

I was introduced to the Palmarian faith by a workmate in the office in 1986. I was 27 yrs old and had completed university 2 years before in Africa. I was a very regular church-goer-I went to the local Roman Catholic basilica even lunchtime, or really in the morning before going to the office. I am a disabled person and had been close to God all of my life.

I was really surprised that there was a palmarian church; but what attracted me was the return to more conservative modes of worship-to make mass a Holy affair instead of it being treated like a hurried duty. I burnt so many of my clothes in belief that I was doing the right thing.

When I was deep in it, I was happy with the schedule of prayer since I had taken leave from my office. When I went back to work, I saw the impossibility of waking up at 4.00am and maybe going to bed at mid-night, in addition to a full day's work. The priest then gave orders for me and my sister to and pray at the house where Anne, the lady who had introduced me, lived. It was a place 40 minutes by bus, a 30 minutes uphill walk for me. By the time I reached the house, I was usually in so much pain and so very exhausted that I could really not bear it. After prayers the same walk, the bus to downtown and another bus to my place after 15 minutes walk from the bus stop. I did this 6 times then I decided to go to this place only for the Saturday vigils.

What irked me was the lack of consideration and love from my sister Ann as well as a lack of understanding from the priest. All he wanted was to control us through Ann who was his chosen head. She treated me so badly; she literally threw me out of the house we were sharing. When I told the priest he would write back as if that was nothing. We were forever contributing money; there were so many rules that we believed that laughing is a sin!

The mode of dressing did not fit in with the African weather; we were cut off socially from those close to us. We could not dress well even though I had a good job. Then our priest visited-we had to take loans to finance his ticket-after eating simple meals he started complaining; he even wanted some beer!

Luckily I got this scholarship to come to Canada. He did not want me to take it but since it was for my professional advancement, I took it anyway. I spent the first year like a zombie-spiritually all was upside down within me. I wondered if anyone could live the way we had tried to in Africa, unless they were in a convent-praying from 4am, sleeping at 12.00midnight. As a disabled person I had suffered so much and often wondered if there was a higher heaven for those who suffered so much like me. And the control-the church was controlling our wake-up time, our finances, with whom we could socialize, whether we could even laugh (often laughter was deemed as being against charity) what and how to dress.

I later went back to going to different churches at the invitation of friends-something forbidden in Palmarian Church. Now I occasionally go to the Roman Catholic Church but I have never returned formally by going to confession and receiving the holy sacrament-the palmarians declared themselves as having monopoly of God's Blessings and that any other sacrament administered by a non-palmarian priest was mere bread ; it had no God's blessings!

After much thought, I decided to try and live my catholic faith but I would never get into palmarianism again-it was like metal chain around my neck. Much as I love Jesus-I even had been to Lourdes, France in 1980; I cannot return to the Palmarians. The Catholic church was the church I grew up in but the homosexuality scandals have really discouraged me. I have not had holy communion since 1988 when our Palmarian priest had visited us. However, I do pray my rosaries and God hears my prayers-small miracles. I wonder which church is the true church? Jesus said, "Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, I am in their midst". "Peter, you are the rock, the rock on which I build my church". My catholic church? My Orthodox Church? My Anglican Church?

I wish I had not met and known the Palmarians. I would not be so cynical about the politics of churches, the search for power, wealth and influence.....! I hope Jesus will recognize me when the time comes to meet Him. He said "by their actions you will know them, faith without works is nothing.....".!

Phillippa