

## [Gregorian music led me to Christ, says Gaurav](#)

by Nirmala Carvalho

Here is the story of conversion of a young Gujarati Hindu, who went from fascination with sacred music to discover the love of Christ on the Cross. Now he wants to become a priest and missionary.

Mumbai (AsiaNews) – Towering at 6 ft 3 in (191 cm), Gaurav literally looks down on people. This young Gujarati convert was captivated by Christian music of the Renaissance era, and choral music awakened in him a quest for beauty.

Gaurav Shroff was born on 30 December 1972 at Holy Family Hospital, New Delhi (“I joke with my parents that ‘Holy Family’ should have been a clue to my future!”). His early childhood was spent in Bethesda, MD (a suburb of Washington DC), when his father was working for the World Bank.

The family returned to India when he was around 6 years old, and he attended St Xavier’s Loyola Hall, a school in Ahmedabad where he joined the school choir. His only knowledge of Christians was that they did not speak Gujarati or Hindi fluently and that they buried the dead, something that intrigued him.

Describing his own religious upbringing, Gaurav said, “My father worked at the World Bank and later was the editor of the Economic Times. My mother was the first woman district collector of Gujarat. While there was an emphasis was on traditional Indian values, they espoused secular humanist ideals and values. However, it was from my grandmother that I learned the ancient stories of the Hindu religion—the epics of the Mahabharata, the Ramayana and the Bhagavad Gita.”

“It was aesthetics,” Gaurav said. “The beauty of sacred music held me spellbound at my first ever experience of the Eucharist at St Xavier’s College, Mumbai on 15 August, Indian Independence Day and the Feast of the Assumption. The sublime music of the Mass undoubtedly assured me of God’s presence; the Gregorian chants elevated my spirits, creating in me a sense of awe for the Sacred. I was instinctively drawn by the aesthetic beauty of the Eucharist and this experience filled my heart with immense joy.”

This young man, an idealistic, Westernized 18-year-old upper caste Hindu, who was trained in Hindustani classical music, began studying Church history, in an attempt to understand “what could have inspired the genius of great musicians to compose some of the greatest classical works in honour of the Divine and place their art at the service of the liturgy.”

Gaurav spent hours poring over books at St Xavier's Library, teaching himself Latin from the pre-Vatican II Missals to learn and understand the Latin Gregorian chants: the Credo, the Gloria, the other parts of the Mass.

So fascinated was he by the sacred music of the Eucharist, that he attended Midnight Mass the same year at Holy Name Cathedral, accompanied by his father. As he became increasingly interested in the solemn liturgies, his friends invited him to the Easter Triduum the following year, with the simple directive not to receive Holy Communion.

Therefore, in 1991, Gaurav went for the Mass of the Lord's Supper at Holy Name Cathedral. "Nothing had prepared me for the 'Washing of the Feet'. I watched with amazement as Archbishop Simon Pimenta disrobed and knelt down, washing the feet of 12 men. I had never witnessed such humility in a spiritual leader." He began reflecting on the nature of these priests, this servant leadership, which was an alien concept.

At the Good Friday service, since his friends had only barred him from communion, he went for the Veneration of the Cross. "As I knelt down and kissed the Cross, I vividly remember the clear voice in my heart saying to me: 'I died for you,' and I began to weep unashamedly, and though I did not understand what it meant, I was certain, that the Crucified Christ loved me. Then it wasn't about music anymore, I wanted to learn more about this Jesus. Either Jesus was completely crazy or he was God."

He began reading everything about the Catholic faith, the Bible and regularly went for Sunday Mass. In 1993, Gaurav went to a Jesuit retreat praying alone at night before the Blessed Sacrament. "I strongly felt the presence of the Divine, the deep love of God for me, and in the darkness, I was illuminated: My life belonged to Jesus, to know him, to love him and to serve him. This was my mission and vocation. I felt called to be a priest."

"I also had a very serious talk with my family about my decision to become Catholic and be baptised. 'As long as you do not sever family ties and do not go aggressively proselytizing, you have our Blessings!' was my father's response."

On August 15 1994, the Feast of the Assumption, Gaurav was baptised at St Peter's Church, Bandra, surrounded by 20 friends, Hindus, Catholics, and Muslims.

Two weeks after his baptism, Gaurav arrived in the United States into an intellectual climate that bred suspicion of the Catholic Church. "God was always faithful, and under the protection of His Blessed Mother, I persevered in the Faith."

“The next four years of my life were the time that God allowed me to see my reality; but even in crises, the calling to the priesthood hauntingly persisted. So, in order to attempt to discern God’s plan in my life, in 1998, I started a second Masters in Religious Studies, also at the University of South Carolina, and received an MA in Religious Studies, with a concentration in New Testament, in 2001.”

That same year, he started work full time at the St. Thomas More Catholic Student Center at the University of South Carolina as the Associate Campus Minister, where he was responsible for the faith formation of the small University parish. His zeal for evangelisation led him in 2006 to the novitiate of the Paulist Fathers (an American religious order), which took him to Washington, DC.

“In 2006, my father was diagnosed with late stage lung cancer. I always had a close relationship with him, and this was devastating. This was just before I entered the novitiate, and I got to spend a few months with him before I left for Washington. God's generosity knows no bounds and I was able to be in India for the last two weeks of his life.”

In 2007, he discerned that God was calling him to the diocesan priesthood and so he moved back to the South, and applied to the Archdiocese of Atlanta. After some pastoral work in the diocese, he was sent to Mount St. Mary’s Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland, in 2008.

Currently, he is finishing the first of four years of Theological Studies at the seminary, and “God willing, I will be ordained to the diaconate in 2012 and the priesthood in 2013, for the Archdiocese of Atlanta.”

“The intervention of God at the foot of the cross in 1991 changed the course of my life forever. Evangelisation and the vocation of the laity will be the central passion of my ministry as a diocesan priest. I see my future role as someone who leads, sanctifies, teaches the laity, not as passive recipients”, I shall be “someone who calls out their gifts, talents, charisms, so that the Christ's lay faithful can be equipped to bring the Gospel to the world, and share in the Church's mission.”

“I hope, through my calling, to proclaim the Love of Christ Crucified to the people and to bring our people to connect with Jesus Christ, to get to know Him in a deep, intimate relationship,” for “he is the source of all love and happiness.”