



# Suc in astum

OUR REFLECTIONS ON THE LIFE AND FAITH  
OF CORNELIUS CARDINAL SIM



SPLENDOUR  
PROJECT

truth + beauty + goodness

# Suc in altum

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OF CORNELIUS CARDINAL SIM

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*In loving memory*



**CORNELIUS CARDINAL SIM**

16 Sep 1951 – 29 May 2021

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## PREAMBLE

We are a community of friends on mission, and we call ourselves the Splendour Project. For this past decade, we have been participating in the mission of the Holy Catholic Church by collaborating with one another on faith formation, evangelisation, and discipleship endeavours. His Eminence, Cornelius Cardinal Sim, was our spiritual father. Many of the members in our community enjoyed close and very personal friendships with him. He made it a point to catch up with us whenever he was in our nook of the world. He gathered with us at our reunions, ate with us, joked with us, taught us, worked with us, and loved us. A few of us travelled widely with him and have probably flown in airplanes with him more than anyone else has done so throughout his lifetime.

And now, His Eminence has completed his earthly journey of life and faith. There are things to be said of him that might have come across as awkward had they been said while he was still alive.

As his spiritual children, it is our intention in this booklet to document some very valuable lessons that we have learned from his life and faith. This collation of reflections is not meant to be a eulogy; as is apparent, there is already a whole lot of that being published on social media, and rightly so. But so far, few have actually shared with the public how their lives have been transformed in terms of virtue through their experience of the late Cardinal's life. So it is our aim, as his friends, to do that in this simple booklet.

On the morning of 29 May 2021, the People of God woke up to a different world: a world without the physical presence of Cornelius Cardinal Sim in it. Friends who loved the late Cardinal lived our lives at different physical, spiritual, and emotional distances from where he was, but he was nevertheless a significant figure in our lives.

Just in October of 2020, we were so greatly rejoicing at the announcement from the Holy See that Bishop Sim had been elevated into the College of Cardinals. The news brought us such elation because of how fitting this public recognition was relative to the virtues of the man that we knew him to be. As it turned out, the cardinalate of His Eminence was not meant to be a long one. It was perhaps meant to be just for a brief moment so as to inspire those whom he would be leaving behind. All the same, this elevation was, for many of us, a wonderful celebration of the new Cardinal's faith and faithfulness.

We are not willing for his departure from this earthly life to be perceived or remembered merely as the loss of a very nice fellow who will be sorely missed. That would be wrong. Those of us who had been privileged to enjoy his presence and friendship, even if only for a brief duration in the course of our lifetimes, need to remember him as much more than just an affable man. We would be pitiable if the holiness and virtues so observable in the life of the late Cardinal did not in some way transform or at least challenge us to become better people. Even in death, his life challenges each of us to something deeper, and the only way we can make good our friendship with him is by living up to his dream for us, to see us pursue holiness and love for the Gospel the way he did. In his friendship with each of us, the late

Cardinal had given and sacrificed too much for his life and its accompanying message to be taken banally.

The life of Cornelius Cardinal Sim is a parable that we want to pass on to our children and grandchildren so that they too may be inspired by him as we have been. This booklet, we hope, will aid this intention. Although he never saw himself as the Saviour of mankind, and consistently pointed people to Christ his Saviour, in some analogous way we have come to understand how it felt for Saint John the Evangelist to have said of Jesus, "we have seen with our own eyes... we have watched and touched with our own hands". If the late Cardinal was an incarnational presence of Christ in our midst, then our encounters with him demand a transformation of our own lives. All the meals we have eaten with him, the walks we have taken with him, and the trips we have made with him, among the many other things he had done in our midst, must result in deeper communion with Christ and His Church and greater commitment to the cause of the Gospel. The reflections that we pen down in this booklet somehow force us to consider if this conversion in each of our lives has taken place, and if not, what we shall do about it.

We have made it a point to consistently pray for our dear Cardinal for 100 days upon his passing. After these 100 days, we are now releasing this book. Our prayers will continue and our mourning will gradually erode with time, but our love for him and gratitude for our encounters with him will be carried with us into eternity.

The Splendour Community  
6 September 2021



## DEACON DR SHERMAN KUEK, OFS

I think that all of us who were friends of Cardinal Cornelius Sim were truly privileged to have experienced frequent encounters with him. I personally consider my own friendship with His Eminence to have been, yes, serendipitous, but also a great grace given by God for me to receive impactful spiritual guidance to shape my own understanding of life, faith, and ministry.

### Obedience to the Faith of the Church

I learned from the Cardinal's ministry that having a string of academic degrees is not what matters most in one's practice of the Catholic faith (although His Eminence certainly did not lack his own share of academic accolades; but the point is, he neither depended on them to affirm his own Christian identity nor flashed them to assert his intellectual dominance over others). For him, the practice of the Catholic faith required a sense of profound obedience; it required one to always be in a posture of contemplation and pondering to make sense of that which we have embraced in obedience to the faith of the Sacred Magisterium.

Some people who fancied themselves as being intellectual would say, "But I'm a rational and intelligent person; how can I believe something before understanding it?" Well, here was a man who was utterly superior in intellect, and yet his practice of the faith was a living model of how a faith that seeks understanding is indeed possible for

a person of true intellectual and spiritual depth. Every now and then, he would use the dictum *sentire cum ecclesia* ("to think with the Church") to express his approach in the way he lived his faith.

I learned from him, contrary to the common notion that truly intelligent people can never really embrace the Catholic faith in a thinking way, that it takes a man of true wisdom, depth, and intellect to embrace what he may yet be able to fully understand. It is such depth of spiritual



*Deacon Sherman with Cardinal Cornelius  
holding up a first-class relic of  
Saint John Chrysostom in Istanbul*

wisdom that will eventually bring one to the point of understanding what he has already embraced in faith. The Cardinal's way of speaking about the teachings of the Church and making sense of them was always thoughtfully crafted and presented with great elegance and magnificence, but it was to be appreciated only by those who were truly listening, for he would not impose this duty of listening on those who would not do it by choice. For those who bothered to listen, it was obvious that his gift of intellectual and spiritual depth emerged from an interior life with God, not necessarily from years of formal education or university degrees.

## **Our Lives Are Not About Ourselves**

I think everyone who was close to the Cardinal knows that he considered his priestly ministry as an opportunity to offer spiritual friendship to those whom he encountered. Despite being a bishop for a significant part of his ministry in the Church, he had an almost absolute indifference towards the pedestal on which people might have wanted him to stand. He wanted to remain on the ground with people of all backgrounds. Certainly, he had some friendships that were more special than others, but this was not of his own choice; it was, I think, based on how people themselves defined the place that he had in their lives and the magnitude of spiritual influence they allowed him to have on them.

I had travelled on many trips through a very big part of Europe, the Middle East, and Korea with the late Cardinal. Even as he was undergoing treatment for his illness, I was discussing future trips to India and Japan with him on the phone; it was my way of giving him something to look forward to. During our travels, he was never one to expect special episcopal treatment. In fact, he disdained being specially treated because it would separate him from the people on the ground. He wanted to be with them, to be one of them. He treasured the experiences of the ordinary life. In fact, he once told me (during a coffee drinking session by the streets of Istanbul) that his life had been a series of serendipitous experiences which emerged from ordinary situations and circumstances, and so he cherished such ordinariness. He did not believe in highly engineered and staged experiences, which essentially is what happens when we elevate important people in social situations, which he categorically disliked.



*Cardinal Sim having snacks with us,  
together with our guide and dear friend  
in Turkey, Ahmet*

Cardinal's life has shown me that our lives are not about ourselves. Our lives are meant to be lived for the Lord, with love for others, so that we become signposts that point them to the reality of God's love. Allowing oneself to remain on a pedestal is the best way to remove ourselves from the lives of other people so that they admire us, hold their

torches to us, and forget about heaven. If we want people to know God, to love Him, and to serve Him, we must be a living parable of His Son that they can experience in a personal way in their lives.

