

*Testimony of Sophia Kuby,  
founder of European Dignity Watch,  
on the Youth evening*



I have not experienced anything comparable to the previous speaker. Like the vast majority of you. And yet I live in the constant awareness that my life would be very, very different today if God had not set it completely on different tracks. I don't mean a change of direction. I don't mean a train slowly being led from one track over a switch to another track. Rather, God lifted the train and put it on a completely different track. On a track that I did not know existed, a track that led me into unknown new territory. This new territory was – and is! – so exciting and diverse, so full of meaning and depth that I can only marvel. This land is life in faith in Jesus Christ. It is filled with trees and flowers, with gorges and mountains, with raging waters and still lakes, with glaciers and green meadows, with storms that you hope will pass, and with balmy summer days that you wish would never go away. It is an overwhelmingly beautiful land, in the gentle and the dramatic. I would never have known this country if God had not intervened directly in my life. He burst into my life like an avalanche. And he did it through what is accessible to every Catholic every day all over the world: through the Eucharist.

That's what I want to tell you about.

The country I knew until then was very different. As a child, I thought I was living in the land of milk and honey. It was the simple, beautiful life. Mom and Dad and my two brothers were a matter of course, we had a big garden, I had friends, liked school. We spent long summers in our vacation house on a Croatian island. We grew up without faith. At least without the Christian faith. And without church. Church was something for others. It was neither attractive nor relevant to the question of meaning. It was old-fashioned, encrusted and uptight. It was so irrelevant to us that we didn't even talk badly about it. It simply didn't matter.

God, on the other hand, mattered a lot. He existed and he was so important that the lives of my parents were determined to a good part by

the search for him. Who he was, no one really knew. Whether he was a diffuse energy or force, in which religion he was to be found, or if in one at all, was anything but clear. But my parents were looking for him. In Sufi spirituality, with Indian healers, in esotericism and freaky spirituality trips. Only one thing was out of the question in the search: the Catholic Church. This world in which I grew up, the only one I knew at the time, seemed good to me. I was happy.

Then came the evening when our parents called us together to tell us they were separating. It was as if I had been hit on the head with a huge hammer. I was 14, I didn't know what to think. I couldn't cry, but it brought a world – my world – crashing down. I remember how I often said to my friends the months before how happy and grateful I was that I could be absolutely certain that my parents would always stay together.

Then everything happened very quickly. Our family was torn apart, my father moved out and I no longer understood the world. On the outside, everything went on as before. I didn't crash in school (like so many other teenagers who experience something like this), I was well integrated socially. And I developed an incredible will to survive, which manifested itself in my taking on great responsibility at a very early age. At 15, I was responsible for the public youth work in our town, I was class president, and at 17 was on the student board of my school. I was self-confident, quick-witted...and unapproachable. At the age of 15, I started going out to nightclubs. My mother, who was busy making money and raising three adolescent children, allowed me almost anything. I was always allowed to do much more than the other girls at my age. I could come home whenever I wanted. At 16, I started smoking pot. I had complete mainstream opinions on everything while being convinced that I was a very independent thinker. I thought I had a good life. What other life could I have aspired to, longed for? But a louder and louder voice inside me told me: This is not everything! This can't be everything in life! These friends, with whom I spent my days and my nights couldn't be everything, the friendship seemed so shallow! I had such a longing for more and no clue where I could find it. Was it even legitimate to hope for more? Not to simply be content with this life I had? Wasn't it better to stifle that longing, lest I experience the pain and disappointment of not having it fulfilled? With all these questions, I was alone. All alone. I

didn't have the slightest idea to whom I could ask them. And they grew louder and louder. My zest for life, of which I had been given an above-average portion in my cradle, diminished. I was bored at the nightclubs and repulsed by the emptiness I saw in the night's entertainment. But what was to be the alternative? What, for heaven's sake, was I longing for anyway?

I was now 17, and something had changed in our family. My mother had miraculously received faith in Jesus Christ in a supernatural experience a few days after separating from my father, and had become Catholic. Wait, Catholic? Yes, exactly, that religion that didn't even deserve to be mentioned in our house. With her conversion, faith was suddenly present in our family. It was her faith though, because I certainly didn't believe in it. I saw that it did my mother good, so I was not against it. But it was certainly not something that interested me. I was thinking so independently and in my highly developed thinking religion was something you could possibly deal with when you were about 80 years old, that is, when you were approaching death.

And then suddenly a family friend invited me on a pilgrimage. To Amsterdam. In a bus full of young people. I just thought: young people going on a pilgrimage!?! That doesn't exist. I'm sure they're all extremely weird and unworldly and have never seen a nightclub from the inside. But something in me was curious. The mixture of politeness, not to refuse an invitation, and a tiny, hidden curiosity about what young people who go on pilgrimages are like, made me say yes.

