

Dear Friends of Our Lady of Bandel,

As the liturgical year comes to a close and the liturgy invites us pray for our departed dear ones, our hearts naturally turn toward memory. We remember the faces of parents who passed on the faith, friends who walked beside us, and relatives whose absence leaves a quiet ache in our daily lives. In the Catholic tradition, however, memory is never merely passive sentimentality. It is an active, vital movement of charity. When we remember the dead, we pray for them.

The **Communion of Saints** is a foundational truth of our faith, yet its full beauty is often not sufficiently understood. Our spiritual family is not divided by the grave. It exists in three states: the Church Militant (us here on earth), the Church Triumphant (the saints in heaven), and the Church Suffering (the souls in purgatory). This triune reality forms a mystical web of holy charity. Just as we ask our friends on earth to pray for us in times of trial, and just as we ask the saints in heaven to intercede before the throne of God, we have a profound duty to offer our prayers for those who have gone before us, marked with the sign of faith, but who are still being purified for the fullness of glory.

The doctrine of **Purgatory** is a doctrine of divine mercy. Scripture reminds us that nothing unclean shall enter the presence of God (Revelation 21:27). Yet they cannot help themselves. They rely entirely on the treasury of the Church and our suffrages. When we offer the **Holy Sacrifice of the Mass** for them, pray the Rosary, perform acts of penance, or gain indulgences on their behalf, we are actively shortening their time of purification. Imagine the profound gratitude of a soul entering paradise because of your prayer. St. Padre Pio once remarked that we must pray for the Holy Souls, noting that "we must empty Purgatory." When these souls finally enter heaven, they do not forget their benefactors on earth; they become our powerful intercessors, pleading for us in our own journey toward salvation.

Praying for the dead is one of the most selfless acts of charity a Christian can perform. It is a love that expects no immediate earthly reward, given to those who cannot thank us in the present moment. Let us not leave our loved ones to memory alone. Let us wrap them in our prayers. In this season of remembrance, let us frequent the sacraments, visit the cemeteries, and cry out with the Church across the centuries: *Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May their souls, and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.* Amen.

Yours affectionately in our Blessed Mother,

Fr John Pchalil

Fr. John P. Chalil, sdb
Prior, Bandel Church

The Apparition of Our Lady of Zion



The apparition of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal to Alphonse Rattisbone

When the Blessed Mother appeared to St. Catherine Laboure for the second time on November 27, 1830, she gave the world the Miraculous Medal that would become a channel of great graces as she promised. Soon after the distribution of medals throughout France and later other parts of the world, numerous miracles were reported that are connected to the Miraculous Medal from unexplained cures, expulsion of evil spirits and conversions.

One of the most famous miracles of the Miraculous Medal is the instantaneous conversion of a Jew named Alphonse Rattisbone which caused a stir in the Catholic world that is immortalized with the publication of the apparitions, art works and a special feast commemorating it.

A Cosmopolitan Jew

Marie-Alphonse Ratisbonne was born on May 1, 1814 in Strasbourg, Alsace, France, the eleventh of the thirteen children born to Auguste Ratisbonne and his wife, Adelaide Cerfbeer, members of the famed family of Jewish bankers. His father was the president of the Provincial Council of Alsace. His mother died when he was 4 years old, but his natural charm drew his wider family to take charge of his upbringing. The family was assimilated into the secular society of France, but had a strong sense of social justice, with which value he was raised.

An older brother, Théodor, converted to Christianity in 1827 and went on to become a Catholic priest in 1830. The family reacted negatively and Alphonse resolved never to speak again with him, and developed a hatred of Catholic faith.

When Grace begins to intervene

At age 28, he becomes engaged to his own niece, Flore Ratisbonne, whom he plans to marry the following August of 1842. In January 1842, with the postponement of the marriage due to the bride's age, he decides to tour Europe and the East, partly for his health and partly for pleasure as he had planned to assume a partnership at his uncle's bank. Ratisbonne decided to go to Naples, to spend the winter in Malta, to strengthen his delicate health.

On the Eve of the Feast of the Epiphany of Our Lord, it seemed that Divine Grace begins to intervene in the life of Alphonse. Due to a travel mistake, he ended up up taking the wrong road and then booked his passage on the steamer to Rome. He left Naples on the 5th and arrived in Rome on the 6th, the Feast of the Epiphany of Our Lord and began to tour the city.