## Venturing Into the Deep

Perhaps the most important lesson or principle that I have learned through my friendship with the late Cardinal is the motto found in his coat of arms: *duc in altum* ("put out into the deep"). He was never content with going through life like it was, in his own words, "business as usual". He saw in everyone a potential to be more, to do more, and to give more. He deeply desired that Catholics should not just be "spectators", but that they should make it a way of life to contribute their "time, talent, and treasure" to the Church. For the sake of the Gospel, he believed that we should always creatively

attempt different ways to reach the world with the message of God's salvation in Jesus Christ, His Son.



*Together with Cardinal Cornelius in Turkey, explaining to our pilgrims the significance of the letters to the Seven Churches of Revelation*

In a way, I have always embraced this principle in my own life, and perhaps this was what made our friendship so deep. And yet, the resistance that I constantly face (within as well as without myself) in embracing this

principle as a way of life has always bothered me. It was his impetus and constant encouragement that gave me the liberation I needed to not be intimidated by resistance. Therefore, I would say that his biggest contribution to my life and diaconal ministry is a constant awareness that I should always expect such resistance without giving up putting out into the deep. Once he told me, "If somebody is not happy, it is a sign that you're doing something right". My friendship with this man has given me a courage that will last me a lifetime.

The earthly departure of our late Cardinal, our spiritual father, and our friend is certainly a cause for grief and a sense of loss. I personally will be needing a long time to heal from this pain of loss. But this loss is not an end for me; it represents an even stronger

determination to continue running the race that he has successfully run, and to continue diligently sharing in the mission to which he devotedly committed himself. It is not the end; it is just a new beginning. The late Cardinal's mission is not finished; it will continue in different forms and expressions, and we who are truly his friends will carry out this mission for the glory of the Lord whom the late Cardinal loved with his life.

We were his friends, and we still are.



*Accompanying Cardinal Cornelius after his surgery in Kuala Lumpur in early 2020*











## MOTHER GRACE DEOSING, FSIC

It was during my tenure as the Mother General of the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (FSIC) that I first met His Eminence, Cornelius Cardinal Sim. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia meets twice a year and those were the times we had the opportunity to meet and chit chat. I cannot quite remember how we first started talking to each other, but I do recall that my first impression of him was that he was an easy-going Bishop. He was approachable, friendly and a simple man, so much so that I found myself comfortably talking to him in no time. Furthermore, he preferred to speak in Bahasa Malaysia with me and we became good friends from there. He was truly a humble, respectful, gentle, soft-spoken, caring, and loving person.

Cornelius Cardinal Sim was a kind-hearted man. He was generous with his time and presence and had hardly any regard to his title and position. I agree with much of Father Arin Sugit's sharing about Cardinal during the Requiem Mass as I have experienced them for myself. For example, he meant what he said without beating about the bush but did so in a gentle manner. His deep words could sometimes be hard to swallow and ache the heart as he spoke the truth. Some might even feel offended because of this. But I am sure that most people who have heard him speak in seminars or in any sessions would find the message he was conveying to be inspiring and touching, and they would benefit from that.

Cornelius Cardinal Sim loved to attend functions so that he could meet the people. There were a few times where he joined the diocesan celebrations in Sabah. He made it a point to spend time with the parishioners and one would often find him among the youth. This was especially after his meal where he would come and mix around with the people and have conversations with them.



*Cardinal Cornelius with the current and the previous Mothers General of the FSIC*

I clearly remember that he came to attend my Ruby Jubilee celebration as a Franciscan Sister. He was supposed to be elsewhere in the evening after the Mass at the Cathedral. I invited him anyway to join my small celebration dinner at Stella Maris Convent, Tanjung Aru. He turned up and participated in the programmes that we had organised – singing and dancing the Joget and Sumazau. Because he was not shy at all, we all loosened up as well.

In fact, during my birthday last year in 2020, he sent me the biggest cake I had ever received for my

birthday. The Sisters at the convent were saying that the cake was especially delicious and special since the person who sent it was all the way in Brunei. He was suffering from cancer and it was during the pandemic when we were not able to visit each other, but he was still warm-hearted and thoughtful. After sending my thanks to him, he replied that since he could not come over to celebrate my birthday physically, he thought of trying another method of sending his well-wishes.



*The biggest birthday cake ever!*

For twelve years as a Mother General, he had invited me to visit Brunei countless times, but unfortunately, I could not fulfil his wish due to unavoidable circumstances. I was just talking with another Sister recently about how he really wanted to have a religious community in Brunei. He would invite the FSIC to Brunei every year to organise vocation seminars. I think this is one of his passions and deepest desires – to have a religious community in his Vicariate. There was finally one who responded to the call and she is currently waiting for the opportunity to begin her journey toward becoming a religious.



*Cardinal Cornelius joining in the anniversary celebrations of the Franciscan Sisters in Sabah*

Before he headed to Taiwan, he said to his congregation in his final homily, "When God opens doors, it is best to walk through them". God had indeed opened this door for him, and he has chosen to walk through it. Nonetheless, he has sown the seeds and ploughed the soil. I trust that he is happy to see at least this one seed sprouting. Although he could not see the fruits of his hard work during his earthly life, this sprouting seed is the beginning of a hope that the other seeds will continue to bloom and grow.

Now, I have lost a good and faithful friend; a shepherd who was after the heart of Jesus, the Good Shepherd himself. Someone who was down-to-earth and who would always make time for his people. I am already feeling this ache although I rarely get to meet and talk to him. I cannot imagine the grief and pain of those who were close to him. Yet, this is God's plan for him and for us.



# JAMES SHAK & JOCELYN YEO

Some people make the world special just by being in it.



*James and Jocelyn visiting Cardinal Cornelius in Brunei*

And where do we even begin to talk about a life so precious and divine? There are many good people but only a handful of them would radiate a genuine demeanour in a way that you know their intentions are nothing but pure.

The passing of Cardinal Cornelius is felt by many and is missed by many more. Although he was ill, many remained hopeful for his

full recovery. Others were prepared for the worst, but no amount of preparation would be sufficient for us to meet his eventual demise. A sense of great remorse, helplessness, and void fills us. It is like the setting of the sun at dusk. Remembering his approachability and smiles, friendliness and humility, exacerbates the pain from an already grieving heart. He has left behind a legacy of godly virtues and it is by way of these virtues that we will remember him. Through these virtues, we will honour him and attempt to fill the emptiness that we are experiencing.

Although I had been friends with the late Cardinal Sim for a long time, we had only got closer during the last ten years. It began with a casual chat in Kota Kinabalu at the end of 2012 during one of the many diocesan events. This



*Pilgrimage to Greece and Turkey with  
Cardinal Cornelius in 2017*

simple conversation had opened doors to many more engagements for both our communities. Cardinal Sim was most prominent for his involvement with the youth. He was not only a teacher to them but also a father figure who made a difference in each of their lives.

Knowing how close he was with his youths in Brunei, I sensed that he would be the perfect person to run a retreat for my confirmation class.



*Pilgrimage to Greece and Turkey with  
Cardinal Cornelius in 2017*

This was not a difficult task for Cardinal Sim because he had always been a very affable person. He always wore a smile as if he had no worries in his life. Anyway, to cut the story short, he accepted my request without hesitation, but it was of course subject to his availability. I received a firm reply from him within a week after his return to Brunei at that time. It was 2013 then and for the next two years, he and his team would continue to help

in organising retreats for the confirmands in Labuan. It was an honour to witness first-hand his works for the youth and seeing him be with the youth, and it was clearly a wise decision to have him on-board these retreats. The retreats not only fostered new relationships between him and the youths, it also brought us closer as it was so easy to grow on him.



