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# Joy In Suffering by Rose Hu

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*The continued serialisation of a story of conversion and heroic practice of the faith in Communist China*

## CHAPTER 17 : SILENCE WITH SOUND

At the end of the year 1956, the Communists' prisoner cells became less crowded as many prisoners were released. The Communists' policy was sometimes strict and sometimes relaxed, and people wondered what might happen next. At that time I was still imprisoned and isolated alone in my cell. The cell was terribly dim and humid with a heavy mouldy smell. It was incredible for a human being to survive under such inhumane conditions.

People didn't have any idea how I spent time in the prisoner cell. When a very "courageous" Catholic was just arrested, it was thought that she could resist all temptations. But a few days later, the police transferred her to a single cell that was exactly the same as mine. Next day, she said to the police officer, "I'll do whatever you say right away, but I beg you not to lock me in alone." Maybe I would have been weaker or might have become a betrayer sooner than she. Fortunately by that time, I had been arrested more than a year. Mother Chen and the other faithful had taught me how to pray in the cell. So with God's grace, I was able to live through each day. Eventually, I recognized that when I was far away from the worldly matters, Our Lord was nearest to me. I had never been so happy in my past life. I myself wondered how I could have spent one hundred and eighty days so peacefully.

It is human nature that nobody likes to be isolated all the time. Nevertheless, if it is in God's Providence, being isolated can bring us lots of benefits. We neither had to worry about our daily needs, nor did we need to deal with social activities. We could focus our time and energy to pray and meditate. The holy silence was like a clear mirror. I wanted to know myself thoroughly, so I had to look at the mirror more carefully. I saw how I had behaved in the past; I had kept myself busy being muddle-headed and ignorant. I was a self-willed girl. Sometimes I was like a wild horse running without rein. I did many things without supernatural intention. I went to the university in order to get a degree and a good job. I joined the Legion of Mary only to show off my ability at such a young age. I went to church every day to pray, just like going to order something in a restaurant. As if I ordered a steak, I would say to God, "I want it only rare, not medium, not well

done." I wanted everything done according to my own will, not God's will. What an ugly, poor sinner I was!

After examining my past life, I had to eliminate my worldly thoughts and deeds. Then I planted the seed of my spiritual life for the future. The seed grew up in silence. I was like the swallows gathering and getting ready to fly off the roof's ridge in silence. I glanced at the sky on a clear night. Though the sky seemed motionless in its appearance, everything was moving in God's order and getting ready for the coming dawn.

I had to turn off all the noise in my mind by means of dwelling in deep silence. In silence, I could drive out all the disturbances in my mind. I kept silent so that I could listen to God more attentively and could leave Him more space in my soul. I wished Our Lord could reform me as He pleased. Silence really meant moving on without shutting the door.

Thanks be to God. He chose me to be arrested so that I could pray silently alone while being in jail for six months. Meanwhile I had only been baptized for seven years. I couldn't even recite the Angelus prayer. I never read the Old or the New Testament. Indeed, I was just a beginner in understanding the Catholic religion. God didn't forsake me, a sinner. He used different ways to guide me in my prisoner cell. I was not good at reciting many prayers, but I had learned many Chinese and English love songs. I remembered a famous one called "Unchangeable Heart." The words in this song were beautifully written. I sang it to Our Lord every day: "Everything changes, but my heart and my love will never change." Actually, I had to keep the same faith as under the times of persecution.

There was another English love song that I often sang at home. Indeed, Our Lord is my lover. He loves me more than anyone else. Tears rolled down my cheeks when I sang, "I think of you every morning, dream of you every night..." Almighty and merciful God is really my beloved. St. Paul says, "To them that love God, all things work together unto good." I did everything for glorifying God. So, singing my love song to Him was good for my soul.



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Sometimes in the prisoner cell, I liked to recall some classical Chinese poems. This led me to think of the Catholic's moral virtue. In the old days, people paid more attention to moral virtue and showed more respect to seniors. But the Communist policy promoted acts of betrayal, unfaithfulness to the beloved ones, and so on. I reminded myself through reciting the classical poems that I should not be poisoned by these Communist errors.

