

From drugs & bikes to monastery peace

A former biker and drug addict who became a Ukrainian Catholic monk is leading an Advent Mission this week.

It's expected to be a packed church when Hieromonk (Father) Teodosy Kraychuk leads the Advent Mission Dec. 6-8 at St. Augustine's Parish in Ponoka. He'll be preaching on a seasonal topic: the appearance of God at Christmas.

That may not seem like a big deal, but it's an extraordinary testament to how far he has come.

✘ These days Kraychuk lives alone on a rented ranch property near Myrnham, Alta. – about 180 kilometres northeast of Edmonton – where he spends his days working, travelling to speaking engagements and helping the Edmonton Eparchy when needed.

His house and its second-floor chapel acts as The Skete of the Universal Exaltation of the Precious and Life-Creating Cross monastery.

His life now is a world away from his days as an addict, partying and cruising on his Harley in southern California.

Kraychuk identifies with the Prodigal Son and admits he has come so far from being lost to being found.

“God has a way of leading you in directions where you didn't think you'll go,” said Kraychuk, who was ordained in 2000, after years of living what he calls a “decadent lifestyle.”

“There are all kinds of ways the spirit of God as our saviour can call us, and our ability to say ‘Yes’. Sometimes it's quietly and sometimes it's dramatically.”

For Kraychuk, his conversion wasn't as “dramatic” as St. Paul on the road to Damascus, depicted falling off a horse by the artist Caravaggio, but it wasn't quiet either.

His conversion took place in the early 1980s, on a bus from California back to his hometown of Winnipeg, after decades of living a “biker lifestyle” in the U.S.

Kraychuk experienced a change on the bus along with another man. He could hear the voice of Christ. He threw away his drugs.

“There in that bus, I experienced his love,” Kraychuk said in an interview with

EWTN:

“There were two of us who experienced that moment and committed our lives to Christ.”

Born in Winnipeg, Kraychuk was raised in a Catholic family.

He excelled at hockey, but soon found that it became an obsession, with a need to be the perfect player.

“I had a lot of problems with anxieties and fears that somehow I wasn’t good enough, somehow I wouldn’t find happiness unless in life unless I was the best hockey player,” Kraychuk said.

When he was 10, his grandfather fell ill. Young Teodosy prayed on the night his parents went to see him in hospital that God wouldn’t take his grandfather, but he died the next morning.

“It was a letdown in me, and I sensed that somehow God wasn’t powerful enough to save him.”

At 15, Kraychuk began to experiment with drugs and alcohol, partying and the freedom that it brought to have a good time. He dropped sports for the drug scene. He was kicked out of high school eventually.

But Kraychuk said he never stopped believing in God, even after he left Winnipeg for California and the biker life that included drugs, alcohol, partying with musicians like the members of the band Pink Floyd, and jail.

Years after returning to Winnipeg, Kraychuk slowly returned to his Catholic roots.

A year after his conversion, Kraychuk heard the call to ministry. He traveled to the Cross Lake, about 770 kilometres north of Winnipeg, to serve as a missionary in the indigenous community there.

He intended to stay a weekend, but ended up staying for five years.

Kraychuk said he felt God calling him to go further. He would later complete his bachelor’s and master’s degree at Christ the King Seminary in Mission, B.C., and be ordained in 2000.



For more than a decade now, Kraychuk has settled into life as a monk living alone. Does he ever get lonely? No, he said. He hosts the public when they come to visit, he’s in charge of the upkeep of the monastery,

and he supports his Ukrainian Catholic superior, Bishop David Motiuk. Photo: supplied

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It's a dramatically different life compared to his own childhood and the wild days of his youth.

How does Hieromonk Kraychuk explain the transformation? "It's the mystery of God's calling."

Hieromonk Kraychuk is leading the Advent Mission at 7 p.m. each night at St. Augustine's Parish. Donations are being encouraged to offset the costs of his travel. For more information, contact St. Augustine's Parish at 403-783-4048.