



## 24<sup>th</sup> NATIONAL CATHOLIC CHINA CONFERENCE

*co-sponsored by*

*Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western and Cultural History*

*at USF Center for the Pacific Rim;*

**September 24-26, 2010**

Our Lady of the Snows Conference Center, Belleville, IL

### *A Chinese Catholic Life of Faith:*

**Lily Cao**

I was born and grew up in Shanghai, China from a traditional Catholic family. I am the only child in my family. My parents and I stayed with my grandparents when I was young. Although I had no formal training in Catholicism, my grandfather had a great impact on me. My grandfather was a doctor and he was a devoted Catholic. He brought GOD's love to our whole family. My grandfather was the first person who told me about God, showed me the inside of a church and attended Mass with me.

As far as I can remember, one tradition my grandfather had was to visit Shanghai She Shan Basilica every year in May. My first time to the Basilica was when I was five years old. I can clearly remember we started the day trip very early around 5 am with a large group of people and would arrive at the Basilica around 7 am. The sky was still dark, but to my surprise there were so many people already there. As a kid, I cannot believe my eyes, these people were so faithful. The steps leading up to the Basilica were over 100 meter high, yet people were kneeling on every step and praying the Way of the Cross. And so did my grandfather. My heart was totally touched and could feel there was a special power just around us.

My grandfather and I continued our traditions every May. This was a very important religious activity in my childhood. I got to know that every May; the church becomes the destination for pilgrims who travel far and wide to make their annual pilgrimage at She Shan. Many of the Catholics in the area were fishermen, who would make the pilgrimage by boat, with the result that the creeks around She Shan were often crowded with boats in May.

My grandfather took me to some Catholic friends' home to attend private mass and prayers. I could not understand what exactly they were doing at that time, but I could feel that those people were very devoted. Until one day, at age seven, I got baptized at a Catholic friend's home. I was very happy on that day since I got allowed to have the host which I have been desiring for a long time; I used to call it "biscuit". It was a memorable day to a child of seven. When I look back now, I should say that this was a lucky day that changed my whole life.

The favorite thing in my childhood was to listen to many epic stories told by my grandfather. Those stories always had a moral theme which was emphasized to me. Sometimes the stories would take days to be told and I would look forward to hearing the complete story each day. After I grew up, I started to read the Bible. To my surprise, some stories were so familiar to me. I discovered that the stories my grandfather told me were actually from the Bible. I am very glad that I got the chance to know Bible stories at an early age.

My catholic teaching was stopped when my grandfather passed away when I was twelve years old. If people ask me what kind of person my grandfather was. The first word to come to my mind would be "warm-hearted." My grandfather was a doctor and he always helped the poor people. For example, he used to provide free treatment and medicine to those patients who were in need but could not afford it. Another example would be in a cold winter night, my grandfather would buy all the vegetables from a countryside farmer to let her go home earlier. My grandfather also contributed his knowledge and experience as a doctor in Hebei Province after he retired. Besides, my grandfather loved study. He self-studied English, French and German. His books occupied every inch of his room. When I think of my grandfather I should say I miss him so much. His spirit encourages me all the time. I dedicate myself to be a good student and a good person.

Eight year ago, I traveled aboard to study in the Netherlands, I discovered a new world. There are many churches in Europe compare to the handful I can remember in China. With so many faithful Catholics attending Sunday's Mass each week, this life style was brand new and amazing to me and I was committed to integrate myself to the European culture. Once the newness worn off, I started to feel sad. The first Christmas I was aboard, when I walked on the street of Amsterdam, I feel lonely and miserable. I missed my family and I missed speaking Chinese. I prayed to God and started to look for a church that I could call my own. Thanks to God, I found Saint Augustine Church in Utrecht and meet many Catholic friends there; they helped me better understand the Dutch culture and tutor me on Catholicism. I even developed a hobby to visit church frequently. In two months, I attended as many masses as I had attended in China.

Actually, the study aboard life is sometimes not easy since we are far from home, far from family. We need to do things by ourselves and might get a lot of difficulties. But when I face difficulty I will pray in my heart. I will let God know my difficulty and wish God can help me out or point a direction to me. The prayer is very helpful to me, gives me confidence and let me feel that life is always hopeful.

My life goes towards God's intention. After I graduated with bachelor degrees from the Netherlands, I got a job offer as a Business Development Manager for Asia Market in Ireland. I accepted the offer and went to the Catholic country. I feel again the importance of God in peoples' life. In Ireland, about 97% of the people are Catholics. As a tradition, almost all the families go to church on Sundays. I felt I was much closer to God and my religion was getting strong.

In Oct 2006, I married my husband and immigrated to U.S.A. I started a new page of my life. From Shanghai China to Europe to USA, I definitely benefit from my experience; I should say that my journey is not an easy one at all. I welcomed opportunities and challenges as well. Every time I come to a new continent, I have to start anew from the beginning. Sometimes when starting a new journey, I am sad to give up a relationship I have built. Luckily, God chose me and God will never give me up. My Catholic root keeps me moving forward. I had two cheerful things here. First, I applied for the Master studies at Catholic Seton Hall University and finished

successfully with the support of my husband and family. Second, I found New Jersey Chinese Catholic Association through a local newspaper and continued my Catholic life here. Again, I meet many faithful Catholic friends. We have regular meetings in Harrison church, we start with a Mass; we share our experience; we sing many church songs together. I feel the joy and peace of the life within God deeply in my heart.

My belief has a great impact to my life. Every time I pray in the university chapel at Seton Hall University, I appreciate very much that God is helping me and loves me all the time. I appreciate my grandfather's guidance to the Catholic faith. I know there is still a long journey ahead with a lot of challenges too. I will keep my faith and follow God's instruction to love others like myself. I will follow God's love and be the best of me.