On January 8, 1842, he encountered on the street his old Protestant classmate from Strasburg, Gustavo de Bussières. In the process of rekindling their friendship, Alphonse meets Gustave's older brother, the Baron Theodore de Bussières, a convert to Catholicism and a close friend of Alphonse's priest-brother. Alphonse feels instinctive abhorrence toward this zealous Catholic convert, but he knows the baron is an expert on Constantinople, which Alphonse plans to visit, so he agrees to call upon him for travel advice. De Bussières saw it as his mission to convert to Catholicism any unbeliever who crossed his path. He and Ratisbonne became friends, but not without difficulty.

A friendly Challenge

The baron makes a proposition to Alphonse that he takes a simple test: wear the Miraculous Medal and say every morning the Memorare, a prayer St. Bernard composed to the Virgin Mary.

So he consents, mocks the Faith, and quotes a line from The Tales of



Hoffman: "If it does me no good, at least it will do me no harm." The baron's little daughter puts the miraculous medal around Alphonse's neck.

The Baron's relentless proselytism continues repelling him further from the Catholic faith. He recruits members of Rome's tight-knit community of aristocratic French expatriates to pray for him. Notable among these friends is the Count Laferronays, ex-diplomat, once a notorious rogue and now a devout, fervent Catholic. Moved by the baron's pleas, the Comte drops into a church and fervently prays "more than 20 Memorares" for the conversion of the "young Jew." That very same evening, the Count suffers a fatal heart attack. After receiving his final Sacraments, he dies devoutly, surrounded by his loving family.

The Apparition of the Virgin

When the Baron was arranging the funeral of his friend Count Laferronays in the basilica of St. Andrea delle Fratte in Rome he asked Ratisbonne to wait for him in the church. When the Baron came back to the church he found Ratisbonne on his knees in prayer. This sight moved him to tears.

In Ratisbonne's own words: ***"I was scarcely in the church when a total confusion came over me. When I looked up, it seemed to me that the entire church had been swallowed up in shadow, except one chapel. It was as though all the light was concentrated in that single place. I looked over towards this chapel whence so much light shone, and above the altar was a living figure, tall, majestic, beautiful and full of mercy. It was the most holy Virgin Mary, resembling her figure on the Miraculous Medal. At this sight I fell on my knees right where I stood. Unable to look up because of the blinding light, I fixed my glance on her hands, and in them I could***

read the expression of mercy and pardon. In the presence of the Most Blessed Virgin, even though she did not speak a word to me, I understood the frightful situation I was in, my sins and the beauty of the Catholic Faith."

The Conversion

The baron helps Ratisbonne outside and into his carriage. He takes him to the Hotel Serny, where Alphonse is staying, and loosens his cravat so he can breathe. But Alphonse is still sobbing, clasping his Miraculous Medal, murmuring thanks to God. At last he turns to the baron, embraces him says: *"Take me to a confessor! When can I receive baptism, without which I can no longer live?"*

"What has happened?" exclaims the baron. "What have you seen?"

"That," says Alphonse, *"I can reveal only on my knees and to a priest."*

Alphonse Rattisbone as a Catholic Priest

The baron takes him to the Church of the Gesu, the Mother Church of the Jesuits, to see Father Villefort. There, Alphonse tries to explain himself, but he is still sobbing so hard that he is unintelligible. At last he calms down, takes the Miraculous Medal from his neck, holds it up, and cries: *"I saw Her! I saw Her!"* Alphonse Ratisbonne confessed and, for fear of ridicule, entered the convent of the Jesuits to make a retreat under the guidance of Father Villefort.

On January 31, 1842, he received from the hands of His Eminence Cardinal Patrizi baptism, confirmation and his first Holy Communion. At his baptism, he added ***Marie*** to his name to reflect the role he felt the Blessed Virgin Mary had played in his life.

Alphonse returned to Paris to proclaim his new-found faith to his fiancée, and invited her to share it with him. His fiance, however, tearfully rejected this.

The Investigation and Church approval

In February 1842, the Vatican held a canonical investigation of the circumstances surrounding Alphonse's conversion. After lengthy inquiry and many depositions, it concludes that his sudden

conversion was entirely miraculous; an act of God wrought through the powerful intercession of the Virgin.

