

Personal testimonies: Discovering God's love in my life

RACHEL (USA)

I am an elementary school teacher and teach three-year-old pre-school and art. I have been married for almost six years, in October, and have two children. Thank you for hearing my story.

I feel I've always known about God. I was born Catholic, went to church on Sundays, went to Catholic school. My parents and grandparents were very supportive spiritually to me throughout my childhood. They emphasised the importance of faith and knowing God's love. I remember looking at them and what they have been through in their lives, what they do for others, their positivity and their faith, and thinking to myself: I hope I too can live that way. I always knew that having faith is important and something I wanted to know about in my life. A teacher in a confirmation class said to me: Open your mind and your heart and let God's love fill you. I remember thinking that I was ready, but not sure how I was supposed to know. I tried to be a good person, kind, hard-working, loving, giving of myself, but I still felt lost in a way.

It was then as a sophomore in college that I lost my best friend to a tragic car accident. He was an extraordinary person – a person whom I know would have done wonderful things in the world. I was devastated as I had not lost anyone in my life before that. I did not know how to feel or what to do. I found comfort in family and friends, but I found the most comfort in knowing that he was in a better place with God, and how lucky he was to be in that perfect place in such peace. It was then at that point that I felt relieved to know that I could turn to God. I saw friends turn to alcohol, to drugs, to coke, but I felt lucky that I had another outlet. I started to transform me and my faith. Now I went to Mass because I wanted to, because God's love was something I needed and now felt. I knew that I was never alone, that in good times and bad, God would love me, forgive me and always be with me. I felt empowered. I had received a gift that no amount of money could ever buy. That changed my life.

I am proud to say that my faith has made me a better teacher. In my classroom, I teach my students to empathise, to love and appreciate one another despite our differences, to appreciate the world and all its wonders, and to be thankful for what we have. The classroom environment I strive to have is that of a family, a safe place where students can

grow together, take risks and be the best that they can be. I am fortunate to be able to speak about my faith and share it with my students and to support them in theirs, since I am teaching at Saint Mary's Catholic School.

Lastly, and most important for me is how my faith and awareness of God's love for me has nourished my marriage. I have been married for almost six years. It has been the foundation of how we want to raise our children. It has been the thread that holds us together. God's love has been there in our utmost happiness, through his true miracle of the birth of our two children. My son Gavyn is now five, and my daughter Alli is now two. God has also been our strength during extreme loss. On September 11th this past year, we lost a son, Keegan James Palmer. He was born at five months due to a fatal condition. The loss of a child is an unimaginable pain, and it was a very difficult time for our family, especially our son who, at four years old, was understanding more. It was the love of God, the strong foundation our marriage was built on, that has helped us through those difficult days, and these days that still lie ahead. I am grateful for the efforts of my parents and grandparents, and the teachers that I have had that have helped me shape and support my faith, so that I can now combine with God's love to be the best teacher, wife and mother I can be. Thank you.