I have learned much while working with him on these retreats. It was already a lesson itself when observing the way he works. I was privileged to be given the chance to understand his perspectives and worldviews. Sometimes while talking to him, one would wonder if he was actually listening. This would cause anyone to want to stop mid-sentence just to check if you still have his attention. But in reality, he was indeed listening attentively and digesting everything that was being said. This was evident as your input would later be translated in his presentations. It did not matter if you were just blabbering about, because he always manages to catch every little detail.

Sometimes when we talk to each other or when sharing our thoughts, one would expect an immediate reaction and we tend to get offended or disappointed when there is no prompt response. Cardinal Sim, in his subtle way, showed that there are many ways to skin a cat. His assuring words, calm demeanour and patience are the many takeaways I had gathered from him when he was conducting retreats all these years. His responses, albeit being something you might not want to hear, were never uttered in a way that was offensive. Rather, his words would open one's heart and mind to dimensions which would never have crossed your thoughts before.

His passion and love for the young ones was truly an eye opener. He never considered himself a bishop when he was with the youth. He behaved more like a father to them all. He would very often say to me, "Joyce, these are our future leaders, we have to help them! If not us, siapa lagi?" Isn't that true? If not us, who else? It was precisely this sincere spirit that could be felt anywhere he went, and the youth got used to him quite quickly. You would see him as part of

their 'gang' because he fits in well and he makes an effort to understand their circumstances without prejudice. Cardinal Sim taught us that this is the true and only legacy we should leave behind – not the many titles and accolades, but our Catholic faith.



*Much laughter during our Splendour community gathering in 2018*

Everywhere Cardinal went, he was sure to leave traces of his warmth and spirit. My husband, James, also shared moments with our beloved Cardinal, and is forever grateful to be given the chance to spend time getting to know him. Whenever Cardinal Sim was in Labuan, one of his must-haves was curry noodles. The many eating sessions between Cardinal and James bloomed into a bonding session. It was during their curry mee sessions that James witnessed first-hand Cardinal's passion for our faith and how he had made it his

own mission to spread the word in his own calm and gentle ways. Mahatma Gandhi did say, "In a gentle way, you can shake the world".

## Suffering and Surrender to God

When the news of Cardinal's illness surfaced, we could not have been more broken-hearted. Despite his sufferings, he extended his comfort to me as I (Jocelyn) was also diagnosed with cancer in the beginning of 2020. Our sufferings had caused our friendship to blossom into an even stronger bond because we were able to share the experiences that we were all too familiar with.

Cardinal Sim taught me to embrace my sufferings and entrust everything to the Lord. This action may seem simple, but we are only human. There are times where we would stray and take matters into our own hands, disregarding the existence of our Almighty Father. Cardinal Sim reminded me to let go of my frustration and eagerness to try and alter situations. He also taught me to embrace what was happening and then work my way through it. If you cannot begin to embrace your present situation, how would you even get to the next step? Even our beloved Cardinal had his own moments. He told me, "I had to really surrender things to Our Lord since then or I couldn't move on". He also said, "We can't always choose the path we take so I guess I will trust the Lord to guide me in this stage of my journey".

James and I once had to make a short trip to Brunei to attend a funeral. Cardinal was present, but he was already struck with the pain of his disease at the time. Although he was not well, he still made

it a point to stand at the church entrance to welcome the bereaved family. That was strength in itself. James had mentioned to me that the sight of Cardinal standing with his walking stick on that day is still very clear in his mind. Cardinal stayed throughout the entire ceremony, and we had the honour of having breakfast with him at the Rectory. Through it all, he never talked about his sufferings, never acknowledged his pain, and never radiated any negative energy even though we knew very well he was in pain. We believe that he kept his spirits high because he did not want those around him to worry for him.

It made me reflect that, if you do not let go of your worldly endeavours, would there be any space left for God to work in His ways? His words indeed serve as a reminder to put our trust in God. If you are suffering or just need a sense of calmness, I believe Cardinal Sim would love to share Psalm 131 with you, which helped him to cope with his own suffering and pain:

- 1 My heart is not proud, Lord,  
my eyes are not haughty;  
I do not concern myself with great matters,  
or things too wonderful for me.
- 2 But I have calmed and quieted myself,  
I am like a weaned child with its mother;  
like a weaned child I am content.
- 3 Israel, put your hope in the Lord  
both now and forevermore.

## Braving Through the Storm

*“Leave what is outside my competence to the One who knows what’s going on.” – Cornelius Cardinal Sim*



*Exhortations delivered by Episcopal Advisor, Mission Advisor, and Lay Advisor of the Splendour community during our gathering in 2018*

We journey through life and become lost at times because worldly situations would often cloud our vision. Clarity can be achieved with just a prayer away. Prayer is the most powerful tool. It is the moment for you to truly have deep conversations with God and it is also the time to better know yourself and the God of all creation.

Cardinal Sim often reminded me that “God always has plans we know nothing about”. What more can we do than to fully entrust Him with all our being, and seek His guidance on our paths? Cardinal Sim has taught me to always be thankful and grateful for being blessed with good times, and even bad times. Despite struggling

from the pains of side effects from his ongoing treatment, Cardinal Sim carried the same enthusiasm in his work. He braved through the agony, physically and mentally, that he might be able to continue to serve. Cardinal devoted his life to service – serving the poor, serving the youth, and serving the Church. Even in the later stages of his treatment, he occupied himself with preparation works to conduct retreats for Catechists. Nothing stood in his way of service, and this makes him even more admirable.

Even though he was indeed suffering, he still garnered the strength to provide comfort and assurance to others. Cardinal Sim said to me, “May God give us who suffer from illness renewed hope in His love and mercy”. Because of his encouragement, I was able to live day by day with renewed hope by entrusting all my circumstances to the Lord. I was also able to fully embrace my own hardships.

During his final homily, his last words were, “The Lord has opened the door for me for which I must pass through”. Passed through the door he did, and he did so obediently. However, he did not shut the door behind him. Instead, he beckons us to remain steadfast in faith, to be an ambassador of truth, and to be a living example in fulfilling the Lord’s commandments, until the time when we too will pass through the door into His heavenly bosom. As we wait for our time to come, let us learn to be ever thankful to God like Cardinal Sim, who said, “We must be grateful for the many good times He gave us before”. And of course, he was a joyful and loving person, not only towards mankind but also animals, especially towards cats! That is how we should remember him.

## SAMSON KOH & HELEN ENONG

The death of our late Cornelius Cardinal Sim was a sad news for all of us who have come to know him through different encounters. Like these people, my husband (Samson) and I too had a personal encounter and shared a special bond with him. The first time we met Cardinal was when my husband and I went for a Splendour formation-



*Samson with Cardinal Cornelius during the pilgrimage to Rome and Eastern Europe in 2016*

based pilgrimage trip with him to Rome and Eastern Europe in September/October 2016. The trip was such a pleasant and joyous opportunity to get to know him and to journey with him in person. It was indeed a special encounter. This was especially since it was the Year of Mercy. We felt very blessed.

At the beginning of the trip, we were at first intimidated by his presence since he was a well-known bishop. However, we later found out that his personality did not reflect the status he carried because he exuded a calm and friendly persona. He

also loved to mix around and meet new people everywhere he went. He was curious to get to know every individual he encountered to the extent of wanting to know their life story and background. Being the friendly person that he was, he made the first move to approach us and started by conversing with us about casual topics and we gradually became more comfortable with him. To my astonishment, he spoke to me in Iban when we were conversing. Iban is my native language in Sarawak, so I could not hold my amazement when I learned that he was able to speak many native languages. We were proud of him for this. Eventually, we started to approach him more often.

It was during our conversations that I learned that he conducted many Masses with a variety of native languages that he had learned from the people he met. This was especially for those villages where English was not their main language. He conducted Masses for those people so that they would not feel left out and that they would not experience any language barrier. We thought that this was very nice of him to do so. That was how we came to know him as a very loving person.

