

From: Victoria Bernardo
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Testimonial on the 5th Anniversary of the EWWJ Bible Class

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Due to my nervousness and time constraint, my oral testimonial given to you yesterday, was in my opinion, inadequate and incomplete. So I wrote down what I really wanted to say:

First, I wish to thank Fr. Bill and Sister Francine, the EWWJ group and many others for their invaluable efforts and hard work in bringing the Word of God to us.

The bible class began on 13 September 2001, but it took a few more months before I attended. A colleague, Ramon, was the first to call my attention to it. One Thursday, he invited me to come. I was feeling blue (depressed maybe). I had no lunch engagement, so I went along. Fr. Bill was impressive, a truly gifted speaker and teacher. For some strange reason, I was not receptive to his words. Looking back, I realized that I went half-heartedly, my mind full of distractions. Ramon continued to encourage me to go again. After a little urging, I went for the second time, determined to focus and give my full attention to Fr. Bill. This time, the experience was very different for me. I cannot recall in details what he said, I just know that by the grace of God, something within me resonated, a desire to hear more. Soon enough, I was attending regularly. Desire had turned into a hunger for God's Word. I could not get enough, I bought recorded tapes by Fr. Bill so I could listen and learn more at home. As I learned more, my faith grew more. I loved the bible class, always looking forward to it, and even after I retired from UNDP, continued to attend regularly, Without realizing it, I had begun to change, slowly, subtly. One day family members and some friends remarked how happy and serene I had become.

We all know the story of St. Paul. He was converted overnight by a vision of our Lord. To most of us, however, it is a much slower process, a lifetime even. We are not perfect, perfection can only be attained when we are fully united with our Lord. As pilgrims on earth, we continue to stumble and fall, but what is important is to get up and begin again and again, and with the help of God's grace, persevere to the end.

One Sunday, a few months ago, I was attending a mass, the priest was reading the gospel about Jesus who had just risen from the dead. He had appeared to His apostles and they were afraid (I would be too if I had been there). Jesus knew their fear and said "***Do not be troubled. Look at my hands and my feet. It is I, myself***" (Lk 24:36-38). I recalled what Fr. Bill once said, "look to the cross...". Then it came altogether. Jesus pierced for our sins. He paid a price for us. I asked myself, how can I, how can we be afraid of God Who love us to death! When we are burdened by sorrows, disappointments, injustice, difficulties, beset by doubts, haunted by fears old and new, look to the cross... Let us not be afraid to embrace it, to love God back. Jesus is with us every step of the way.

Dear friends in Christ, God has blessed us with a bible study, a unique opportunity right here at the United Nations, in our own backyard. He gave us Fr. Bill and Sister Francine, two wonderfully gifted and dedicated teachers from whom we can learn much and grow in faith. He gave us each other. Come join us. Bring your friends (and your bibles too). Come regularly, with open minds and open hearts. If you do this, I am convinced that your lives will be changed forever. Let us pray.

Thank you for your time and may God bless and keep you.