

A BRIEF STORY OF HOW I HEARD HIM CALL ME

When I was a kid, I had something in my mind which, though I thought it was lost, after many years, I have found it somewhere in my memory. Contrarily, during my six years in the primary school, my mother motivated me to think about my future which she created for me. So I used to think that I would have a world of my own. But then I realized myself heading towards a direction which was unknown to me. It seemed to me that I was a stranger in my own land. I did not follow my own designs. It was God Who called me from the top of His mountain, so I crawled up the mountain towards Him and there He gave me a nick-name.

Every person has a story to tell from birth till death. Everyone of us is a book full of stories about our good and bad, ups and downs, and sorrows and joys. Every activity that we do in life is part of a very long story of life's journey. However, we can never remember all of them because our history is normally too much for us to memorize even though all the events are part of our lives. The following is a brief story of how I recognized my vocation.

Family background

I come from a faithful Christian family of eight children. I am the first born of four boys and four girls. I arrived in this world on the 6th of June 1983. I cannot remember when I received the Sacraments of Initiation. But I can still remember when my parents taught me how to pray. My father was a catechist in the parish. He was also a leader of many different ministries of my local parish and several times in the diocese too. All my family members are alive, except my father, who passed away last year (2021). My first two sisters after me are already married, and my mother is left with five children.

The seed of my vocation

When I did my first grade in 1993, I was the favorite kid of my teacher. My teacher was a Rosary sister from Wewak who taught us for both the first and second grade. She always liked to teach us prayers and songs. One time in the afternoon, she gave us an assignment, that each of us was to draw anything that we favor so much. She gave each of us an A4 paper with crayons and color pencils.

I travelled home thinking about what to paint purposely to make my teacher happy. Late in the evening after the meal, I painted my parish priest on the A4 paper. His name is Fr. Tonny Somhorst, a Polish SVD priest. Through my father, I came to like him personally. He never even once hesitated to give me candies and chocolates whenever I walked around his house always expecting something from him. This had made him my first choice to paint a picture of him.

The next day in the classroom my teacher arrived. And firstly, she collected all our papers. She looked so bright looking at my painting. In the picture she looked interestingly at the priest consecrating the host and chalice. "Excellent!" she said amazingly. "Why did you paint this picture of the priest?" she asked me. "Because he gives me candies, I like him so much." "Okay, good. Now keep it for yourself. And later when you have finished your education, you must become priest like Fr. Tony." Those few words were a very small seed of vocation God has planted in me, which I had never recognized until after twenty-nine years.

That was my first inspiration, from my teacher, which was awakened when I met her again for the first time after 22 years in my parish. She gave me a crucifix with some posters of Jesus and Mary. "This is the second time we are together; the third time will be your ordination day. Be strong and courageous." She encouraged me. My spirit was really moved by her encouragement. Earlier that event, I was writing to the vocation director when I did grade eight in 2001. And in 2003, I sat for the entry exam with a great heart. However, at the end of the year, I realized that I failed both the entry test for minor seminary in Madang and the national examinations. So I had to stay back home and help my parents.

My poor village life

Staying home was not really acceptable for me even though I had my own house and gardens. I was downhearted, sad, and unhappy, when all kinds of sad feelings were over-ruling my life every time. I for many years, hated doing work or helping others and became a wanderer. That means I left my parents, relatives, and even some of my best friends too. When

I was moving from place to place, people spoke all kinds of abusive words to me. It seemed everyone was against me. I was living on my own, doing things on my own, excluding myself from all community activities. Thus, they gave me a nickname and even today, they call me "Freedom." This had made me feel that I was not part of the society. Well, I accepted that, since that was how and where I had to live and move on. And I do accept that name even today.

One time, while sleeping on the bed, I meditated upon my nickname. "Why are they calling me Freedom?" I did not even pray but just a thought came to my mind that I had to open the Bible. Without hesitation, I got up and went to a nearby house where I knew the household very much, and asked for a Bible there. They gave me a New Testament Bible but then asked me to overnight with them that night. Before I lay myself on the bed, I opened the Bible and where my pointer had touched I read: "If the world hates you, just remember that it has hated me first. If you belonged to the world, then the world would love you as its own. But I chose you from this world, and you do not belong to it; that is why the world hates you." (John 15: 18-19). Thereafter, these verses became my favorite verses of the Bible.

Later, after twelve years since I left education, I had one more chance to sit for the entry examinations for the 2015 intake in the minor seminary in Madang. After the entry test, I was further inspired and motivated when I witnessed the ordination Mass of Fr. Thomas Waikane, who was one of us who had sat for the entry test eleven years earlier. "I would have already been a priest by now," I thought. Having these motivations and inspirations driving me, I recalled a prayer I made about twenty years ago, just after I had received my first seed of vocation from my teacher in the first grade, which reads, "Father, I promise that I will become a priest like Fr. Tony."

Conclusion

I only heard God was calling me through the human voice. But as human being and creature of God, I also had the desire to see Him. So I crawled searchingly to the bottom of His Mountain where the voice was coming from. And there I heard His voice calling: "Freedom! Freedom!...Freedomooooom!!...So I replied. "Yes Lord, speak, for I am listening." And He said to me, "By now, while you are still crawling up, I call you Freedom. But when you reach the top of my mountain, you will be called NEWMAN".