Aside from that, we loved him even more when we found out that he was an ordinary person who loved the outside world and would capture memories by taking countless pictures of the scenery and of people. As mentioned, we were initially intimidated by his status, but he had shown that he was not intimidating at all. He was a quiet and calm person whereby he would listen to Deacon Sherman's talks attentively during the pilgrimage, much like the rest of us. During



certain moments, we would almost forget he was a bishop, but just an ordinary person, who like us was curious about our Lord's life.



*Helen with Cardinal Cornelius and two Franciscan Sisters during the pilgrimage to Rome and Eastern Europe in 2016*

Despite being an ordinary person just like one of us, Cardinal Sim was different whenever he was presiding over any Mass. He was a serious and committed man when he was on the holy ground of the Church. He had the ability to capture one's attention during Mass and would make us feel like we were all one in the presence of the Lord.

Cardinal Sim was a model for the youths, and he loved to be around children. He was often invited by our local parish in Labuan to help the youth to strengthen their faith before receiving their Sacrament of Confirmation by conducting seminars, talks, or

workshops for them. Thus, a special bond was created between him and the youths whenever he conducted his sessions. His influence had undoubtedly impacted other countries outside of Brunei, and Malaysia was no exception. He made it a point to never turn down our invitations no matter how busy his schedule was.

He created a friendship with the youth and in turn, he earned their admiration, respect and love everywhere he went. In fact, the impact he had on them was so significant to the point that most of his students would eventually decide to become his young disciples. They were inspired by the talks he provided, touched by his kindness and understanding, and were comfortable with him due to his easy-going personality. He was such an extraordinary human being that everywhere he went, he was loved by the children and they would even decide to follow in his footsteps.

Despite being appointed with the title of Cardinal for only a few months, we deeply believe that the Cardinal title is rightfully his since the beginning. God works in wonders, and we believe that this was all in God's plan for him from the beginning before his departure from his earthly life. We believe that he has accomplished the purpose and duty that God has given him. Not only as a Bishop, but as a Cardinal as well even though it was only for a short period of time. He has served God for a sufficient period to make the necessary impact on all the people who have followed him or have encountered him during his life. In fact, he has provided them the purpose to seek God's plan deep inside their hearts, especially for those who have trouble searching for their purpose.

He is an inspiration and a model for everyone regardless of their age. He continued to move forward despite the inevitable pains from the sickness he had to carry for the last few years of his life. We are struck by how strong he was for carrying such a heaviness alone, both mentally and physically. And yet, he continued to shine in imperturbable energy under exceptionally difficult circumstances.



*Cardinal Cornelius loved to take photographs to capture significant moments.*

Cardinal went through a life filled with trials and tribulations like any faithful follower of God. Nevertheless, he still walked through this life with dignity and passion. We admire him, for he never complained even though he knew

this journey of his would be a tough one. As the Bible says in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you will not have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life". He has faithfully served and worked for our Lord on earth, and now, he has followed the light that leads him to heaven.

# RAYMOND HEW & GRACE KANG

## Humility

What struck us the most from our encounters with the late Cardinal is his humility. He was a surprisingly down-to-earth man and was easily approachable although he had authority and influence. This humility which he displayed reflects very much Christ Himself. Many were naturally drawn to him and loved him as they recognised Christ's humility in him. He was truly a father figure to his flock.



*Cardinal Cornelius giving some closing comments at Deacon Sherman's talk in Brunei*

## A Father Figure

As I reflect upon this virtue of the late Cardinal, it affirms what I (Raymond) believe about how I should be as the head of the family. It takes great courage to humble oneself, especially as the one who holds the authority in a community. Seeing how the late Cardinal was able to do it with ease encourages me to do the same as well. This has helped me to be a better father to my children and a better spouse to

my wife. It reminds me that, even though I am the head of the family, I am willing to be corrected.

Aside from that, we were able to see the late Cardinal's humorous side too. I believe his humorous side was a natural product of his humility. As a father and husband, I am convinced that it is paramount to



*Humorous moments*

be able to find humour in our everyday life. I can be strict with my children, but I should remember to laugh with them too. Just as how the late Cardinal taught the Catholic faith with unwavering fervour, he never missed a beat when it comes to having a good laugh.

Like Christ, the late Cardinal was a father figure model for me to emulate. He was a very endearing man, and he undoubtedly brought joy to those who have met him in various ways. Humility, joyfulness, and respect. These are the qualities I hope to follow in my own vocation as a father and husband – to love as Christ has loved.

## Faithfulness

Looking at the late Cardinal's life, we are also able to see his steadfast faithfulness towards the Catholic faith. His life very much reflects his trust in God. Wherever and whenever he was needed, he would tend to his people, bringing Christ to them. As we reflect further upon his life and death, it is clear that nothing in this earthly life of ours belongs to us. During his last moments, he was far away from home with very few personal belongings, and with very few family members and friends by his side. It was an uneventful death, so to speak. But his faith remained unshakeable.

Reflecting upon his death, it is apparent that all that we have, all that we are, and all that we will be, has all been predetermined by God and God alone. It gives us great courage to continue to remain faithful in Christ especially in times of difficulties, helplessness, and hopelessness. It reminds us that God is always in charge and we need to trust Him, even though we might not be able to see his plans, grand or ordinary, for us in our lives. All we must do is heed His call for us in each of our own vocations and strive to do our utmost best. We must trust in God and be obedient to Mother Church, like how the late Cardinal dutifully fulfilled his priestly vocation. We need to continuously be faithful, just as God will always be faithful to us until our very last breath.

## SYLVESTER LEE, OFS

My dearest Bishop Cornelius,

I never got used to calling you Cardinal. I think mostly because I was not given enough time to be with you after your elevation. We did not even have a chance to meet since the world went into lockdown. I still remember we were in the car when I read the news article about your elevation. We were so, so happy for you. Happy that the Church had recognised you with this honour. Happy that Mother Church had rewarded one of her most faithful sons.

I think most people remember you as that hip, down-to-earth, friendly bishop. I too, came away with that impression when I first interacted with you many years ago when you invited our team to Brunei. I remember asking Deacon Sherman, "Why this Bishop like that one ah?" You were most certainly very different from the others that I had encountered. Pondering on this further and after many more years of interacting with you, I came to realise that you wielded the power of the Apostles very strongly. Not the power to rule and to coerce, but the power to penetrate lives. When people first met you, they would greet you and pay you due respect by the fact that you had been ordained bishop. Soon, because of this status, you would



*Cardinal Cornelius baking Turkish flatbread in Istanbul*

find yourself invited to have coffee or a meal with them. It was during such casual occasions that people would find their boundaries slowly disappear. At first, they would be taken aback by your warmth and friendliness, and as they slowly revealed more

about themselves because they found you so unassuming, you would begin to dispense wisdom to help them make sense of their problems, to make sense of things that were happening around them. All this was done so casually. Until this day, I do not know how you did it. You brought many closer to Christ by doing this. That is why, all our collaborators in other countries always loved it when you accompanied us on pilgrimages to their countries. Once, you even got yourself a hands-on tutorial on how to make Turkish flatbread in a stone oven just by having a friendly chat with the worker at a restaurant where we were having lunch in Istanbul. I cannot help but think that this is how Christ meant for the episcopacy to be used, to serve others with the warmth and friendship of Christ. I will always remember the way you served God's people.



I consider myself very blessed to have been able to accompany you to so many places around the world. To have had so many chances to sit and have these thought-provoking



*One of our usual outing meals with Cardinal Cornelius*

conversations, as we pondered on how God was moving and was present in all the places we visited. You were always meditative of all the places we were going to even when it was not your first visit. Always had something to say, always something to tie into the Word of God. Your thoughts were always on God and what He was doing. I especially note how spiritually delighted you were when we returned to Lourdes. I remember you saying it was one of your favourite places among all our destinations and that you felt close to Mother Mary there. We always had our fun during the pilgrimages, which I will fondly remember. At the same time, you always made sure that the pilgrimage was spiritually fulfilling, often by remembering to do penance for those whose prayers you carried with you. I will always remember how you contemplated God.

