



A Life-Changing Prayer

In 1992, Father Wenceslao 'Wens' Padilla packed the warmest clothes he had and set off for the capital of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar. His mission was to share Jesus' message with the people living in one of the harshest climates in the world, following the collapse of Communism. Today, he is the nation's first and only bishop. Describing his own elevation to priesthood as a "miracle", the path he took to get there makes his story all the more extraordinary.

Throughout her son's ordination in 1976, Wens Padilla's mother had tears streaming down her face. The young man could not understand why she was so upset at what was his proudest moment. Of course her tears were not of sorrow, Wens later found out, but of joy. For, although unbeknown to him at the time, her deepest and most heartfelt prayers had been answered.

Until the day after his ordination, Wens knew nothing of a grave illness that struck him as an infant. In the earliest stages of his life, a reaction to breast milk left him practically at death's door. So dire were the circumstances that his parents took him on a pilgrimage where they made a desperate plea.

Bishop Wens explains: "They offered me to God saying, if I ever got healed, God could do anything He pleases with me."

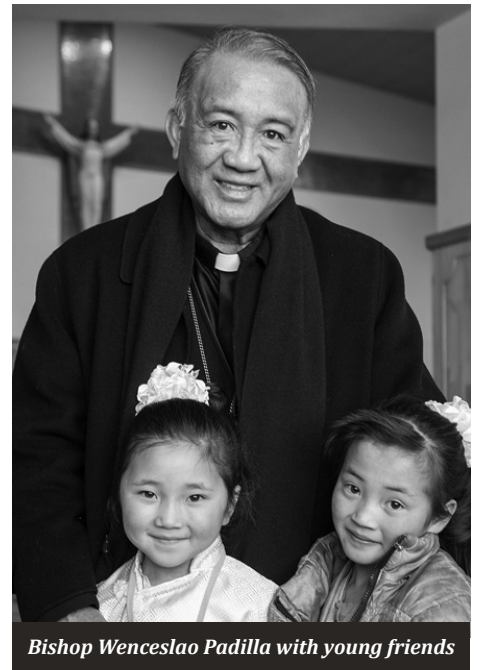
At his ordination it was clear that prayer had been answered. "No wonder why my mother was crying when I was being ordained," he says.

Bishop Wens believes that his calling to priesthood is a "miracle",

given he had no knowledge of his early brush with death and his parents' extraordinary prayer. "With all these trials, that is why I say it is a gift, really a gift, to be called a priest," he says.

Surprisingly, as a child growing up in the Philippines, there was nothing about Wens that gave any insight into what lay ahead. Like many young children, Wens was a troublemaker! When he wasn't fighting with his brothers and sisters, he would pick on the smaller kids of the neighbourhood and, if they were bigger, he'd throw stones. Such was the extent of his mischief his grandmother called him 'Lucifer'! By his third year of theology study in the seminary though, Wens says that he had become her favourite.

Nearly four decades later, Bishop Wenceslao Padilla now presides over the apostolic prefecture of Mongolia; the world's youngest Catholic Church, which he helped build from scratch. Mongolia had just begun diplomacy with other nations including Vatican City, opening the door to Catholic faith.



Bishop Wenceslao Padilla with young friends

Having served for fifteen years as the first non-European provincial superior for Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, Bishop Wens was an ideal candidate to lead the mission.

Operating out of merely a hotel room, the four men conducted Holy Mass for themselves until Catholic expatriates began attending. Eventually, they in turn brought their Mongolian friends and,

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Bishop Wens conducting Mass at Sts Peter and Paul Cathedral in Ulaanbaatar

before long, the first Catholic Church building was constructed.

Bishop Wens says part of his inspiration comes from the Gospel of Matthew. “Jesus said to St Peter, upon this rock I will build my church,” he says. “I am thinking that this was also addressed to me when I came to Mongolia.”

Twenty two years on, despite the impressive growth of the Catholic Church Mongolia, Bishop Wens is very aware of the challenges that still lie ahead. Sadly, poverty remains rife and the bitter cold means life on the streets is an even more dangerous reality for the homeless. However, through your continued support,

Catholic Mission is helping Bishop Wens to foster a safe environment of hope and faith in God.

In this sense, he is grateful for his supporters in Australia: “Thank you... I’ll try my best to finish the work I have started in Mongolia, encouraging my missionaries to impart the warmth and greetings of Australian brothers and sisters,” he says.

Reflecting on the rise of the Catholicism in Mongolia from literally nothing, Bishop Wens draws parallels with his own personal story. “It’s all the work of God,” he says. “I know He was there—we just had to hook up where He was working.”



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