



Trinidad and Tobago



Holidays by the sea remain for me the most beautiful memories of my childhood. Fr. Ricardo

Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Parish
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WELCOMES
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Appointed as Associate Pastor by
Archbishop Donald Bolen effective
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Note from Fr. Ricardo: This is an interview I did for the magazine of the Czech Seminary in Rome. This, combined with my Vocation Story, gives almost a complete picture of my life.

Q: Ricardo, you were born and raised in Trinidad and Tobago which for some may sound a bit exotic. Please tell us something about your childhood. What does it mean to grow up in Trinidad and Tobago?

I was born and raised in Trinidad and Tobago in a small suburb 10 minutes by car from the capital.

We had a pretty big garden, and the most beautiful memories of my youth were the many animals we had, especially dogs, racing pigeons, fish, budgies, but sometimes also rabbits, chickens and turtles. I consider myself an expert in dogs and racing pigeons (I even had a collection of books on how to train racing pigeons).

My brother and I used to wake up at 5 a.m. to feed and train the pigeons. We would give the best ones a cod liver oil tablet every day.

Beautiful memories of my youth were the many animals we had.

And we always had at least three or four dogs. The pigeons, and the dogs, especially when they would be pregnant and have puppies. I vividly remember as a child the fascination of watching the puppies being born and raised by their mother, the sound of newborn puppies, the way she took care of them. . . watching them grow.

Those, and the holidays by the sea (where the dogs came as well) remain for me the most beautiful memories of my childhood.

Q: Apart from animals, did you have a special hobby?

I was always fond of sport, of playing and also following it. I had subscriptions to an English table tennis magazine, and tennis and gymnastics magazines from the United States.

My brothers and I were in a swimming club for a few years when we were in Elementary School.

But my first passion was table tennis: I played for a club when I was in high school, and every afternoon, right after school until the evening, I would practice there. Afterwards I discovered tennis, which has remained a tremendous passion until today. Here in Regina during the summer I love playing at 5 or 6 am, when everyone is still asleep. However, I am not as good in tennis as I am in table tennis.

Both my parents read a lot, so we had a well-

stocked library. Somehow I fell into the habit of reading as well. My father worked for the then English bank, Barclays, listened to the BBC every day and brought home the newspaper "The Times" of London.

In retrospect, this opened my eyes to a world beyond Trinidad and Tobago. It would be difficult to overestimate how much this contributed to what I am today. I remember very well the events of the 70s and 80s: the death of Paul VI and the elections of John Paul I and then II, the entry on the political scene of Thatcher, Reagan, Gorbachev and Shevardnadze; the era of Glasnost and Perestroika . . . the Solidarity Movement and the killing of Popieluszko in Poland, culminating with the fall of the Berlin Wall, and then the "Velvet Revolution." In short, the fall of Communism, almost without a drop of blood. Miraculous!!!

A time full of "exceptional" men (to use the Philosopher of History Christopher Dawson's term) people who have the power to change the course of history. And in John Paul II and the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, God gave the Church (and history) perhaps the two greatest of all these "exceptional men" of that time.

All this as a young boy and then young man I followed with enormous interest in Trinidad, and it remains with me as if it happened yesterday.

Afterwards, I discovered the magazine "The Economist." It was love at first sight. The first thing I did when I started working was to take out a subscription. It is beyond doubt the best newspaper in the English speaking world, both in terms of depth of analysis and writing style. It should be in the library of every high school in the world, and on the reading list of every thinking Catholic!

Q: We know that you worked as a lawyer for about 10 years. From the law to the priesthood??? A bit odd, no?

After my high school leaving exams (where I did French, Spanish and English literature: in Trinidad at that time we followed the Cambridge English O' and A' Level system: we sat our exams in

Trinidad, and they were sent to England to be corrected by Cambridge University), I was not sure what to do.

An uncle of mine advised me to study law because it would give me a sure foundation, and then, if I wanted, I could study something else later. And then some friends in my class had also decided to study law, so I guess I went with the flow, as they say. But it was clear that I didn't have much interest. I continued because it was something to do.