You were always one for adventure. In fact, you told us stories of how during the World Youth Day in South Korea, you would snub the comfortable accommodations provided just so you could sleep on the floor in the same venue as



*Cardinal Cornelius being with the young people*

your youth. I remember how we climbed Cross Mountain in Medjugorje together. The mountain path was rocky and steep, but you made your way, nevertheless, praying the Rosary as we climbed to the top. You always had youthful energy, making sure to take full advantage of every adventure that God brought your way. You always loved serendipity, cherishing these spontaneous events as God's little treats for you. You always had that smile on your face as if to acknowledge that God had been kind to you, whenever you chanced upon an old friend along the way, or someone did a favour for you out of the blue, or something happened and you were offered a new experience. I will always remember how you were constantly grateful for the experiences God granted you.

I do not think I will ever understand why God chose to bring you back to Himself at such a time, why God made you a Cardinal but did not give you a chance to exercise this privilege at all, and why you had to become ill at a time when we could not be around you physically while you suffered throughout your treatment. I am saddened that God would let the Church on earth lose a bishop who was faithful, who thought with the Church. I do not think we will ever come to know why, on this side of life; but I can hear your voice in my head, telling me to trust in the Lord, to always know that He is in control and that He knows what is best.



*Cardinal Cornelius "collecting toll fee" from pilgrims in South Korea*

I hope you know that you are sorely missed, and that I am most aggrieved that you are no longer with us, no longer here to share your wisdom and counsel, no longer here to walk with us physically through these tumultuous times. As God reveals His face to you, please remember to intercede for us who still struggle through this life. Be

our fiercest intercessor so that we can move on when this pandemic is over, when we can once again do the work that God has called us to do. May we also learn to extend Christ's friendship and warmth to others as you once did so lovingly.

How I wish that today was just another day. You would fly into Johor a day before the Bishops' Conference meeting, we would pick you from airport and head to lunch. Maybe for a Korean meal, which you always liked. We would then sit in a café and have coffee, and chat about absolutely everything and nothing.

How I wish I could have another day with you.



## EDMUND KANG, OFS

The late Cornelius Cardinal Sim was more than a friend to most of us in the community. We would often refer to him affectionately as our *ah kong* ("grandfather" in Chinese dialect) in our private conversations. We are indeed truly grateful for his presence as our spiritual father. In the final leg of his earthly pilgrimage, I had the privilege of travelling with him on several pilgrimage trips. On these trips, we would spend time together praying, eating, and chatting. These were the times when he taught us about life and shared how he viewed the world and the Catholic faith. Cardinal was not one who would go straight to the point when sharing his ideas. Contemplation and reflection was required to understand what he was conveying. I personally learned from him mostly through observing the way he lived his life and how he interacted with the people and appreciated the things around him.

### Faith Requires Sacrifice

One of the lessons from Cardinal Sim that left a deep impression on me was that choosing to live the Catholic faith always comes at a cost. The sacrifice that God requires of us might seem too much or too difficult at that point in time. However, Cardinal shared that over time, God would provide us abundant graces and blessings through the sacrifices that we were willing to offer to God. In his case, he shared with us that he had to give up certain things in his life to fulfil his call to the priesthood. These sacrifices were overwhelming,

but he trusted in God and put out into the deep (*duc in altum*, his motto). As the years went by, he noticed God's blessings through the people that he encountered and through the situations that he had faced.

One such situation was during one of his travels. At the airport, he had forgotten that his hand luggage was with his companion who had already crossed the immigration counter. The luggage contained his personal belongings including his passport. He was extremely worried about his situation and prayed to God to help him get through the immigration. When he was explaining at the immigration counter, the officer noticed his episcopal ring and he decided to let him through after some questioning. He expressed half-jokingly that it was through these kinds of experiences that he felt grateful to be a bishop.



*Pilgrimage to Lourdes, Cardinal Cornelius' favourite shrine*



I have taken this to heart and constantly kept this in mind as I continue to discern my vocation in life. I remember I once asked His Eminence whether it was worth choosing to be a priest and then a bishop. He revealed that it was entirely worth the sacrifice. From there, I learned that when we truly offer our entire being to loving God, it is then that we would experience the fullness of God's love for us. This is perhaps the reason why he had such an immense love for God and the Church.

## Humility and Simplicity

A common theme you would find in the reflections from the rest of our community is that the late Cardinal was tremendously down-to-earth. He disliked any special treatment that might put him

in the spotlight. He would always prefer to minister to the grassroots and get his hands dirty whenever he had the opportunity. A very good example of this was how he used his love of baking to reach out to the people. He would bake bread and pizzas for those



*Cardinal Cornelius loved to bake to feed people!*

in his parish whenever he had a chance to do so. He used to bake in our community home in Johor Bahru during his visits as well.

Regarding his relationship with God, it was evident to anyone who observed his life that he was greatly aware of his role as merely an instrument to fulfil God's will here on earth. This could be noticed in his prayers and in the way he worshipped, submitting himself to God. Often in our pilgrimages, I noticed that the first thing he would do when entering each church that we visited was to kneel before the altar even when there was a large crowd. He was also deeply aware of his own faults and shortcomings and was constantly practising the spirit of penance. When in Fatima, for example, he would always make it a point to pray while crawling on his knees on the path to the Chapel of Apparitions as an act of penance. It takes an awful lot of humility to be able to accept one's shortcomings and live a life of penance. I am personally still working on this aspect in my life and the late Cardinal's life is a great reminder and encouragement for me.



*Cardinal Cornelius enjoying durians with other visiting priests at our community home in Johor*

Another quality of Cardinal Sim that impressed me was that he lived a very simple life. As his close friends, we noticed that he saw joy in the little things. One of the things that he enjoyed greatly was



food. If he had something delicious, he would express his satisfaction by exclaiming repeatedly with relish. On one occasion, he was enjoying durian in our community home and simply could not stop eating despite saying repeatedly that this was the last piece! He also enjoyed being in the company of others and delight in partaking in conversations which can happen spontaneously even if nothing productive was being said or done. This is a reminder to me that despite our struggles in life, we need to learn to be grateful for the simple things that life offers to us. We are often reminded through these little things that life is not as cruel as we imagined it to be.

### Love for Life

For all those who knew this Cardinal, it is no mystery that he had a love for animals, especially for cats. He had several cats in his Vicariate which he tended to when he was home in Brunei and would miss them dearly when he was out on his travels. On our pilgrimages, there was never once where he ignored a feline encounter. He would always give these animals attention and love by carrying them or stroking them and taking pictures with them.



*Cardinal Cornelius loving a kitten during our pilgrimage*

He also loved people and always sought the best in them. I find him a model worth emulating for us in the community. Specifically, he spent his time nurturing the young people close to him by providing them with spiritual guidance. He explained that he did so because he believed that the young people were the hope of the Church. As the youngest member of our Splendour community, I understand why he chose to be close to young people. The world we live in is currently becoming increasingly liberal and the boundaries of morality are straying further away from truth, beauty, and goodness.

Through his example, I am reminded to have a love for life as well – to see the goodness and potential in people, to love God’s creation and to tend to them with care. I am also reminded by the late Cardinal to go against the world (*contra mundum*) and to not be afraid to walk the path of morality when our society condemns it, by living my life in obedience to the Church.



# AUDREY YU, OCDS

## The First Encounter

If I recall correctly, I first “met” the then Bishop Cornelius Sim on Facebook. He was shown in some photos administering Baptism by emersion during one Easter Vigil service. What got my attention was his gentleness. He held the hand of each candidate tenderly as they were going into and out of the baptismal pool. I found my heart skipped a beat as I scrolled through the photos. Genuine tenderness cannot be faked.