A few months later, after a formal inquest about the apparition of January 20, the Vicar General of Pope Gregory XVI, Cardinal Patrizi, declared on June 3, 1842, that it was a divine miracle operated through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and permitted the publication and spread of texts recording the miracle.



On April 25, 1942, Pope Pius XII elevated the title of the church to the rank of a basilica while on March 12, 1960 Pope St. John XXIII elevated the Minor Basilica of Sant Andrea delle Fratte to the title of a cardinal's church.

The Life after the apparition

In 1843, after his conversion he reconciled with his brother and assisted him in founding the Sisterhood of Our Lady of Sion. In 1847, he was ordained priest and entered the Society of Jesus. At this time, two Jewish sisters came to him for spiritual advice, and eventually also converted to Christianity. They became the nucleus for the Congregation of Our Lady of Sion, founded in 1847.

The Brothers Theodor and Alphonse Ratisbonne

In 1850, Alphonse became engaged in mission work among convicts in the prisons of Brest, but two years later he felt called to join his brother in this mission to their own people, writing that he "recognized that the will of God in my Conversion and in my vocation to the priesthood obviously destined me to work for the salvation of Israel."

With the authorization of the Jesuit Superior General, Jan Philipp Roothaan, and the blessing of Pope Pius IX, Alphonse left the Jesuits to join his brother Theodor. The two brothers, with several other priests drawn to their mission, formed the male branch of the Congregation in 1852. Alphonse moved to Palestine in 1855 to open a convent for the Sisters of the congregation. He would spend the rest of his life there.

In 1858, Ratisbonnes established the Convent of Ecce Homo in the Old City of Jerusalem for the Sisters of Sion. In 1860, he built the Convent of St. John on a hilltop in Ein Karem, then a village on the outskirts of Jerusalem. In 1874, he founded the Ratisbonne Monastery for the priests of the congregation. (At present, a Salesian study center in Jerusalem's Rehavia neighborhood.)

Alphonse Ratisbonne died in Ein Karem on May 6, 1884 and is buried in the cemetery of the convent.

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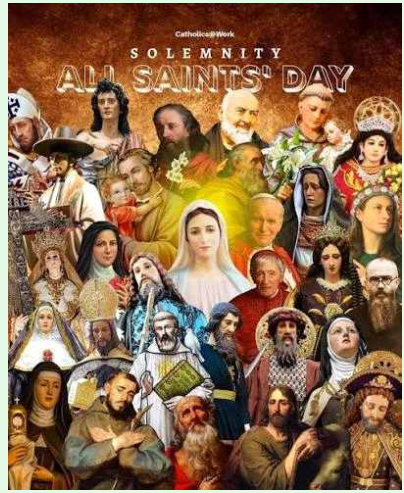
The Solemnity of All the Saints



After this I had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation comes from our God, who is seated on the throne, and from the Lamb." ~ –Revelation 7:910

On 1st November, we celebrate the Solemnity of All Saints, a celebration honoring all men and women who have entered Heaven. While this includes every soul in Heaven, the focus is particularly on those who led extraordinarily holy lives on earth and that the Church has canonized as saints. These individuals honored God in a variety of ways: through deep prayer and mystical union, through enduring martyrdom or other forms of religious persecution, and through acts of service, such as caring for the needy or teaching the faith. Some saints were powerful preachers or miracle workers. Others were leaders, some lived in obscurity, and still others experienced exile or made significant personal sacrifices for their faith. In various ways, these saints glorified God during their lifetimes.

By honoring this host of saintly witnesses, we honor and glorify God through their lives. By honoring them, we honor Him Who made them holy. This liturgical solemnity is but a foretaste of the eternal Solemnity of Heaven. Heaven will be the eternal glory of God through the lives of all His saints. In Heaven, the virtues, sacrifices, prayers, and selfless service of all the saints will radiate as beacons that eternally manifest the great mercy and goodness of God. The life of every saint in Heaven will become a continuous chorus of praise and

worship of God, intertwined with the nine choirs of angelic hosts. With the Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones, the saints will cry "Holy, Holy, Holy..." With the Dominions, Virtues, and Powers, the saints will participate in God's providential care of the New Heavens and Earth. With the Principalities, Archangels, and Guardian Angels, the saints will celebrate God's protection and continuous communication with all of His sons and daughters. Heaven today, as well as the New Heavens and Earth at the end of time, will be nothing other than a continuous solemn celebration of all that God is in His essence and all that God has done in the lives of those who responded to His grace.

