

"FOR THEM, GOD IS EVERYTHING"



I was about eight years old, it was a hot summer afternoon and I was on vacation at the seaside with my grandmother in the village of Pinarella (Ravenna), Italy. Together we went to visit the parish church, which contained a beautiful painting of Christ, almost six meters (20 feet) high, depicting him with a smiling face and open arms. The painting fascinated me because it seemed to say: *Come to me with confidence!* Next to the church, the Daughters of St. Paul were holding a book display. We stopped there to buy some items. One of the sisters smiled at me and I was struck by how joyful and serene her smile was. On the way home I asked my grandmother, "Why are nuns so happy?" Being a woman of faith, she replied, "Because, for them, God is everything." Her words filled me with enthusiasm and I exclaimed: "Then I too want to be a nun when I grow up!" My grandmother was a little worried and replied, "But you have to have a vocation to become a nun!" The mysterious word *vocation* intrigued me, but after awhile I forgot the episode. I recalled it only many years later, when I was already a postulant and two Daughters of St. Paul from the Milan community, one of whom was my teacher, told me that they had been taking care of that seaside book exhibit when I had stopped by during my vacation all those years ago. I had found that smile again!



When I was young, I loved to read, in particular short stories, adventure stories or books on spirituality. Among the latter, two became my "traveling companions": *The Story of a Soul* by Therese of Lisieux and *The Interior Castle* by Teresa of Avila. In fact, the fascination and attraction to God that I had felt

when standing before the painting of Christ had remained in my heart and had grown within me, not only when I was in church but always—even when I was riding my bicycle along the country roads on the outskirts of town. The beauty of nature communicated to me a Presence that loved me, enveloped me and wanted me for himself.

One day I experienced more intensely than usual his invitation to make him my "all" and I was both joyful and alarmed at the thought of saying yes to him. Was this the meaning of the mysterious word *vocation*? And where would it lead me? The answer came one spring morning when, in the cathedral of my hometown, Mantua, two Pauline sisters came up to me and invited me to participate in a summer vocation camp. I realized that this was the sign I had been waiting for. During that camp and the succeeding ones, as well as during the FSP retreats that I had begun to attend together with some friends from my parish, I discovered the beauty of the Pauline mission, the figure of Fr. Alberione, the various components of the Pauline Family, their way of life...and I felt very much "at home" among them.



I was enthusiastic about the way the Pauline sisters and priests guided our prayer sessions and celebrations, using modern songs and audiovisual languages, as well as their animation of catechetical encounters centered on the Word of God and a reading of contemporary history through the lens of faith. I wanted to share this experience of vibrancy and vitality with others in my parish, where our glorious polyphonic choir had been disbanded and the cineforums that had once been frequent were now a thing of the past. The songs we sang were always the same, our Liturgies were dull and routine, and the pews that had once been filled with young people were now sadly empty. My discouraged pastor was an elderly, good-hearted person but he had a stern face and spent hours playing the organ alone in church. How could I convince him to

give us permission to play the guitar during our liturgies and radically change our repertoire, introducing new languages and experiences? Yet once I had mustered my courage and made the proposal, he agreed to give it a try and the reaction of the parishioners was so positive that I was astounded. As Sunday followed Sunday, our parish community went from boredom to joy: it began to blossom again, like fields when they pass from the fog of winter to the sunshine of spring.

It was the same wonder, the same thrill of amazement, that one feels at the miracle of a personal and/or collective inner rebirth—a reality that I have experienced time and again in my life as a Daughter of St. Paul, for instance during Bible missions, in encounters aimed at listening to the Word, at cineforums or discoforums, Gospel days, “itinerant” contact with catechists, young people and the general public in which participants begin to rediscover their faith and transition from a religiosity lived by tradition or habit to a personal and revitalizing encounter with Christ Way, Truth and Life.

It is the same emotion I have felt as the years go by and my initial “bubbly” enthusiasm has subsided into more intimate and profound contact with the surprises of Providence. Like the experience of finding myself, as a professed sister, holding a book exhibit

in Pinarella and running into the same parish priest who had been the pastor there in my childhood—which gave me the chance to tell him that the nun now standing in front of him was once a child enchanted by the painting of Christ in his church. Or like the experience of organizing in my turn vocation camps and meetings in which I crossed paths with other companions on the journey of faith and apostolate at the delicate and decisive moment when they were trying to decide what to do with their lives.

But even greater than all this is my increased passion today for communication. Moving from one service to another: from provincial government responsibilities to multimedia publishing, the animation of Communications Week, the Pauline Communication and Culture Association, and from there to the digital apostolate...I have felt growing within me, year after year, the conviction that the Pauline charism is a treasure to be shared because it contains so many precious and fruitful elements for our contemporary Church and society. My horizons have expanded even more now that I am living a new stage of my Pauline journey—one that is helping me get to know and serve our sisters all over the world.

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