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Home Province: Autonomous Region of Bougainville Country: Papua New Guinea

The Power of the Voice that Touches My heart.

I was born on 17 March 1977 at Pinepel Island, Bougainville Autonomous Region. My parents, Sylvester Nepipia and Cecilia Agatha, were both baptised to Catholicism. Both lived a simple village life. My father spent most of his life on the land making gardens for food crops, as that was the only means to support our family. But he was also a successful fisherman. Like my father, my mother also went to the garden and she loved planting vegetables and collecting dry wood for cooking. But her main task was household duties. There are eleven of us in the family comprising of six boys and five girls. I am the third born. My parents always took me to Church, not only on Sundays, but also during daily evening and morning prayers. I can still remember my parents showing me the holy pictures and the crucifix in front of our village church for the first time. They also taught me the sign of the cross. Later when I was able to understand things as a child, I began to see that the church was the house of God, as my mother used to tell me when I was a little boy. There was already some sense of respectful feelings when I saw the sacred images and the Crucifix in the Church which was an initial stage in my mother's guiding me in believing in Jesus.

When I was seven years old in 1987 my parents put me to Sacred Heart Community School. In my first grade I began to understand the relationship I had with Jesus, and I was able to say the Catholic basic prayers myself. The subject that interested me most in my first grade was Religious Instruction. I liked it because I enjoyed listening to our teachers telling us the stories in the Bible, especially those of the Old Testament. In my class I was the first to learn how to read well the spiritual sentence about Jesus. At the end of my first grade school year, I was awarded the first prize award for doing well in our Religious Instructions Class. It was a Holy card about the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles.

In 1990 when I was in grade four, I received first Holy Communion. That was an unforgettable experience for me because I personally experienced reception of the sacrament myself with self awareness which is different from my baptism which was only experienced by my parents and the witnesses of sponsors. I was so excited and full of longing to receive Jesus for the first time in the Eucharist. When the time came, we received Jesus in both species. My young faith started to grow and from that time I always had my personal prayers. Then a year later I began to have an inner desire of wanting to be close to Jesus always and everywhere. I always loved the prayers at Mass. When a priest came for school Mass I usually served him as an altar boy, and I admired him as a priest at the altar. From time to time as a boy I had the burning within me like a soft whispering voice. It's like someone speaking to me in the heart and I didn't take much notice of it. When I reflect back I certainly can say that it was the divine call. It was the call to follow Jesus. This was the power of the voice that touched my heart.

When I completed my sixth year in the Community School I continued to grade seven in Holy Cross High School and finished my grade ten in 1997. Unfortunately because of my marks for Science I did not get accepted to continue to other colleges. Therefore I stayed for another three years at home with my family doing distant learning to upgrade my marks. It was very challenging for me to do my studies in a very far off distant village on an Island that was without any government transport services to reach our Provincial town. Therefore, it took me four years to upgrade my marks relevant to grades eleven and twelve. When I finished my distant learning, I had to make up my mind to which college or university I preferred to apply and continue my further studies. That time I did not think much about going to the seminary when I saw the situation in my family. Therefore I thought of going first to a technical college and taking up a course that could help me find a job and support my family by working for several years before I would go to the seminary. Therefore, I applied to Lae Technical College (now Lae National Poly Tech), but my plans did not work out well. In 2004, I was studying a two year diploma course in Civil Engineering and when I came to the final stage I failed one course and did not have any more funds to retake only that single course.

I stayed four years in Lae and was helping out in the Cathedral teaching Sunday school. As I was teaching Sunday school during these four years my desire to become a priest came

back. I then spoke to the parish priest of St. Mary's Cathedral, Lae Diocese, and he recommended me. So the following day the Vocation Director and I had a talk. He gave me a week to pray about it if I truly wanted to become a priest. When the one week of prayer and reflection had passed I went back to him and told him that my desire remained. The vocation director of Lae Diocese accepted me, and so the Bishop of Lae Diocese, Bishop Christian Blouin, CMM, sponsored me. The following year I entered St. Fidelis Minor Seminary in Madang for two years study. That was from 2009 - 2010. In 2011 - 2014 I did my Religious Studies at Good Shepherd Seminary in Banz, Jiwaka Province. In 2014 I was doing two things, studying in the seminary and doing pastoral experience in the parish. Last year (2015), my parish priest, Fr. Arnold CMM, asked me to take charge of his kids' literacy programs and other pastoral works in the parish. This year I am currently doing my first year in Theology in the Catholic Theological Institute, Port Moresby of Papua New Guinea.