

APOSTLE OF JESUS CHRIST



Looking back on the story of my vocation and the abundant blessings I have received in my 25 years as a Daughter of St. Paul, it comes spontaneously to me to praise and thank the Lord for allowing me to participate in the Pauline mission in Pakistan, bringing Jesus to the people through the specific charism of our Institute.

I was born in Pakistan, the second of seven siblings. Our family environment was very religious, which made it possible for me to “breathe” a profound Christian spirit from my earliest years. I remember that every morning my father would read the Bible and sing the Psalms in Punjabi, our native language. This daily practice made a deep impression on me. My mother too was very devout. She had a special love for the Blessed Mother and said the rosary every day. Each evening she and my father would gather the family together for night prayers before going to bed.

Our parish, dedicated to St. Paul, is one of the biggest and most active in the archdiocese of Karachi. I was a member of the church choir and of the catechetical team. Little by little, I began to feel a call to the religious life, but I didn't know what steps to take to realize this dream. When I met the first FSP missionaries to Pakistan, I was captivated by their smiles and by the enthusiasm with which they carried out their activities in the schools and parishes. I was especially interested in the way they catechized various groups of Christians in the evenings by showing films translated into Urdu and Punjabi. Watching them return home after a long day spent visiting the people with their bags overflowing with books, I longed to discover the secret of their life and in the end I found that it was very simple: they wanted the Gospel to reach everyone!

Participating in the days of recollection they organized for young women, I soon realized that I had found the type of religious life that the Lord wanted me to follow. With the permission of my parents, I entered the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Paul in 1989. It was very hard for me to leave my family and go to Lahore to begin my formation. My whole

family came to the train station to say goodbye. My parents gave me their blessing and I began the 24-hour trip, which seemed to last forever!

When I reached my destination, Sr. Mercedes Randisi, an Italian missionary with luminous eyes and a gentle smile, was waiting at the train station to meet me. As the sister in charge of formation, she gave me a very warm welcome, and when we got to the convent the other young women in formation did the same. I felt like I had arrived in a foreign country because life in a religious community was so strange to me. But I also felt like I was on “holy ground.” It was a very moving experience. The atmosphere of the house was serene and I threw myself wholeheartedly into the daily schedule of the candidates, which was made up of prayer, study and apostolic activities. My favorite times were our visits to the families because we had the chance to listen to the people and pray with them.

I participated in an inter-congregational novitiate and I will never forget the classes or our beloved teachers, who shaped us like a potter shapes clay vessels. The day of my religious profession was the most beautiful day of my life: I finally belonged to Jesus as a Daughter of St. Paul! Afterward, I was assigned to the diffusion apostolate—a beautiful experience in which I met countless people.

Later, I was sent to Rome to continue my studies. It was a time of great spiritual and cultural enrichment. Living in Italy—a land of innumerable apostles and martyrs, the land of our Pauline beginnings—was an unforgettable experience that strengthened my faith and my feeling of belonging to the Congregation.

After my perpetual profession, I realized that the time had come to recompense God and the Institute for the abundance of blessings I had received. I am grateful to my superiors for the trust they showed in asking me to take charge of formation work in the Pakistani Delegation.

As I celebrate the 25th anniversary of my religious profession this year, I want to join my co-novice, Sr. Meena Inayat, in thanking the Divine Master for accompanying us on our journey with great fidelity. We are both very grateful to the Congregation, our Delegation, our formators and the many other people who have supported us in our efforts to live and communicate Jesus in the footsteps of St. Paul!

Magdaline Ishaq, fsp