

Converted to a real and true faith



I was about 14 years old when the war was declared. It caused disruptions and interruptions in my studies; lack of supply, no exit, no more than 3 people together outside. I was hungry at boarding school, I was afraid of the Nazis and their raids, I had exams to do in the middle of bombing... railways had failed under the bombing and I could no longer go to university (13 months for the first 3 years). It was in such circumstances that I heard the first call to Religious Life. But I had hesitations, searching in silence so I did not begin the Postulancy until I was almost 30 years old. My entry into the convent was difficult because my family did not want me to become a religious.

I consider myself as having been converted just before my last year of humanities (A level). I learnt nothing from the catechism classes preparing me for my confirmation at the age of 10; and nothing from the Religion classes where they never dealt with evangelical subjects. Three priests were like three faces of Christ in my life: One day, while walking down the street a young curate of the parish of Saint Augustine (at Forest-altitude 100) approached me and invited me to join the JICF (Jeunesse Indépendante Catholique Féminine). This meeting, followed by many others, was the “coup de grâce” of Providence; a door opened and was the source of a religious education in its beginnings. When I entered the novitiate in Uccle-Brussels in 1953, the curate of my parish played a major role in my adult life. Later, I met another Redemptorist priest in Mouscron who also helped me find my way. They were for me the 3 aspects of Christ in my life: father, brother and friend, all very dear. I experienced important meetings in fraternity of recollections, retreats and personal encounters.

At the beginning, I taught only in Catholic schools: in 3 different congregations in the first 2 years of my career. I taught with The Ladies of Mary (Daughters of Mary and Joseph) of whom I was unaware. I met them by chance, by the stroke of providence, when I applied for a job after my university studies. Until then, I had had a poor opinion of Religious. But when I found myself in the school of the Ladies of Mary in Uccle, something attracted me to them through the first two I met: Marie Sophie and Marie Marthe. I taught at their school for 3 years as a layperson then I entered. Their open-mindedness which was not limited to religion, the value of their teaching, their attitude towards young people, had captured me. This spirit of openness touched me because I like everything that is open, well done. That was exactly their way of doing things. The Ladies of Mary were rated as one of the 4 strongest and most open schools in Belgium.

The Postulancy and novitiate were very hard for me. In community we lived as cloistered nuns because we did not just speak. If we had something to say; which had to be brief, perhaps a question, we had to say "Ave Maria" as if to ask permission. During the novitiate speaking to the professed sisters was not allowed. I will not mention the negative points that were found throughout the Church. I swore that I would never become a “naïve nun” and I kept my word. I kept my critical spirit (positive and negative) in all that I had to live. In my direct language, I love and seek the truth above all.

During formation we participated in sessions outside the community and these sessions taught me a lot. It was especially the courses given by priests from outside the community and the years spent attending the Bible courses at Lumen Vitae on Saturday mornings that helped me to form myself. I had the opportunity to socialize with other people; especially the Redemptorist sisters and other sisters from different Congregations. We had enriching discussions from every point of view. I often applied the famous discernment preached by the Jesuits, and that helped me a lot.

Afterwards, there were important changes in religious life, an opening to the world and the suppression of certain pious practices after the Second Vatican Council. Open-mindedness is what struck me from the beginning in the DMJ. In summary, I lived a happy life, though there were moments of doubt, and psychologically difficult ones. I am proud to acknowledge that I am a DMJ, especially for the openness, among us which have allowed me to meet many beautiful people. Their evolution still today pleases me well but it would benefit from going faster. I remember the 20 years that I spent in community in Mouscron from 1964 to 1984. It was the happiest period of my life, the most fulfilling time for me as a human being and as a religious.

I had a very active life in teaching, then after my return to Brussels upon my retirement, I was involved in parish activities and in a library of the DMJ School. I taught myself how to use a computer. Now, at the age of 96 years, I find myself in a nursing home; a modern flat. For more than 8 years, I have lived here with 5 sisters, while the other 3 are in Nazareth House. I am experiencing old age which is a great and true poverty, common to everyone, made of much renunciation and loneliness. As my vision has greatly diminished, depriving me of reading and legs that reduce me to walking only in the immediate surroundings of the retirement home, the essential remains, Christ and his faithful Love.

Sr. Marie Philippe