Honoring the saints also becomes an invitation to each one of us on earth to strive after the holiness the saints attained. The saints give us an example; their lives are a "how to" book in holiness. The lives of the "super saints"—such as the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saints Francis of Assisi, Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Ávila, Thérèse of Lisieux, Augustine of Hippo, and Thomas Aquinas—should be studied and pondered so that we can learn from their example.

We must also remember that, from Heaven, the saints become powerful intercessors for us on earth. It is true that God could deal directly with us without using the mediation of angels and saints. He chooses to use secondary causes, while He always remains the First Cause and Source of all grace. The saints and angels are among those secondary causes God chooses to mediate His grace. For that reason, we should rely upon their intercession. Doing so is an act of faith by which we profess our belief in God, using the saints and angels as His instruments.

This solemnity has its roots in the earliest days of the Church. Even in the New Testament times, martyrs were honored by the community of believers, beginning with the deacon Saint Stephen, the first martyr. As the first century of the Church unfolded, others began to suffer persecution and death at the hands of Roman emperors, and the Church honored their deaths. In 64, Emperor Nero was the first to organize a persecution of Christians in Rome, taking the lives of Saints Peter and Paul, and many others. After this first persecution in Rome, other Roman emperors systematized various persecutions

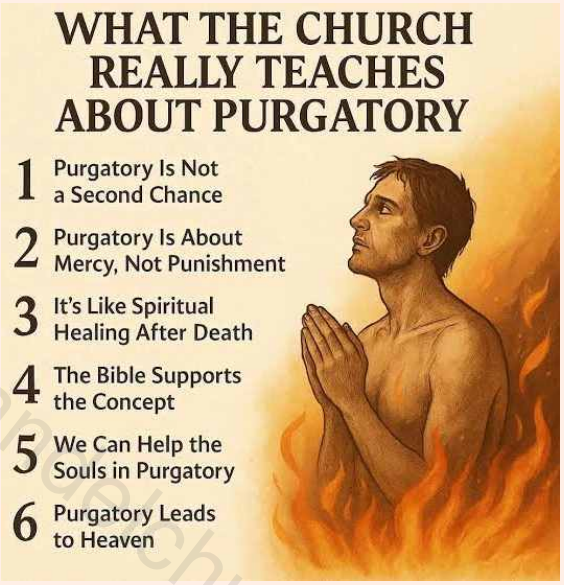
throughout the entire empire. The worst persecution took place under Emperor Diocletian from 303–311. During that persecution, churches and sacred texts were destroyed; Christians lost their property, legal rights, and lives; and those who were not killed were imprisoned and tortured. Some estimate that during the Diocletian persecutions, there were as many as 3,500 martyrs. Although there is no way to confirm the exact number, there were many.

In the fourth century, after Christianity was legalized in 313 by Emperor Constantine I, who became a Christian himself and began building churches and monuments to the martyrs, public devotion to the martyrs began to flourish. Their graves became churches and places of pilgrimage and prayer. On May 13, 609, Pope Boniface IV transformed the Pantheon in Rome, a former pagan temple, into a church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary and all martyrs. The annual celebration of its dedication also honored the Blessed Virgin Mary and all martyrs. On November 1, 731, Pope Gregory III dedicated an oratory within Saint Peter's Basilica to "all saints" that included the Apostles, martyrs, confessors, and all holy men and women throughout the world. This broadened the commemoration of the saints beyond the martyrs to all who lived saintly lives. In 844, Pope Gregory IV extended the November 1 celebration to the entire Church. In 1484, Pope Sixtus IV made November 1 a holy day of obligation for the entire Church and added a vigil day and octave to follow, making the celebration nine days in all. The vigil celebration for All Hallows' Day was called All Hallows' Eve, or Halloween. Unfortunately, in many places, Halloween has lost its Christian and saintly focus and has become a secular, and even pagan, celebration.

As we honor all the saints in Heaven today, ponder the fact that you are called to be among their company. The extent to which you become holy while on earth is the extent to which your life will be an eternal glorification of God. Seek a profound depth of holiness. Don't just try to remain in a state of grace. Seek an abundance of grace. Strive to grow in virtue. Purge all sin, even small sins, from your life. Pray as often as you can. Read about the saints. Ponder the Scripture. Act with generosity and charity. Forgive everyone. And do everything you can to become the super saint God wants you to become.

