

## LOVE AND GO YOUR WAY

### A Brief sharing of a section of life

How I learned to discover the extraordinary in ordinary everyday life, sparks of eternity in those seemingly so innocuous "little things".

.... For a long time already, I had known that there were priests and sisters whose vocation was to share the life of the workers, to be a Christian presence in this workplace and this challenged me ....

The years lived in Brazil (another slice of life to share) have only increased this call, this desire to be close to those who live at the bottom of the social ladder. Learning to look at our world through the eyes of those who usually don't count.

It was a period of strong economic growth in Europe and a large number of immigrant workers arrived in Belgium, mostly Moroccans and Turks in the late 60s and 70s.

After receiving some advice from my sisters in the community (rue Vifquin) and friends already living in the same neighborhood, it was soon obvious that there was a call to share the same work as Moroccan and Turkish women, without proselytizing of course, but not fleeing the "encounter" in this area. How many moments of grace have I been able to live!

What was the work that was available to them in Belgium?

Subcontracting: cleaning companies... these firms came out of the ground like mushrooms, because they were very lucrative.... Almost no investment, just a hiring office and then "renting men and especially women to go and clean elsewhere ... banks, schools, factories etc... I worked in particular for the firm ISS which at the time had 40,000 workers around the world.

To begin with I went to the Lumière firm's hiring office (address received from a young Iranian worker) and the next day I could start. As I looked like an immigrant (and swarthier after Brazil) the employee used a vocabulary he thought more appropriate: "you here tomorrow at 5 am with a work permit".

And this is the beginning of a long adventure of almost 20 years!

Yes, I admit that this job was terribly monotonous and tiring, the first 10 years I cleaned 8 hours a day, with a large team of more or less 30 cleaners, the head office of the Société Générale de Banque, now BNP Paribas Fortis (I even had the honor with a friend to clean the safe deposit room).

... and yet precisely in this monotony there were fantastic aspects: how solidarity grew, how respect for different nationalities grew and how together through trade union action we were often able to achieve an improvement in working conditions.

For me, and for others, it was also a privileged place for prayer, for meeting the Lord and for a better understanding of the Gospel incarnate:

-Wasn't it a bit Pentecost when during our 1st union meeting everyone began to speak...each in his own language and yet we understood each other very well because we spoke the language of solidarity and we sought respect for each person in a dignified work.

- Isn't it a bit resurrecting, when we all stopped work for 2 hours at the risk of losing our jobs, to protest against the unfair dismissal of a Turkish colleague and we won! Several of us then straightened our heads and said: "we are no longer afraid!" and we cried with joy.

Of course after extraordinary moments it happened that the next day we fought for a squeegee or a tea towel... we were not angels!

I give thanks for so many women with whom I have been able to team up, to go a long way throughout these years.

To reflect on this experience there were the teams of priests and worker sisters. For many years we met every 10 days (one week on Wednesday evening and the following week on Saturday morning): for a revision of life (cfr Cardijn "see, judge, act"), the meal and the Eucharist. Each in turn received the others and every two months with a larger group, we had a weekend of recollection. This is how we shared the problems and difficulties we encountered, reflected and encouraged each other to "live with open eyes, to discover the Essential.... And also to take together good moments of relaxation.

Nowadays, we still meet a few of us, once a month ... all pensioners, but keeping the same spirit.

Yes, LOVE AND GO YOUR WAY

Cécile Walrave, Brussels September 2020

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