

My life with Blessed Peter ToRot

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My encounter with Peter ToRot

I began to know about Peter Torot in my younger age during Sunday school sessions in the year 1995, just after the twin eruption of the Tavurvur volcano in Rabaul in 1994. Peter Torot's life story was an inspiration to most of us children of that time and was so interesting to know more about the war in 1942-'45 along with Bible stories of the Old Testament. During our age, attending Sunday school was a compulsory occasion for all children. Skipping a Sunday school session was like breaking a rule in the family. If we are caught not attending, we are usually whipped. Hence, such policy increased our understanding and knowledge on the fundamental aspects of our religious life in the Church. Church leaders were accountable together with the teachers and parents in playing their roles to strengthen our faith as children of God motivated and influenced by the life story of Peter ToRot.

The facts

Peter ToRot was known as a catechist from Rakunai village in the Gazelle district of East New Britain Province. He was a pious young man who had an intense prayer life and received Communion daily. Peter became a lay catechist at the age of 18 and ministered to his own people of Rakunai Village. The Bible was his frequent book that he never forgot to carry around and from which he frequently quoted.

At the age of 24 he got married to a lady who is from the same denomination (Catholic) and from the same place. He was faithful to his wife and children despite his demanding work as catechist at Rakunai, now St. Augustine Parish.

Missionaries and their staff were arrested by the Japanese when they invaded the island of New Guinea in 1942 and were housed in concentration camps. He continued to lead the village as best as he could, in being accountable to his responsibility as a catechist caring for the sick, baptizing and teaching the faithful, helping the poor and also assisting other catechists who were frightened by the Japanese invasion. He had the courage to continue on living and serving his community.

The locals were prevented by the Japanese from worshipping, fearing that they would pray for their defeat. That's why they tried to get the people back to their pre-Christian ways, even enforcing polygamy. Those who were resisting the law were punished. Peter was one who was openly opposing their instructions and was arrested for his work in conducting religious gatherings. He was imprisoned in a cave, but still supported and loved by those who knew him. He became a source of strength to his people and of annoyance to his captors. On July 7, 1945 Peter was murdered by his captors and died as a martyr for the faith.

Inspiration for East New Britain

"I am here because of those who broke their marriage vows and because of those who do not want the growth of God's kingdom", is one of Peter ToRot's quotes in jail. The historical life of Peter ToRot still has a great influence on the life of the youths, individuals, leaders, families and the communities of East New Britain. Our life has been shaped and inspired by

his life as a true model in strengthening our faith in the Church and in our family life in the communities. According to the history of Peter ToRot, he was tortured for strengthening the faith of his people, caring for the sick, conducting religious gatherings and fighting polygamy in society.

Iatapal village is one of the Catholic communities in East New Britain Province, few kilometers away from Rakunai Parish. That is the place where I come from, on the north coast road of the Gazelle district. It is a sub-parish under the main parish of Vunavavar. The community of Iatapal is known in East New Britain for their participation during big celebrations at Vunapope Catholic headquarters through choirs, culture and dances that showcase both local traditions and Church rites and practices. Iatapal is an entirely Catholic place.

Our Family

Going for church and praying the holy rosary is a normal daily activity for our families. Traditionally our families, with their cultural and traditional background, also help in providing the basic native ethical conducts for all members. Usually our parents always encourage us to carry around our rosaries and to pray the five decades of the rosary each day. Church people usually encouraged us with a familiar quote which says, “God always responds quickly to children’s prayers”. We were so inspired by that say that most of us children used to lead prayers during the month of Mary and other religious gatherings. Our life as children was dedicated to prayer as inspired by the life story of Peter ToRot.

The norms of conduct in place at that time, regarding relationships between our families and different clans, ensured a positive outcome in any case. Nuclear and extended family members grew up and lived in harmony within our family, clan and the environment. In whatever we do as a family or clan, traditionally or customarily, prayer is always the first step, whether we deal with bride price ceremonies, marriage ceremonies, initiation, reconciliation and other traditional activities in our society.

Youths and Vocations

Since our culture and traditions are still strong in our society, the youths work in unity with others in ministerial groups such as the Youth for Christ, Divine Mercy, and Legion of Mary. Not only the youths make up these groups, but also a number of adults, men and women, including parents, church leaders, employees or students.

Three of our young boys joined the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC) with one of them ordained this year on January 14th 2012 as a priest. Two others joined other Congregations. One is with the Diocese as a brother and another joined the Franciscan brothers. The rest of us live a normal Christian life, though sometimes influenced by modern ways: the progress of technology, the growing phenomenon of urbanization, mass media, etc.

The youths are very committed to their responsibilities in providing comfort and treating their parents with great respect. Those with ministerial responsibilities play their part in being accountable for healing the sick, the poor, and visiting and conducting programs from clans to clans or even meeting with congregations from other parishes in Rabaul in big gatherings like the youth days. This also positively influences the life of the couples. Peter Torot has a great influence on the life of the youths.

Peter ToRot healer of the sick.

People have been healed by using soil taken from the tomb of Blessed Peter ToRot and water taken from the cave nearby Rakunai parish which is known to be the cave where Peter ToRot was kept imprisoned before he was tortured. I for once had an experience, being given the holy water from the cave of Peter ToRot in the year 2007. I was doing my Grade 11 in St. Mary's Vuvu Secondary School during that time. I was very sick and was shivering having sleepless nights and with an increase in body temperature. What happen to me is that I was totally healed the next morning when I woke up after drinking from the water of Peter ToRot. It was a total and complete miracle for me which was extraordinary. It was unbelievable and I do trust that it was Peter ToRot that healed me through my belief in him. The holy water was given to me by one of the leaders of the Legion of Mary.

Some members of my family have experienced the same healing power from the soil and water of Peter ToRot. My mother also was suffering from backache and head. She applied the soil on her back and drunk the holy water and was healed after some days.

Marriage life

Most of the couples in Iatapal have a marriage life that is faithful and filled with the true love of God. Some of the broken marriages have been mended because of the calling of the members of these families to Peter ToRot in their meditation and prayers to rebind their marriage life to faithfulness. Because Peter ToRot was strong in faith in his marriage life and was fighting against polygamy, most marriages in East New are not polygamous.

I actually come from a family where my father divorced my mother and got married to a new wife leaving us behind. This marriage broke up because my father was so serious about running his business and not intending to attend church every Sunday or even other religious gatherings. When Church leaders or even his brothers and sisters would talk to him, he wouldn't care. Now he has nothing left, because everything has gone down the drain. Through our prayers to Peter ToRot to strengthen the faith of our family, he is now trying to come back to us his sons and daughters with our mother. I believe that Peter ToRot will strengthen him and bring him back to our family life; and he will be filled with the grace and faithfulness of God.

To the people of East New Britain and Papua New Guinea as a whole, Peter ToRot is like a true role model in our religious life. Life in the Church today is weakening because of the weakening of the family. Our life in our families is the backbone of true and faithful Christian life. Parents are not taking their responsibilities in shaping their children by passing on the religious tradition onto their lives. Many nowadays disregard the principles of the Church and choose the future of their children to be rich with money and not in faith for the Church and the will of God. Many problems are arising every now and then, caused by the youths; these problems are experienced nationwide as well as in the global scene: killings, rape, criminality, failed marriages, and other acts that are against God's will.

We must continue to pray and ask for peace, faithfulness and unity in the families of the world today, that they should listen to the Word of God, attend the sacrifice of the Mass, persevere in prayer, bring up their children in the Christian faith, cultivate the spirit, practice penance and thus implore God's grace in their lives. (*Madang, 29 July 2012*)