

HOW DOES THE LORD REACH OUT TO US?



Sometimes the Lord takes us out of our customary routine so that he can enter our world and our life. This is what happened to me before I even became a Christian. A year in France changed my whole life.

In Korea, I had received a degree in French literature because I always wanted to do translation work. In view of this, one day I gave up my job and went to France so as to perfect my skills in that language and specialize in translations. Little did I know what was in store for me....

About a week after I arrived in Angers, the seat of the *Université Catholique de l'Ouest*, the Lord began to change my route in life. My landlord asked me to move out by the end of the month because his daughter was unexpectedly returning home. The university semester had already begun so it was very hard to find another room to rent in the area. I was disillusioned and desperate. But finally, a young Korean couple who were students at the same university gave me some marvelous news: another Korean student was getting ready to return home for family reasons and so the room she had been renting was available.

I had miraculously escaped the danger of finding myself homeless in the heart of winter and I wound up in the hands of God without even realizing it. The Korean student had been renting a room from an elderly priest, the pastor of a small church. The room was next door to the rectory, with a garden view. Each morning, the church bells woke me, as if an angel were whispering in my ear. On Fridays, I would join a small group that met at the church for Bible meditation. The first Mass I ever attended was on Ash Wednes-

day, celebrated at the university to open the new semester. Every day, the words the priest had spoken when he marked my forehead with ashes echoed in my mind: "You are dust and to dust you shall return." Little by little I began to attend Sunday Mass.

My relationship with my "landlord," Fr. Jean Gautron, was similar to that between a granddaughter and her grandfather. Fr. Jean would knock on my door almost every day—a habit I wasn't too fond of. But with the passing of time I became more and more aware of the joy, energy and zeal that animated this elderly priest. I was especially struck by his practice of poverty. I asked myself why he was so serene and resolved to discover the answer, but I didn't have the courage to ask him about it....

That semester, I made a number of trips to different European countries, where I visited many beautiful and ancient churches. Three days before my return to Korea, I was in one of the those churches when the Lord knocked on the door of my heart. It was the Church of Sainte Marie-Madeleine in Paris and as I knelt before the sculpture entitled *The Glory of St. Mary Magdalene*, I suddenly felt profoundly consoled and protected. I was amazed by this and realized that the hour had come to place myself in the hands of God.

The following day, while attending Mass in Notre Dame Cathedral, I decided to sign up for catechism lessons. A year later I was baptized, taking the name Marie-Madeleine. I was the first person in my family to become a Christian.

Once the Holy Spirit entered my life, he continued to guide me. For the next three years, from the day of my baptism until I entered the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Paul, I was accompanied by many "angels" sent by God. During my period of initial formation in the Institute, I looked back periodically over my journey, and each time I rediscovered how important these "angels" had been in helping me understand the Divine Master's plan for my life.

I want to say a heartfelt *thank you* to the many people who served as God's cooperators in this work, first and foremost Fr. Jean Gautron, who supported and accompanied my vocational journey with his prayers and letters from the very start.

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