Catholic Teaching on Purgatory

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines purgatory *as a "purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven," which is experienced by those "who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified" (CCC 1030). It notes that "this final purification of the elect . . . is entirely different from the punishment of the damned" (CCC 1031).*



The purification is necessary because, as Scripture teaches, nothing unclean will enter the presence of God in heaven *(Rev. 21:27) and, while we may die with our mortal sins forgiven, there can still be many impurities in us, specifically venial sins and the temporal punishment due to sins already forgiven.*

What Happens in Purgatory?

When we die, we undergo what is called the particular, or individual, judgment. Scripture says that "it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment" (Heb. 9:27). We are judged instantly and receive our reward, for good or ill. We know at once what our final destiny will be. At the end of time, when Jesus returns, there will come the general judgment to which the Bible refers, for example, in Matthew 25:31-32: "When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from

another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." In this general judgment all our sins will be publicly revealed (Luke 12:2–5).

Augustine said in *The City of God* that "temporary punishments are suffered by some in this life only, by others after death, by others both now and then; but all of them before that last and strictest judgment" (21:13). It is between the particular and general judgments, then, that the soul is purified of the remaining consequences of sin: "I tell you, you will never get out till you have paid the very last copper" (Luke 12:59).

The Catholic Church, Purgatory, and Indulgences

One argument anti-Catholics often use to attack purgatory is the idea that the Catholic Church owes the majority of its wealth to the doctrine of purgatory. But the numbers just don't add up.

When a Catholic requests a memorial Mass for the dead—that is, a Mass said for the benefit of someone in purgatory—it is customary to give the parish priest a stipend, on the principles that the laborer is worth his hire (Luke 10:7) and that those who preside at the altar share the altar's offerings (1 Cor. 9:13–14).

But look at what happens on a Sunday. There are often hundreds of people at Mass. In a crowded parish, there may be thousands. Many families and individuals deposit five dollars or more into the collection basket; a few give much more. A parish might have four or five or six Masses on a Sunday. The total from the Sunday collections far surpasses the paltry amount received from the memorial Masses.

Indulgences are often brought into this discussion as well. However, when properly understood, an indulgence is the remission of temporal punishment due to sins already forgiven. This can be either applied to oneself, or for a faithful departed. The Catholic Church encourages the faithful to gain indulgences through prayer and penance. Unfortunately, at times in history, indulgences were abused and many of the faithful were led to believe that money could purchase spiritual benefits, or less time in purgatory. However, this was a distortion. The Catholic Church has never taught that salvation can be merited by money or purchased through indulgences.

Is Purgatory a Catholic "Invention"?

Fundamentalists may be fond of saying the Catholic Church "invented" the doctrine of purgatory to make money, but they have difficulty saying just when. Most professional anti-Catholics—the ones who make their living attacking "Romanism"—seem to place the blame on Pope Gregory the Great, who reigned from A.D. 590 to 604.

But that hardly accounts for the request of Monica, mother of Augustine, who asked her son, in the fourth century, to remember her soul in his Masses. This would make no sense if she thought her soul would not benefit from prayers, as would be the case if she were in hell or in the full glory of heaven.



Nor does ascribing the doctrine to Gregory explain the graffiti in the catacombs, where Christians during the persecutions of the first three centuries recorded prayers for the dead. Indeed, some of the earliest Christian writings outside the New Testament, like the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* and the *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity* (both written during the second century), refer to the Christian practice of praying for the dead. Such prayers would have been offered only if Christians believed in purgatory, even if they did not use that name for it.

Where Is Purgatory in the Bible?

Catholics are often asked by fellow Christians, "Where is purgatory in the Bible?" While Catholics hold that the deposit of Faith is found both in Scripture and Tradition, we need to show the Scriptural foundations of our beliefs to those who consider Scripture the only authority.

Eucharistic Miracles: Tixla, 2006



In October of 2006, a church in the diocese of Chilpancingo-Chilapa, Mexico, was celebrating Mass during an annual parish retreat. During the Mass, as the two parish priests and a religious sister were distributing Holy Communion to the faithful, the sister turned to the priest celebrant with tears in her eyes and showed him that one of the hosts in her ciborium had begun to emit a reddish substance. Filled with amazement, and unsure what to make of the host, the priests informed the bishop.

