

# MY FAITH JOURNEY

## RAMIREZ, MIGUEL, E.

Beginning at age five, my mother would take me to my grandmother's group every Sunday. Such gatherings were filled with warmth and spirituality as we would read the Bible, sing biblical songs, and share reflections on the passages read. As a child, I found comfort in these gatherings, even though I did not have a full grasp of what faith was all about. But everything changed when my mother gave birth to my younger brother and sister; with the new responsibilities of having two little ones in the house, we could not continue the Sunday sessions anymore.

On turning 11, we, as a family, started a new tradition wherein every Friday my cousins and grandparents gathered for Bible study at my Lola's house. These gatherings are similar to our Sunday sessions, so it brings back memories and encourages us in the family spirit. We will read from the Bible, praise our God through songs, and offer prayers in turns. The pandemic changed the frequency of our meetings, though. Due to the restrictions on physical gatherings, we transitioned to an online setting. We continued our tradition virtually, proving that our devotion to God and to one another was unwavering despite the challenges brought by the pandemic.

In 2022, however, upon Lolo's passing, our weekly Bible study sessions were halted. His loss created a vacuum in the family, and our grief-encumbered hearts could not bring us together in that manner any more. Our previously lively and faith-filled meetings took on an aura of incompleteness without him. Gradually, this cherished tradition dwindled, and faith slipped farther away from my life. I still said an occasional prayer, but I was not as deeply embedded in my faith as I used to be. It was like part of my spiritual growth came to a standstill.

By the end of 2023, something most unexpected happened. On some random Sunday, my mom suggested I join her for Sunday Mass; this came as a shocker to me since our family was never accustomed to going to Mass together during my growing years. Still hesitant, I agreed to go with her. Little did I know this very simple decision would renew my faith. Sitting in church, I could almost feel the warmth of peace and belonging during the homily and the prayers of the congregation. God seemed to be reminding me that, even in my doubts and struggles with faith, He was always right beside me.

Eventually, it became a custom for the family to attend Sunday Mass. It was now more than a requirement; it became a time when we came back to each other as well as to God. Any instance we failed to make it to Sunday Mass, we would make sure that we were there on Saturday instead. Whatever it was, we always had a priority in thanksgiving to God, asking for His guidance and uplifting our faith as a family.

In looking back across my own faith journey, I see that there were different phases God and I went through times of deep devotion, times of distance, and times of rediscovery. Each of these experiences shaped me into who I am today, teaching me that faith is not about being steadfast on the way but about finding one's path back to God, however many times one may stray. Throughout my life changes, one thing that did not change was the presence of God. Even in those moments when I felt far away from Him, He was always there—watching, waiting for me to return.

As I continue moving along this journey, the lessons I've learned are what I hold on to. I have learned that faith isn't just attending rituals and following traditions; it is the improving and building a personal relationship with God by means of prayer, trust, and love. My faith journey is still not complete, but I look with much appreciation to the way I have walked and the ways God continues to guide me. With each Sunday Mass, each prayer, and each reflection, my walking continues with a renewed spirit, embracing my faith with an open heart and with a much deeper sense of gratitude.