One of the benefits of working as the local church’s media personnel was that I got to know the bishops even before I met them in person. So not too long after the Facebook “encounter”, the editor of *Today’s Catholic* at that time told me that Bishop Cornelius Sim was coming to Kuching for a meeting, and she wanted me to meet him too as he was the bishop overseeing the Regional Commission for Social Communications.

That was how it all began.

## Loving As a Father

For the first few encounters, I met him for business meetings and for clergy retreats in Kuching where I helped to take photos. For me then, he was just my “boss”, to whom my obedience was required.

I do not know if he remembered me at all as I am a shy and socially awkward person. I have always tried to not make myself known and would disappear after my job was done.



*Audrey with Cardinal Cornelius at St Joseph's Cathedral, Kuching, in 2018*

But ever since I became a part of the Splendour community, our relationship grew. He was the one who began reaching out to me. Whenever we met, he would initiate to greet me and then gave me a warm embrace. On some occasions, he even invited me to hang out with him. It was never uncomfortable when being in his presence. He was to me a father, in whom I experienced God's love and affection.

I confidently speak of this for those whom he knew, especially for his staff, as I have witnessed the same gentle affection that he has shown towards them.

### **Self-forgetfulness**

It was the late Cardinal who made my visit to Brunei possible in 2019. I was to write a news report for *Today's Catholic* on how Catholics in Brunei celebrated the Solemnity of Assumption. While I was there, he took the time to drive me to visit the other two parishes, Church of Our Lady of Immaculate Conception in Seria and St John's Church in Kuala Belait, which were both more than 100 kilometres away from the Church of our Lady of Assumption in Bandar Seri Begawan.

Those who did not know who he was would probably think that he was one of the bishop's staff. I saw for myself what I had heard from my friends. He would stay back to wash the dishes after meals, and he would go into the baking bay to join his staff to bake bread.

In the morning before my flight back to Kuching, when breakfast was not available at the refectory, he brought me for breakfast with him... in his sweat-drenched t-shirt and shorts, right after he came back from his morning walk. He kept his staff in mind even when he was at the coffee shop. At the time, he called them on the phone and asked if they would like him to bring some food back for them.

## Helping Others to Give Their Best

For a long time, I'd wondered why the late Cardinal would go all out to bring me to Brunei and make my stay such a wonderful one. I was neither his staff member nor a clergy or a dignitary. As I was reflecting on that trip, I remembered the time he showed me the new equipment he had bought – good quality ones – for his youths. He had got them just because they would like to produce podcasts and undertake some projects.

It dawned on me then that it was for the very same reason he happily granted my desire to visit Brunei. I'm very sure he knew that I was just making my job an excuse to see Brunei before I resigned from my post as a staff of *Today's Catholic*. But at the same time, he also knew that I was eager to write about the Catholic Church in Brunei. It was his way of giving me the opportunity, perhaps for one last time, to make full use of my skill for my local church.

It was just like how he saw the potential in his youth, hence he willingly invested in the new equipment to encourage them to reach out to the other youths by exploring new methods.

## Conclusion

Even though I wish I could spend more time with the late Cardinal to learn from him and work with him, those short moments of encounter have already made an impact on me. It is painful to not have him with us physically, but now that he is with the Father, he is

closer to us than before. We who are his friends should give of ourselves even more, to the Church and to those God sends our way, so to continue the legacy that he had left for us.



*Cardinal Cornelius loved being with the young people.*



*Cardinal Cornelius with Brunei's World Youth Day participants in 2016*

## FELICITY CHAN

When I became a Catholic at the age of 13, I knew Cardinal Sim simply as Father Cornelius. He was the priest who baptised me and presided over my communion and confirmation. At that time, he was an enigma to me, albeit a curious one. A respected entity that would pop out of nowhere to greet Ompong, the maintenance man, or stride past us while walking with a member of the congregation.

My interaction with Cardinal Sim then was very much limited to seeing him at Mass or at events, where he would be surrounded by leaders from the various church ministries. Yet, he was not stern or aloof with us children. Unknown to me back then, he was the only priest in Brunei and he had to rotate his time between all the existing three churches. It was common to wait for Father Cornelius to arrive from Bandar to celebrate the Easter Vigil. It made it more fun as we got to stay up late.



*Felicity becoming a new Catholic at the hands of Father Cornelius Sim*



As the years progressed, I was drifting away from the Church when I started college for my diploma. At the time, I heard that Father Cornelius had become Monsignor Cornelius. However, I was absorbed with the secular world and before I knew it, eight years had passed. That's when I began returning to the Church. I remember praying that I would agree to whatever the Lord planned to bring my way. This was when Monsignor Cornelius, already Bishop by then, invited me to join the Vicariate of Young Adults. I was working in Kuala Belait at the time and the meetings were held in Bandar Seri Begawan every Wednesday evening. Which meant that it was a three-hour return trip for me but what the heck, I thought. I told my parents that I was attending a "Church" meeting (technically true!) and made that first trip. I was hooked after that and decided to really dive into it, and I did commit to it for weeks. I didn't know it then, but it was the kind of evangelical formation that I had been craving for. That was also the time I came to know the kind of person Cornelius Cardinal Sim was.



*Cardinal Cornelius with the Vicariate Young Adults of Brunei*

Down the rabbit hole as they say. I became more involved with the Church because Cardinal Sim encouraged and motivated me in his own mild-mannered way. It was so much fun to be able to look into the meaning of my faith that the catechism during my earlier years shied away from. Cardinal Sim casually floated thought-provoking topics and discussions (although this was very much planned by him) during our sessions. This drove us to face our own inadequacies and thus dive deeper for answers and to not fear the unknown but fear ignorance and complacency. The mentality he proposed was not to fix what was unbroken but to challenge it, elevate it and make it better. And just when you think that you have finally reached one level, you would find that it was only the foundation for the next level. Cardinal Sim explored and brought us together with him in his journey to seek knowledge joyfully and not to try to conquer it. We went through the many pitfalls, the failures, and seemingly impossible hurdles together, but he made it possible and even enjoyable. We went through shocks, lots of laughter and joy as a community.

When he recruited the youth to participate in World Youth Day, I could not participate due to my citizenship (as is a common problem in Brunei). He then proposed for me to join Asian Youth Day. This changed my view of Catholicism in its entirety. The event blew me away and opened my eyes to what our Faith truly is – what it means to so many and how it brings us all together. One memorable moment was when we were in Kkotongnae in Korea, they had a program where foreigners could sign up as volunteers for several months to serve in the community. Cardinal turned to us, raised his eyebrows and said, “Why not? Something to look forward to.” It became the

mantra I try to live my Catholic life by: our services are never a duty or a chore, they are always something we should be looking forward to.



*Cardinal Cornelius with candidates of Asian Youth Day from Brunei in 2014*

He also introduced contemplation, prayer, and reflection. He suggested for us to start praying the Taizé in our parish, a way of worship by an ecumenical Christian monastic fraternity in Taizé, France. I thought to myself, “What the heck is that?” Singing. I was always told that I was a bad singer when I was a kid and am self-conscious about it, but sing I did. It became an integral part of our activities which led to us being more involved with the Church as we

immersed ourselves in contemplative prayer. After which, we helped facilitate the retreat for confirmands in Labuan, conducted Taizé for different communities and even translated some songs into Bahasa for the Bahasa group. At the time, I never understood why others would treat him with reverence as he was so familiar and down-to-earth, that it was not unusual to go out with him for *laksa* or the latest Avenger movie, or even to a specialty shop to look at flour and pans.

