

How did I become a sister?

At one point in my life, as I was an exchange student in Japan, I met God, I discovered his presence in my life. I had been born and raised a Catholic, but faith had never been a very significant part of my life before that.

In Japan, I was 21, I had just graduated from a French business school and had decided to spend a year there to learn Japanese, mostly to figure out what I would be doing next.

For different reasons, I ended up going to mass in Tokyo and to my great surprise, I met God.

It was such a powerful experience that I decided to write an article for the parish newsletter.

I **had to tell** others that God is present in our lives;

that we can meet him, not in extraordinary circumstances or in mystical revelations, but in the core of our being, in everything that we do and live.

God is here, with us, now and every single day of our existence.

I had to tell others so that everyone might see and experience the joy of living in His presence.

And I guess my journey since then, has consisted in transforming this desire of proclaiming God into a life. I think **a vocation is a desire made flesh**. Religious life is therefore the best way for me to give flesh to this desire of witnessing God's presence in our lives and telling others about it so they might discover him as well.

Each life is a vocation, desired by God and called to be God's salt and light in a specific way: some in the silence of a monastery, others in family life, others in caring for the oppressed, the poor and the sick as Isaiah is inviting us, others in serving God's people by administering the sacraments and so many other ways. Religious life is one way among many others of living this call.

### **What is religious life's own way of saying something about God?**

I think religious life is a way of life that testifies to God's logic, which is not our immediate logic, notably through the vows.

As Paul says in the passage of the 1<sup>st</sup> letter to the Corinthians that we've heard, the wisdom of God is Jesus Christ crucified. This is quite a challenge for usual marks of success. The path proposed by religious life is to follow Christ through the radical experience of the vows in order to experience the true freedom of the children of God.

Different forms of religious life have a different way of regrouping and naming the vows, but basically they consist in the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Today, as I guess in all times, vowing poverty, chastity and obedience can sound crazy in the first place. Just ask my family what they think about that, you will see how popular these vows sound, when you decide to live them...

But the vows are really a path to freedom, to the real freedom of God.

How?

By vowing poverty, I acknowledge that I receive my life from God, I cannot give it to myself. It has then something to do with the truth of my being. I am not perfect, I am fragile, wounded, broken, poor inside, I am a sinner and that's truly who I am. I am like Paul, my only real support is Jesus Christ, the crucified Christ. Poverty is a way of saying "I'm not God, God is God and I can be who I am". The concrete way of living the vow of poverty is by sharing everything that I receive from God: sharing my income with my community, sharing my gifts, my time, sharing my experience of God with others as I'm doing in this moment, sharing also my imperfections, acknowledging that they are part of me. This vow prevents me from clinging to material things, but also to titles, honours, rankings and outside recognitions. It frees me

from pursuing those, from being attached to them. Of course, it is never done once and for all and sometimes it can be a real challenge, but the vow is a constant invitation to root myself in God alone.

Vowing chastity means renouncing to a spouse, to family life, to having children. I can choose this only because the relationship with Christ is so fulfilling that I want to be entirely his. It is my joy to belong to Christ, to give myself totally to him. Concretely, this means celibacy, but it also means living each relationship in Christ. Through him I learn to receive each person as a sister, as a brother. It starts of course in community life where I am called to accept each sister as she is and myself also as I am. Chastity means learning to be faithful to who I am, accepting my difference, accepting the difference of others. It is a bumpy road for sure but a one worth traveling because it is a path of truth and of growth.

Obedience paradoxically allows me to live what I want, to make it real. It is through obedience to a superior who has the ultimate say about my life, that I can live what I desire, which is to be united to Christ. I cannot be a religious by my own initiative. Christ is calling me and sending me into religious life, I cannot send myself. I need a superior, a person who has received this mandate from the Church, to send me. This is vital because it makes my religious life real, inscribed in a specific context. I'm a religious in a specific order: the Xaviere sisters, with its charism and its Constitutions, I've been sent to Canada, to Toronto, to a community, to a job, to a specific climate also it seems...I'm being sent into my life.

By renouncing to making my own decisions about what I want to do or where I want to live, I am sure that I'm not making up a mission of my own. I learn to receive everything as a gift from God, good things and difficult things: the warmth of this community here at Newman and the coldness of winter; the joy of serving Christ and the pain of my weaknesses. In all this, I learn to listen to God's spirit and to obey to his gentle invitations. It's a great way of walking. Here again it is a learning process but an effective one, rooting me in the deep joy of knowing for real that God's Spirit is always guiding us on our path. Obedience is a great source of freedom.

So yes, religious life, along with all the other vocations in the Church, is called to be God's salt and light for the earth. It does so certainly not because of a strength it could claim as its own, but only because it is rooted in Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord. Religious life is a call to live the joy of the Beatitudes, this paradoxical wisdom of God which is the actual truth. In this sense, religious life is one way that God uses to reach out to all of us, his children, to reveal himself, to make us aware of his care, his presence in our lives.

He loves us so much!