

THE CHIL BRIDE



Why did I choose this title for my vocational story? Because I entered very young (11 and a half years old) and also because I heard Jesus call me one day, in prayer, with this name. It was not a vision, just a gentle voice within my heart.

FIRST VOCATIONAL SEED

My mother always prayed that one of her sons would become a priest. God seemed to have granted her profound desire when my brother Innocenzo entered the Salesians. But during his novitiate, my brother wrote home saying that he no longer intended to continue his journey with the Salesians. This was a real shock for the whole family, especially for my mother. My brother never expressed his motives for wanting to leave. We were all at supper the day that mother gave us the news of his return to the family. In my heart I resolved that day that: *If I enter religious life, I will never leave and return home. God had given our family a task and we have not fulfilled it.*

I had no real liking for Sisters because they seemed old-fashioned to me. They all seemed to be made of the same stuff. One day the Daughters of St. Paul came to my parish. They were young, full of life and not stereotyped. I said to myself: *If Sisters are like this, I can become one too.* But I never voiced this desire.

I enrolled in middle school. I had to walk two and a half kilometers to reach the school. One day Sr. Lidia Bianco of the Daughters

of St. Paul met me (we lived near Alba) and she said to me: "If you join us in Alba you can continue your schooling *in-house* without having to walk all this way each day". I didn't answer her. However, I spoke to the parish priest and my parents. My mom was against it because I was too young, but my dad was of the opinion that an education from the Sisters would be better than what I would receive in our village, so he said yes. I left my family with tears in my eyes and a heavy heart. I brought my middle school books with me to continue my studies, but I had to put them aside. I felt offended. Why I didn't say anything to my family, I don't know. After about a month Primo Maestro came to give us a meditation. I was fascinated by the fire he inspired. I was also enthusiastic about the work in the bookbinding department. So I went ahead like this, always more fascinated by the Founder and by the apostolate.

THE SECOND CALL

On the eve of my perpetual profession, numerous doubts assailed me: had I remained here simply to replace my brother? Why did I like this apostolic mission? Why did I enter so young? Therefore, I asked for a year to reflect on and discern my vocation. I abandoned the religious habit and finished my last year of higher studies in the community in Lugano. This year of struggle and searching was my exodus from Egypt. I discovered and reconfirmed my vocation. Since then, I have continued my vocational journey without any more doubts. I am grateful to the superiors and sisters who supported me and trusted me in that difficult year for both me and them.

EASTER 1972

I asked to make my profession on Easter Sunday, rather than wait for June. I rediscovered my vocation with a new dimension of joy and love.

About a month after my perpetual profession, the Superior General, Sr. Ignazia Balla, wrote a letter to all the sisters stating that she needed about twenty missionaries: some for Latin America, others for Africa and still others for Asia.

I said to myself: *I have not really shown a guarantee of my trustworthiness, and if this family of mine is in need, I cannot fail to offer my availability.* So, I wrote that if they didn't



find enough missionaries, I was available. I was sure no one would think of me. I also said that I felt more inclined to go to Latin America or Africa due to my lively character.

THE MISSIONARY CALL

The news reached me from Rome that I had been chosen for the missions but that if I accepted I would have to go to Taiwan because they had not found any missionaries for the Orient. I felt like dying. I went to chapel and said to Jesus: *You always make what I don't desire fall into my lap!* After some reflection, I said to myself: *I've never been to Latin America, or Africa, or Asia either. So, why not try?*

I replied to the Superior General that I did not feel suited for the Orient. The culture, customs, environment, seemed so differ-

ent. She replied: "If your only difficulties are these, go with faith".

GOD KNOWS ME MORE THAN I KNOW MYSELF

In the Orient I had a great time! I immediately enjoyed the culture, art, music, and people. That is why I spent 45 years in Taiwan and now 6 years in Pakistan. I left Taiwan in tears and sadness, as well as a certain fear for the socio-political and religious situation of this new country. But here too I learned a lot.

A deeper social dimension entered my heart, compassion for the people suffering from poverty, admiration for the Christians who are a discriminated minority but who courageously defend their faith. I immediately felt great esteem for our sisters who are so gifted and creative in music, dance, and art and who, with admirable courage, reach out to Christian communities even in the most remote and deserted areas as well as the risky border with Afghanistan.

Today, after so many years and experiences, if I look back on my life, I have nothing but gratitude to the Lord for having led me by the hand, or rather "carried me in his arms". Magnificat!

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