Later, I learned that apparently this was not considered normal behaviour for a bishop and people would still put him on some kind of pedestal. Some even boasted that they had the “ear” of the Bishop of Brunei and elevated him to a sort of unapproachable Catholic celebrity (to the point where some groups were accusing others for monopolising his time and attention). This was puzzling for me as he was always welcoming. It was very common to see Cardinal Sim sitting in his office, one hand scrolling away at his latest research, the other hand resting on Angel, his first cat. The absolute humility in his character was evident on many occasions. This sometimes baffled me until later in life, where I recognised that it was simply his way of living. He held no merit to how elevated his office or position might be, but instead, found more joy in interacting with the parishioners and other like-minded individuals. It was his humility that humbled me and quelled my own pride.

When Cardinal Sim passed away and people were reminiscing about him, I too was pondering about what I had inherited from Cardinal Sim. Was it this Rosary beads that he blessed for me? Or the thousands of bits of memories that I have of him? It was then that it dawned on me that “I” am what he has left for me. The me today is

the result of many years of his mentorship, spiritual guidance, and leadership.

Cardinal Sim once introduced me as his “wandering sheep” which I embrace whole-heartedly. I always appreciated that he recognised my meandering ways. What I inherited from Cardinal is infinite and mysterious, yet deeply personal and profound. These lessons will always remain with me and guide me in my life. The sheep is only safe because of the gentle shepherd. And for that, I am eternally grateful.



*Felicity taking a selfie with Cardinal Cornelius*

## JENNIFER CHONG

My encounters with Cornelius Cardinal Sim are few but each encounter has left a big impact on me. In fact, I am still digesting the lessons I have learned from each of those encounters to this day.

The first time I saw Bishop Cornelius was in May 2015. I was waiting outside Sacred Heart Cathedral on a Saturday evening for the weekly Novena of our Lady of Perpetual Help to end, so that along with the rest of the crowd outside, we could go in and find a seat for Mass. Bishop Cornelius was standing quietly among the crowd, drawing not an ounce of attention towards himself. As the novena ended, and the crowd rushed into the cathedral, Bishop Cornelius went in as well. I thought that perhaps he was going to attend Mass that day as part of the congregation. To my surprise, when the Mass began, he was the one celebrating Mass for us that day. This was a surprise as he could have taken a shortcut to the sacristy instead of waiting with the crowd to go in. I was quite sure that he knew how to get there as this was likely not his first-time celebrating Mass here.

Naturally, he was invited to give a special blessing for all the nurses present, in conjunction with International Nurses Day. I recall that his short address was truly enlightening. It was my first time hearing him speak, hence, I did not manage to “hit the record button”. However, I vaguely remember that he said that the nurses are “unsung heroes” and are models for us to faithfully devote ourselves to quiet services. These words alone had me pondering for a long time.



*Jen with Bro. Matthew Lo (seminarian) and Cardinal Cornelius at Mother Grace's jubilee celebration in Sacred Cathedral, Kota Kinabalu*

We met a few times after that but I did not manage to speak much with him. On 21 April 2018, I attended Mother Grace Deosing's Ruby Jubilee as a Franciscan Sister and had arrived just a few minutes before the Mass celebration started at Sacred Heart Cathedral. As I

was hurrying to enter the cathedral, Mother Grace called me from the entrance and asked if I could help bring Bishop Cornelius to their convent for a dinner celebration that night. I was left speechless. How would I do that? I had barely spoken to him and did not have his phone number. How would I approach him when he would be sitting with the other priests and bishops?

By the grace of God, Mother Grace and Bishop Cornelius were chatting with each other after Mass and I conveniently bumped into them. That was when I managed to take down his phone number and brought him to the Franciscan Sisters' convent that night for dinner. When sending him back to his accommodation after dinner, I found out that he was planning to call for an e-hailing service to the airport for his flight the next morning. I offered to send him to the airport instead, and he gladly accepted the proposal.

Next morning, I had one of the most profound and thought-provoking conversations I have had in my life. There was hardly a silent moment between us as he kept sharing stories and nuggets of wisdom. What might seem like a casual conversation to an onlooker was actually a sharing session overflowing with practical lessons in life. When we grabbed coffee at the airport while waiting for his flight, I started to ask questions – especially questions that I had been thinking about for a long time. One topic in particular was on identifying one's vocation in life. I did not want to bring the topic up so suddenly, so I asked him instead. "Have you ever regretted being a priest?" This was a question I often pose to the clergy I meet. Their responses were always, without skipping a beat, a "no". It was the response I was expecting from him too, only to suddenly hear, "Well, yes initially". The reason for this response was that he was pressured to be a priest at that time as they were desperately in need of a local priest. He had only just returned to the Church after a long absence, and they wanted to put him on a fast track to be ordained a priest. It was an arduous journey of overcoming one big obstacle after another. He then continued, "Now thinking back about it, I give thanks to God for the way it has been. This is one of the best decisions I have ever made". The deepest lesson on this topic I learned that day was when he said, "No matter the path you choose, God will always turn it for our good". Surely, if we keep the intention to want to follow the will of God instead of our own will, God will not abandon us.

My mother was admitted to the hospital the following month after falling. She remained unconscious after her first surgery and doctors were telling us to prepare for the worst. I then tried to look for priests to come and administer the Anointing of the Sick, but none



were available at that time. I became desperate and tried my luck by contacting Bishop Cornelius to check if he was in town by any chance. He soon replied saying that he was on the way to the airport after attending a celebration at Keningau. Not long after, a local priest was available to come, and I informed Bishop Cornelius about it so that he did not need to come over. However, he suddenly texted asking which floor I was on as he had arrived at the hospital. He came to see my mother and comforted my family. Although he did not bring his kit and he was about to miss his flight, he came anyway. In fact, he showed no signs of urgency when he was at the hospital. His flight was postponed after he left the hospital. Although technically, he was not the appointed shepherd of my area, he still saw me as his sheep.



*Jen with Cardinal Cornelius at  
Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Kota Kinabalu*

The next year, my parish rector decided to invite him to be our guest speaker for our week-long parish feast day celebration – the Feast of the Sacred Heart. He had to speak for a few evenings and some of us youths would wait for him outside the cathedral after his talks. When he did not have plans, we then took him out for supper and coffee. One could tell that he was genuinely happy to spend time

with us. I did not realise it then, but in hindsight, it was indeed peculiar for a bishop to be hanging out so often with the youth when he could

choose to spend time with the clergy or the influential people of the parish. It reminds me that we need to go often to the grassroots no matter our status. We were only ordinary young people of the parish, but Bishop Cornelius was happy to spend his time with us.



*Cardinal Cornelius incredibly happy with his dessert*

I did not meet Cardinal Sim often, but I always learned something profound each time we met. The sharing above displays some of the most important lessons I have learned from some of our encounters. When I heard his final homily where he said, “When God opens doors, it is best to walk through them”, and “Don’t be a spectator in the Church, be someone who contributes – gives time, talent and treasure.” I find that he has been living by what he preached through the few encounters we had.

I have also heard many accounts of his life after his death, and all of them shared a consistent theme. These people have met Cardinal Sim during different times in different ways and are from

different places. Yet, the recurring impressions are that he was down-to-earth, he worked tirelessly for God despite the difficult circumstances, he did not water down the message of the Gospel, and he continuously loved the people, to name a few. Surely, these testimonies would hold some weight.

Cardinal Sim was always ready to sacrifice himself for the sake of his people – just as Christ willingly died on the cross for our salvation. This is something every disciple of Christ, each one of us, should strive to do daily – to die to ourselves. He was known to bake bread to physically feed his people. However, his real mission was to feed people's souls through the love of Christ. Cardinal Sim allowed himself to be broken like Christ so that he may feed his people, and he has done it well.



*Cardinal Cornelius with Fr Paul Lo and some young adults from Sacred Heart Cathedral, Kota Kinabalu*

## BRO. MATTHEW LO (SEMINARIAN)

On the morning of 29 May 2021, I was shocked to receive the news of the passing of Cornelius Cardinal Sim. I could not believe this was true as I expected him to come back healthily after undergoing the supposed long treatment of seven months in Taiwan. Tears of sadness mixed with regret ran down my face. I regretted not appreciating him enough, or accompanying him enough through my prayers, text messages, and telephone calls through the difficult final part of his journey of life.