I learned in geometry that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. I hoped that the distance between God and me was also a straight line. St. Therese of the Child Jesus' spiritual life was through a straight line to God. It's like a short cut. I was far behind all the saints. I was as unworthy as dust. I had to imitate St. Therese like a toddler, just beginning to learn how to walk with parents. Somebody told me an example about two toddlers learning how to walk. The first toddler walked properly, but he was tripped by a stone. His mother removed the stone. Then the toddler could keep on walking smoothly. The second toddler started walking and trembled. He didn't fall down, but he kept on trembling. I stumbled many times in my spiritual path. Nevertheless, I hoped that after many falls, God would remove the stone and allow me to keep walking properly.

God didn't choose me to be a great apostle. Being imprisoned in an isolated cell, and being His silent witness was the lightest

cross for me to carry. It would please God if I continued carrying the cross.

In the isolated cell, my mind was not distracted by many other thoughts. So, I had more memory space. I did not have any dictionary or reference book. Luckily, I remembered many English grammar rules by heart. It is difficult for us Chinese to learn English. I collected and edited different English grammar rules. I also found out a new way for Chinese to master English. After I was released in 1957, I recalled from my memory and wrote some notes entitled, "A new method to learn English as a second language." Thirty years later I became a high school English teacher. My new English learning method did work well. Many of my students won the championship in various competitions. I was elected the best teacher of the year in my city twice in three years. Nobody knew I learned English grammar in silence. Only God could make it happen to me.

I never regretted that I spent my youth for so many years for Him. I denied riches, fame, and vainglory in my early years of life. For those who had lost their faith, there was nothing except facing the walls day and night. Being imprisoned in an isolated cell is truly a paradise. You love God and God loves you. I am very blessed and I will praise God forever!

## CHAPTER 18 : AN INCREDIBLE DAY

It happened in Shanghai, at the Z-Ka-Wei District detention house in June, 1957. At that time the police department had released most of the prisoners, but one seminarian and I were still detained. The Communists' policy was getting much less strict, and the food was better than before. Our family was allowed to send some food every other week. The cell that I stayed in was brighter and bigger than the old one. I was satisfied with everything. I didn't expect them to release me. I realized that God created me only for Himself. It was His will that I stayed in this cell. I could praise and adore Him day and night. So, the prisoner cell was like my paradise. Where else would I like to go? But on June 3, 1957, at about 9 a.m., I was very surprised when a police guard took me to the interrogation office. I had not been called for a long time. I wondered if maybe the officer would use some new tactics. As soon as I went into the office, the officer said to me very briefly, "Hu Mei-yu, we are going to release you today." It was something totally new to me. Since I got arrested I heard more than a hundred times, "You'll get severe punishment," or "You'll be imprisoned all of your life." In the meantime, how could I believe such words? I said to him without any consideration, "You are joking, aren't you? You know very clearly that my

Catholic faith is the same now as when I was first arrested. Today it's because of the loose policy that you'll release me. Maybe next year the situation will be stricter. Then you'll put me into jail once again. We are not playing a drama. To face the reality, I don't want to be up and down, down and up. Please don't send me home now. I'd rather stay for good." Having heard what I said, the officer was dumbfounded. He kept silent for a minute; then he said, "I have never found such a fool who is not willing to go back home." Perhaps he was much impressed by me. He said to me directly, "Your mom is waiting for you in the lobby." I burst into laughter; my mom went to Hong Kong about ten months ago. It was totally a lie. I shook my head repeatedly, "I won't go home, period." "Go to the lobby right away." What should I do? Suddenly a smart idea came into my mind. "Good, if I find my mom there, I'm sure to go home. If not, I will go back to the cell."