Bishop Alejo Zavala Castro formed a theological commission to investigate the phenomenon, and to determine whether the host was supernatural or simply a hoax of some kind. Dr. Ricardo Castañón Gomez, who had also investigated the Buenos Aires miracle of 1996, led a team of scientists in an intensive study of the host between 2009 and 2012. The study reported the following findings:

- The reddish substance "corresponds to blood in which there are hemoglobin and DNA of human origin.
- The blood type was found to be AB, which corresponds to the miracles at Buenos Aires and Lanciano, as well as traces found on the Shroud of Turin.
- Forensic experts found that the substance originates from the

interior of the host, which would seem to discount the theory that it was somehow planted from outside.

- Part of the blood was found to have been coagulated since 2006, but further examination shows the presence of flesh blood from 2010.
- The blood contains intact white blood cells, red blood cells, and active macrophages that engulf lipids, indicating an active metabolism.
- The tissue seems to correspond to the muscle of the heart, the myocardium, as found in other Eucharistic miracles. Further, this was found to be *living cardiac muscle*. Normally after 48 hours, the tissue dies, but this case, 3 months had passed before the results could actually be obtained.
- The study concluded that "the event has no natural explanation."

This miracle is sometimes attributed to the young Blessed Carlo Acutis, who died of leukemia just a few days before the miracle took place. Blessed Carlo is an incredibly charming modern-day saint who combined a love for video games, soccer, and computer programming with a deep devotion to the Eucharist. After receiving his First Communion, he worked to bring his parents back to the practice of their faith by cataloguing the hundreds of Eucharistic miracles throughout the world, including those we have discussed. Blessed Carlo found himself continually amazed by what he found, but was always content looking for Jesus hidden within the tabernacle, saying "The Eucharist is my highway to Heaven." May the Lord continue to fill us with wonder and awe at these miracles, and to give us a deep fervor for the Eucharist at every Mass.

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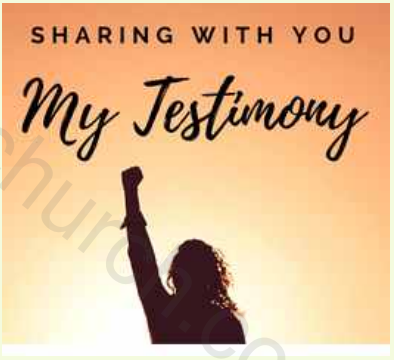
MY LITTLE TESTIMONY AT OUR LADY OF BANDEL - 2026

(A partial testimony of Sr. Lucy Gangmei FMA, from Guwahati.)

With heart full of gratitude to God, I wish to share my personal experience of our retreat held at Our Lady of Bandel Shrine, Kolkata, in the month of May 2026, animated by sisters from 8 to 13 May 2026. As I completed 25 years of my religious life, I came to Bandel with many memories - joys and struggles of these years. But God had His own plan for me. In this holy shrine of our Blessed Mother, in the month dedicated to her, God waited for me personally.

From the first day, the atmosphere was so God-oriented. The prayerful silence, the inspiring inputs of sisters, the meaningful liturgy and the loving presence of Mother Mary at Bandel helped me to enter deep within myself. Slowly I began to taste God again. My heart, which was tired with many responsibilities, began to long for prayer. Prayer was no longer a duty, but became a deep thirst, a longing to just sit at the feet of Jesus and be with Him. I experienced what the Psalmist says - "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God."



In His immense mercy, the Lord also touched and healed me physically. I was supposed to undergo a surgery in July but after my return from Bandel, when doctor examined me, it was found that, surgery is no longer required. So, I believe that the Lord has healed me through the intercession of our Lady of Bandel during the retreat as it was announced and I claimed it for myself. The aches and little health problems that I was carrying, I placed before the Lord, and He in His goodness restored my health and gave me new strength.

But the greatest miracle was the inner healing. In these 25 years, unknown to me, many small wounds had gathered in my heart - hurts, difficulties, challenges of life, failures in mission and personal disappointments. During adoration and inner healing prayers led by sisters, I felt Jesus gently touching each wound and healing every memory. Tears rolled down, and with tears, my pains also flowed out. I felt free and light.

I came back from Bandel not the same person. I came back as a more joyful and prayerful person, ready to journey ahead with Jesus, my Spouse.

Sr. Lucy Gangmei fma, Guwahati

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