If, as they say, gratitude is the memory of the heart, then it is my hope that this short reflection can be a record of my gratitude towards him and my reflection on what I have learned from him through our encounters. I have decided to group those lessons into two main categories which I strongly believe are pivotal virtues on which other virtues depend, and they are inter-related. Firstly, to be humble is to be simple. Secondly, being a shepherd means having a fatherly and listening heart.

Although Cardinal Sim was a bishop for many years, he was down to earth. My first personal encounter with him was in 2016 during our Splendour community gathering in Penang. Prior to that, I only knew him from a distance. I remembered vividly, our first face-to-face meeting was at hawker stalls. To show reverence to him and his office, I made the move to shake his hand and kiss his episcopal ring. Instead of merely receiving the gesture of respect, he gave me a warm hug in return. This showed that he was more interested in building

friendship rather than being preoccupied with his position as a bishop. Since then, I continued to be amazed at how simple this bishop (later on, Cardinal) was. Even after being elevated into the College of Cardinals, it was just a title for him.

Occasionally, while attending meetings or events in my hometown (Kota Kinabalu), he would look for opportunities to spend time with me and other youths that he knew. During those meetings, I was anxious about where should I bring him to and what kind of food I should offer



*Cardinal Cornelius with Fr Robert Leong  
and some of our Splendour community members  
in Kota Kinabalu*

him, but he seemed to just be contented with simple things. I remember how he was so happy that I brought him to a pet shop. He was delighted to look at dogs and cats in the shop, taking pictures and buying things for his cat. And he thanked me for that as soon as we walked out from the shop. Even at this particular moment of writing, while I am struggling to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic and my studies in the seminary, the fresh memory of him reminds me that life can be simple and enjoyable, and only those who are pure in heart and mind can attain to it.

It was the virtue of humility in him that allowed him to receive blessings from others comfortably and be ready to bless others generously as well. He never insisted that he must be one to pay the bill, and yet, would also pay it quietly. I must admit that in the early stage of my seminary formation, it was hard for me to receive blessings from others. Reflecting on it, I have no doubt that it was due to my pride.



*Matt with Cardinal Cornelius at the Miri Airport*

To say that he was a simple man does not mean that he had nothing to be worried about. As a shepherd, I am sure that he was always thinking of those whom he was responsible for. During my last face-to-face encounter with him at the Miri

Airport on 22 July 2019, after knowing that I had just facilitated a retreat for the members of the Legion of Mary in the Diocese of Miri, he immediately asked if I could provide some help for the Church in Brunei. It was this shepherd's heart of his that enable him to see the talents and gifts in others. When my parish invited Cardinal Cornelius to give a series of talks on the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus,



he texted me with a suggestion, "Perhaps we can do something together". Although such cooperation did not happen because of my schedule, I appreciate how Cardinal Sim recognised the potential in me. I believe such an ability came from a listening heart.

Cardinal Cornelius was always looking at his mobile phone and laptop, even when we were talking to him. During the sharing session at our Splendour community gathering in 2018, when I revealed my intention to join the diocesan seminary, he continued to work on his laptop, raised his head and looked at me a few times without any expression, but he was certainly listening. I knew that, because since then, he had shared with me his own vocation story, the struggles he faced, and encouraged and assured me of his prayers. As a bishop,

he could have known thousands of people easily, but the details of my story were never lost from his memory. During our physical meetings and in text messages, he often asked how things were progressing and told me he was keeping me in his prayers.



*Our Splendour community dinner together with some of our friends during our 2018 gathering in Sabah*

I think Cardinal Sim would not disagree that to him, being a shepherd meant being with his people. I have silently wished that he would be present at my ordination to lay his hands on my head if it was God's will for me to become a priest. It is hard for me to accept the reality that this will never happen. However, my faith challenges me to trust that God has a better plan, and to believe that even the departure of Cardinal Sim could be something meaningful for me. At least, I know that the way he exercised his priesthood has been imprinted deeply in my heart, and he has set the bar high for me.



*Cardinal Cornelius with a group of pilgrims in Saint Peter's Square at Vatican City*



## KURTSEAN PITCHAY, OFS

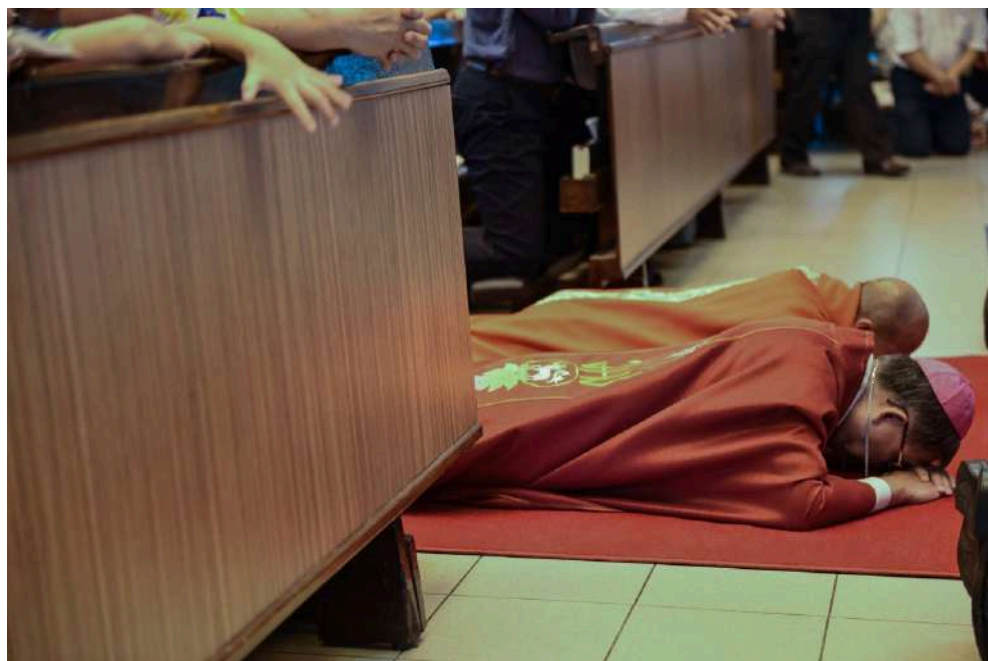
I met Bishop Cornelius during one of his visits to Johor Bahru several years ago. My first impression of him was that he had a slow deliberation when it came to his words and actions. It seemed like he had a lot of knowledge but did not always quickly share it. Rather, he allowed others to willingly engage and ask questions in the conversation before he shared his thoughts. As someone who strives to learn new things, I constantly seek to expand and accumulate knowledge in life. Hence, I found this slow deliberation of his words and action quite odd. I wondered why a Bishop of the Church would not want to exercise the teaching office of his station. However, having said that, Bishop Cornelius was very open to intellectual discussions among friends.

Over the years, I began to see the wisdom of his behaviour – that intellectual knowledge may not always be necessarily helpful in every situation. I also came to recognise that we may sometimes overwhelm people in our efforts to teach or share information. This may lead to us focusing on our own greatness rather than the greatness of God and will potentially lead other people away from God.

I am learning to emulate this slow deliberation in my life by consciously taking the time to listen to others before speaking. I also learned to only say what is necessary in any conversations and to focus more on the person I am talking to instead of making intellectual

knowledge the focal point. In this sense, I pray that God may grant me the wisdom and slow deliberation that Bishop Cornelius had.





CORNELIUS CARDINAL SIM,  
PRAY FOR US!



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responding to the call of the Holy Catholic Church  
for a New Evangelisation through the proclamation of  
Truth, Beauty and Goodness.

Convened by the Rev. Deacon Dr Sherman Kuek OFS in 2012,  
we came together to string a series of apostolate activities  
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