In his own words...

Scattered throughout the missionary were little towns and villages surrounded by farms. There was no industry or shopping malls, nor housing projects; hence there was no growth. Everything remained the same. People were un-churched. Those who did go to church belonged to a Protestant denomination and some were prejudiced against Catholics. About one percent of the population was Catholic. Throughout the years this did not change.

We were averaging between 100 and 125 people at Mass on Sunday at each of the three mission churches. When one of our families would move out of the area, eventually a new family would move in. Once in a while, a fallen-away Catholic would return to Church. Converts were few and far in between. But there were some who converted. I would give instructions individually, once a week for six months. Because of the distance and lack of facilities, I often would go to their homes. A few came to the mission church and I attempted to teach them in the sacristy or even in the furnace room. Sometimes all went smooth and was very rewarding.

There was a doctor in one of the villages who had to retire because of illness and was not bed-ridden at home. I had heard about him from some of my parishioners. I stopped by to pay a visit, and in the end he was willing to take instructions in the Catholic faith. I would go every week for six months giving him instructions at his bedside while his wife would sit in the corner of the room knitting. After I baptized him into sacramental life, he died. Immediately, his wife came to me and said that she would like to become Catholic. And she turned out to be a devout and faithful member of the Church.

A lady came to the rectory requesting to receive instructions. I had her come back each week and finally she did accept baptism. Shortly afterwards her husband, who was in the United State Air Force, was sent to Japan and she went with him. I will always remember her because she sent me a beautiful work of art, a Japanese Madonna with child all made out of real air and silk. She had made it in an art class in Japan, which she was attending.

However, all did not go so smoothly. A young man from a prominent family was dating one of our Catholic girls. He was willing to take instructions. After we finished, he said all was fine, but he did not understand our use of the Latin language. I spent three extra hours trying to explain. Finally, he accepted it and entered the Church. Several months later Vatican II Council changed from the Latin to the vernacular and he never let me hear the end of it.

I gave instructions to an elderly couple one time and they too came into the Church. I thought that since they were old and didn't have much, I would not send them envelopes. Then they quit coming to Mass. I met them one day and asked them, "What's wrong?" They told me that I had kicked them out. In their Protestant church, when one did not get envelopes, it meant that you are no longer a member. You can be sure that I sent them envelopes.

I was taking care of a sick man and his wife was willing to take instructions. When we finished, she just didn't accept Purgatory. Three times I came back and tried to explain it to her, but she just did not understand. She did not commit to the Church. But after I left the area, my successor visited her once. He explained Purgatory, and she immediately converted to the Catholic faith. It is the Holy Spirit who grasps the gift of faith. We are only instrumental in the instructions that could lead to it.

When we cherish our faith, we have a desire to share it and live it with others. We like for others to convert to our Church. This is especially true with regard to spouses and members of our family and close fiends. We not only desire it, but we try to influence them and urge them to convert We must remember that they

may be living according to their convictions and may be closer to God than we are. We should not upset or disturb them.

Faith is a gift of God. We do not make converts. We can help plan to see the conversion through prayer, good example, inviting them to join us on certain occasions. If someone responds to converting to his or her faith and while returning to the practice of the faith, it is truly through the grace of God. We just continue to cultivate the soil and wait patiently for God to bring about the harvest.