And suddenly I was on the bus to Amsterdam. However, the young people were mostly pensioners praying the rosary (the organization had made a mistake) and I thought I had landed in the wrong movie. But what could I do. I was virtually trapped in that bus for the next 15 hours. And out of pure pragmatism and to survive this weird situation as undisturbed as possible, I didn't rebel, but decided to make the best of it. Even after 15 hours I was still convinced I was in the wrong movie, but at least we had arrived in Amsterdam. The next day there was a big event, a stadium with 10,000 people, some songs were sung, strumming on the guitar, some people I didn't know and didn't want to know were giving some sermons and speeches on stage. In short, it was a mediocre experience and nothing struck me in the slightest way. At the end of the day, Holy

Mass was celebrated. I didn't know anything about the Holy Mass, only one thing I knew: as an unbaptized person I was not allowed to go to communion. I didn't think that was bad either. To do without this little dry host was not a thing. But I knew one more thing: I could proceed during Communion like everyone else, hands clasped in front of my chest, and receive the blessing. When the time came, I thought to myself: why not! Now I have already survived the ordeal of 15 hours in the pensioner bus, a blessing can't hurt. So I got in the long line and approached one of the countless priests distributing communion. With my arms folded, I finally stepped in front of him, assuming that it was a short and painless blessing. Instead, something quite different happened.

Instead of giving me the blessing, the priest wants to give me communion. I stand before him a bit puzzled and say: I'm not part of your club, I am not allowed to take it (thinking to myself: You should know the rules here, not me). And suddenly the priest holds the host right in front of my eyes and asks me this question: Do you believe that this is Jesus Christ?

I had never asked myself that question. The once or twice I had been to Mass in my life, I had not thought about it. And suddenly I'm standing there, the Host in front of me, and a priest challenging me for an answer. "No, I don't believe it" would have been the natural response. But something holds me back. I look at the host and suddenly the 10,000 people around me disappear. The priest also disappears. There is only me in front of the host. And suddenly there is a certainty in me that this little white piece of bread is... God. Jesus Christ, God, my own Creator, the one I had been looking for so desperately without knowing that I was looking for him. Without a hesitation in me and with perfect certainty, I say, "Yes, I believe." And the priest places the Host on my tongue. Suddenly a bomb explodes inside me. Tears flow, my knees tremble. Back in my seat, I sink to my knees and cry and cry. I have never experienced anything like this and yet I know exactly what is happening.

I am not alarmed nor do I find it strange. I just know that right at this moment I am meeting directly, face to face, the greatest love there is. Greater than anything I would have thought possible and dared to long for (and yet longed for all these years!). More overwhelming than anything I have known. And in all the tears and trembling is a deep, deep peace and deep, deep joy. It is the peace of the homeless finding home. It is the joy of being deeply known and yet loved by a love that nothing and no one can destroy.

In those seconds, God gave me the entirety of faith. In that moment I knew that everything the Church teaches was true. However, I had no idea what she actually taught and that there was quite a bit in there that challenged my mainstream opinions. Over the years, I discovered the faith and the truths that the Church teaches. And there was never a moment where I doubted that it was true. I saw the world with completely new eyes. Everything I discovered was true and good. I didn't understand everything right away, but the certainty that our faith holds deep truths about God, about the world, and about ourselves never left me.

A year later I was baptized and confirmed – together with my brother, who had been given faith in Jesus Christ in his sleep two months after my experience.

Now one may ask: how could the priest at that time give you communion? He is not allowed to! Right, he is not allowed to and I don't know what was going on in that priest's mind at that moment. How could he give me communion? My honest answer is: I do not know. I would never advise anyone to just go to communion to try it out. The Body of Christ is sacred and the Church has good reasons why it requires certain conditions. All I can say is that these limits protect the sacraments and their sacredness and we do not have the authority to arbitrarily circumvent the limits of the Church. But God does! And he obviously wanted to enter my life through the question of the priest.

Since that evening in Amsterdam, I have been living in a new country. It is the country of a changed heart and a changed mind. But I had to move out of my old country. When I got back from Amsterdam, I had such joy and I found the emptiness of my old life so striking. I changed my lifestyle, I stopped wasting my time in nightclubs. Most of my friends

from back then didn't understand me and said I had become "boring". Boring? I was just discovering a new land that was so beautiful, so powerful, so wide and deep...and they thought my life had become boring!

They turned away from me, I went through times of loneliness and feeling like I had lost my old life. That was hard. But God gave me a certainty that He would not show Himself to me so that I would then languish all my life, but that I would have life and have it abundantly. Today, 21 years later, I can say that this promise is true.