I hurried to the lobby. Truly, my mom and nanny were gazing around. I called Mom at a distance; "Mom, Mom!" Then, I turned my head to the officer saying, "I will go home right now." I completely forgot that I had some clothing and daily supplies in the cell. Mom was in such a hurry saying, "Go home, go home at

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once.” But the officer said, “You have to go back to the office to sign the release paper and take all of your belongings from the cell.” Mom said, “We don’t care about the stuff, but anyway, you have to sign the paper.” Mom told my nanny to call two tricycles while waiting so that we could go home as soon as possible. When I was out of the detention house, Mom was already waiting for me in the tricycle. She was so excited that she didn’t know what to say. Mom told me that she arrived in Shanghai the day before. Though she was in Hong Kong for so many months, she couldn’t help missing both Mary and me. My second brother tried his best to stop Mom from coming back. Nevertheless, Mom didn’t change her mind. Eventually, she bought her plane ticket and came back. Mom was very pleased with herself, saying, “If I did not come here, how could the police release you?” We got home within ten minutes. My family had moved after my arrest. The new home was a gorgeous apartment. My sister Mary and I still shared one bedroom. There was double happiness in my family the same evening. Mom was back from Hong Kong, and I was released. Many guests came. The phonograph was playing the song, “Reunion of Our Family.” All of us were soaking in great joy. But, who knew what I was thinking about? Various thoughts came to my mind; I was feeling glad, sweet, frightened, and bitter. It was really beyond my expression.

I was glad to see Mom again, and it was sweet to meet so many family members. But, I worried if I might get arrested for the second time. How could Mom endure it? I felt bitter that I would have to leave such a comfortable life once again. I had whatever I liked at home and three servants to serve me. I could enjoy all this worldly happiness, but I would have to deny my faith. God gave me a very strict choice: either deny my faith or deny myself completely to gain eternal life. I asked God why He asked me to make decisions again and again. I had been prepared for so many years for my first arrest. I didn’t have any idea that in God’s Providence, I would have another choice to make. I needed to pray hard and follow Our Lord to the top of Calvary.

At night, I liked to sleep on the hardwood floor because the mattress was too soft for me. Mom said, “It is o.k. But, you have to remember not to follow the bad habits learned from imprisonment. There were some prisoners with bad habits. Remember that our family is well educated. You have been raised by many holy priests and nuns. You have to behave well yourself.” I kept these words in mind all of my life. Whenever and wherever I go, I always remember that I am God’s child.

The next day, Mom asked me to go to the police office to apply for a passport to Hong Kong. Mom knew that many Catholics

had got their passports after their release. My second brother insisted that I go to Hong Kong as soon as possible; if not, I would surely be arrested again. Definitely, I expected to go to Hong Kong immediately. I went to the police department early the next morning. Many police recognized me. Everyone asked me if I was going to the cell once again. I answered them with a big smile, “This time I ask you to give me approval for going to Hong Kong.” They were astonished by my request. They thought that since I just got out of prison the day before, it was ridiculous to go to Hong Kong the next day. They assumed that a daughter would like to stay with her mom in most cases.

From June 4 to August 30, I could not remember how many times I went to the police department, but they rejected the approval of my passport application repeatedly. They allowed my mom to stay in China for three months only. If she stayed more than three months, she had to apply for another passport. If she couldn’t get her passport again, she would suffer in China once again. I had to make up a story to push her to go back to Hong Kong, the sooner the better. I said to my mom, “You go first; if I get approved, I’ll go on my own. Just ask my second brother to pick me up at the border.”

On August 30, Mom left Shanghai with good hope that I would be in Hong Kong very soon. But I knew very clearly that there was no possibility to go because the policy was getting stricter. Those who stayed here were waiting to be shut in the cage for punishment.

This was the last time that I saw my mom off at the airport. Mom had a sweet dream, but I had a different thought. It was quite difficult to welcome my second arrest. All the worldly things around me, including human respect and all the vainglory ... lose, gain, and then lose again. I was not an actress; I was not on the stage to play a soap opera. It was a reality. When I sat on the comfortable sofa at home, looking around at what I had, I realized that it was my home. I was one of the owners of the house, and yet it was not home. Who knew when the police would come? Then, I would become a prisoner again. For the first arrest in 1955, I had prepared for many years. God provided me boundless grace. But in 1957, so many bishops, priests, and countless Catholics gave up their faith to avoid suffering. Would I follow their way? No, definitely not. Our home is in Heaven. This transitory life would pass away so fast. If I were reluctant to leave the world and I lost my faith, how could I face God on my judgment day? We can’t serve two masters. So, I decided to serve God above all, no matter what would happen to me! I prayed hard and waited and waited for my second arrest daily!