Growing up, both my parents read a lot, so we had a well stocked library.

In the end I have no regrets about doing it, because thanks to this I was able to satisfy some of the obligations towards my family which I had willingly assumed.

But perhaps more importantly, it also taught me how to reason, how to think. I agree with Pascal that "the heart has its reasons which reason does not know,". But in the end, it is reason that should govern. The ability to completely separate the movements of the heart in arriving at important decisions is something that the law taught me.

For someone as sensitive as I am, as idealistic, it was an important lesson. Finally, on a more worldly level, the law gave me the means by which I was able to travel almost all over the world.

Q: How did you end up in Canada?

We always had family in Canada, in particular Vancouver, and we often went there on holidays. It was a natural progression, I think.

Q: You were living in Vancouver, how did you end up studying in Rome?

Since I had worked as a lawyer for 10 years, the

Diocese of Vancouver wanted me to study only one year of philosophy, and then 3 years of theology, and then I would be ordained. But I had read an article by Cardinal Danneels who insisted on two years of philosophy and I wanted to do the same since I knew nothing about philosophy. The diocese did not agree, but gave me permission to study philosophy on my own.

Then someone said to me: "Why don't you go to Rome? There, the tuition cost is cheaper and the course is shorter, only 2 years". He was right and I started studying philosophy in Rome for two years. Surprising as it may sound, it was completely an economic decision. It would have cost me at least 10,000 Canadian dollars in tuition fees to study philosophy in Canada. In Rome, only about 800 Euros every year. An enormous difference.

The initial plan was to return to Canada to enter the seminary in Vancouver after the Bachelor's in Philosophy, but I fell in love with philosophy and decided to continue with the License or Master's. The Vancouver Diocese also agreed. At the end of the further two years where I got my Master's in Philosophy, the rector of the college where I lived offered me to be his assistant, with the added incentive that I would only have to pay a quarter of the accommodation costs. In this way, he suggested, I would be able to study the Bachelor's of Theology in Rome.

But Vancouver did not agree with this, and warned that such a decision would mean the severance of any hope of returning to enter the seminary of the diocese of Vancouver. I followed my spiritual director's clear and unequivocal advice that I would be a fool to turn down such an opportunity to study theology in Rome. He told me that I should put myself in God's hands: God himself will find my place in the Church. So I began to study theology in Rome, in this way ending any hope of returning to enter the Seminary of Vancouver. I would do it all over again!

Q: Studying to become a priest without knowing which diocese you could be ordained takes a lot of courage. And also trust in God. How did it all turn out?

For me the decision was very, very easy. The fact



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that I was following the advice of my Spiritual Director (who many considered a saint) gave me incredible peace. And, in the end, when one loses one's mother at the age of 16, things take on a different perspective: everything, in a way, seems easy.

Q: You also decided to pursue a doctorate in philosophy. The Master's was not enough?

Actually, I had never thought about doing a PhD in philosophy, as my Master's on the French Philosopher Gabriel Marcel was anything but a labour of love. It was the Dean of Philosophy at Angelicum University where I studied who suggested that I continue with the doctorate. He said that my problem was that I loved both Theology and Philosophy, but that at my age I could not do both. He added that in the last 25 years the Church had moved away from philosophy, that there are few doctoral students of philosophy compared to theology.

I agreed on the condition that it not be on Gabriel Marcel, and that he, the Dean, be my moderator. He agreed, and I ended up starting the Doctorate on a theme that was, compared to my Master's on Gabriel Marcel, quite fascinating, culture. The actual title is, "Culture and Truth: the Philosophy of Culture of Joseph Ratzinger." And enormous theme, but oh-so-relevant.

What is culture??? Can one indeed make a legitimate distinction between high and low or pop culture. In this age of political correctness, it is a minefield. Trinidad . . . Vancouver . . . Rome. . . and now Regina, one can understand how I would gravitate to such a theme!

Next: Part 2 from Father Ricardo: "My Vocation Story"