

VOCATION STORY OF MANUEL TOPITE COTE

Until today I am still trying to discover and understand the mystery of God writing straight on crooked lines. This mystery is a real manifestation of God's intervention upon humanity and an ongoing procedure in the lives of many people today, but also it depends on one's self to identify this wonderful mystery.

By the way, regarding my vocation story, I never dreamt of becoming a priest because I never had visions or intentions to be somebody at all, and neither did I understand education regarding the courses I would take up in order to secure a profession in life. This confusion happened in my childhood period. All I knew was to do well in my studies because other people always said that to me without a precise explanation of colleges and universities. Until my secondary level of education, I was just following the influence of my friends as well as the situations that I had been encountering. This was the lengthy period of transition in my life and as far as I could recall, I was undergoing the crisis of discerning my future; today I'd rather say, the crisis in vocation discernment.

However, after I had completed my secondary level of education, I could not make it to the tertiary level. So I went home to be with my parents and everyone in the community. At first, I did enjoy the life in the village, and going back to find means and ways to get back to the education system became a burden to me. I rejected many who wanted to assist me in finding my way back to school because for me, life is too long, and I was too young to make crucial decisions of my own. For me, I did reach the end of my life. As it was, that was my life and there was nothing more I could do. Living unemployed was never a problem at all. I really enjoyed village life.

But then, problems started sprouting in my life. Problems of my own as well as those of my friends. Some of them were exactly for my friends, but at some instance I became the scape goat for their safety. With all these, I felt that I could not bear the weight any longer and finally, I started regretting all the past opportunities that I was given to go back to school, but it was too late. When that happened, I began to hate myself, my friends, and other people in the community. However, everyone goes through pain and suffering as consequence of their own decisions but still they continue to live because every problem is temporary and has its own solution.

Anyway, in 2017, back in my parish, there was only the parish priest, but no curator or an assistance priest. The parish priest was alone in his pastorals presiding masses from place to place and there was a great need of an assistant. Fortunately, the bishop of the archdiocese of Rabaul, archbishop Francisco Panfilo (SDB), appointed one of the newly ordained priests to assist in the parish.

The news of the newly ordained priest reached the parish and everyone was happy, especially those in the out-skirts of the parish because finally there would be real masses with a priest on Sundays. During the arrival of the priest, everyone was expecting someone elderly and similar to our parish priest, but unfortunately he was a very young priest and that surprised everyone in the parish. I never had a chance to meet him personally because during that time, I was caught up with all my friends, and my interest, as well as my right to make my own decisions, was deprived by my peer members.

One day, we met by coincidence and I was surprised to see him. We exchanged greetings, and then as polite as he was, he introduced himself; Fr. Neville Wavi was his name. From there, I know him by name because we speak the same language. His approach was so gentle that after I left, I could feel my heart pounding with dissatisfaction and I was kind of wanting to know more about him. So as a result, I didn't realise I was now going to the priest house so often. Sometimes I went for the morning masses and after that, I must visit the priest, trying to build a close relationship with him.

Finally, we became close friends and as the first person to know him, he always asked me to usher as a service to any visitors seeking him and I became his loyal friend. However, later on, I began to develop good moral judgement by just being with the priest, and it resulted in me attending regular daily masses.

The first significant moment that ever happened to me was the detachment from the

people I lived with who had the same motive of being retarded. The community was kind of challenging at first because from no where, you abandon your real life full of all the earthly pleasures, and trying to be fervent and austere in prayer was a very challenging for me.

On the contrary, I never knew I would be coming to the seminary because as I have said, my childhood to my youth life was so confusing. However I just wanted to enjoy the company of a priest and from time to time, we went together for pastoral purposes and I really enjoyed the fact that some of these places that I had never been to in my life, by God's grace, I happened to see them and have wonderful experiences. The influence of the young priest was so convincing that it began on me the feeling of becoming a priest as well.

So it happened in 2017 when the vocation director who was the rector of the Sacred Heart Seminary, Rapolo went on promoting vocations to the remote areas of Pomio District through the "Come and See" program. When the news reached my ears, I thought to myself, maybe, this might be for me, so a day later I visited the vocation director, Fr. John Cabrido and expressed my desire to enter the seminary.

After hours of interview and then diagnostic and ability tests been done, I went back and waited for the results. Finally a few of us who attended the program were asked by the rector to go with him on his return to the seminary. On 01st August 2017, we entered the seminary as the students under the Come and See program. For the third trimester of that year, we attended the classes together with the second year philosophy of this year when they were doing their first year propaedeutic.

In 2018, I officially began class in the seminary as a propaedeutic, one student with all these current philosophy one students of the archdiocese of Rabaul. From there, I began to grow to be who I am today regarding the various aspects of formation. Those were the human, spiritual, intellectual and educative-pastoral formations, as well as meeting the requirements of the seminary. So the vocation that I have today began within myself due to the various experiences I had been through and the influence of the priest that enlightened me to discern my will to follow the path of Jesus to become a priest one day. Divine Providence is the term I would like to describe my vocation because this remained a wonderful mystery when God wrote straight on crooked lines.