

IN LOVE WITH GOD



Even as a child, I felt the Lord drawing me to himself. This was truly a gift! Although young, I was already familiar with suffering and it was precisely in this context that my friendship with him began.

He was the dear Friend and good Father to whom I entrusted everything. I don't know where this confidence in God came from because my parents were not people of faith. In fact, they were "against the Church," as they would often say....

When I was in first grade I started attending catechism classes; the catechists were very good. At the age of twelve, I met nuns for the first time—two Sisters of Divine Providence who came to the parish that summer to conduct a Bible vacation school. One day I asked one of them, "What is a sister?" She replied: "A sister is a woman totally in love with Jesus, and Jesus is totally in love with her." I had no doubts: "I will be a sister!" I exclaimed.

I started attending Mass every day and meanwhile I wrote to many religious congregations, asking for information about their lives. When my parents realized that what they called "this nonsense of religious life" was not a passing fancy, they became worried and tried to deflect me from my plans. It was a battle for me to leave the house every Sunday to go to Mass. At one point, one of my aunts convinced my father that his attitude was only making me more determined to pursue a religious vocation. She told him that if he would leave me alone, I would soon abandon the idea of becoming a nun. So he let me continue to go to church....

One Sunday after Mass, I read a short article in the diocesan newspaper about the Daughters of St. Paul. It was accompanied by a photo of a smiling, radiant nun (Prima Maestra Thecla). For me it was a sign and an invitation.

I entered the Institute on 29 June 1963 at the age of 14. I always thank the Lord for calling me to the religious life at a young age. From the very first day, I felt I was in the right place: "at home." The Pauline charism seemed made for me.

I was privileged to learn the "propaganda" apostolate from the sisters who came to the United States from the Motherhouse (i.e., from Italy). I was able to carry out evangelization side by side with them, breathing a supernatural spirit and a love for the Pauline mission that inspired and invigorated me.

Some Daughters of St. Paul have left a decisive imprint on my life and character, beginning with Maestra Paola Cordero, whom I consider a true mother. Our first sisters had no academic qualifications, but they were women of prayer, charged with apostolic fire, with a simple, strong and constant faith; they were women who knew how to love gratuitously. It is especially from them that I learned the most important things: love for God, the Church and humanity; generosity and creative fidelity; confidence; the Pauline missionary spirit.... They are part of my "great cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12: 1).

My first profession and then my perpetual profession were moments of great joy mingled with suffering. My parents chose not to celebrate these important events with me. Nevertheless, I rejoiced, because the Master was making me his bride. My dream had come true! Nothing seemed impossible anymore.

My "mission territory" was my own native land, with all its needs and wounds: that great river of humanity seeking the meaning of life, reasons for hope, good news and redemption. In those early years, I was able to experience different aspects of our mission. The desire to reach as many people as possible with the Word burned like an ardent flame within me.

But at the end of 1983 my path in life took an unexpected turn. Sr. Maria Cevolani, our Superior General at that time, asked me to go to Germany as a missionary. I spent 18 wonderful years in that country! As always, the Lord asked me to do things I had never



Germany



done before, trusting in the grace of my vocation and in his promise. The Pact became a way of life for me.

At the turn of the century, the Pauline Family celebrated the first centenary of our Founder's "Night of light" and we sisters of the German Delegation were able to participate in this memorable event in Alba, where everything had begun. After the Mass in the cathedral, the whole Pauline Family spent an hour in adoration together. Afterward, I continued to pray on my own. Sr. Giovannamaria Carrara, then Superior General, was praying beside me and at around 2:00 a.m. she urged me several times to take a break and get a cup of coffee. Her insistence surprised me but in the end I "obeyed." When I returned, I reassured her a little ironically, "I'm fine now." Sr. Giovannamaria looked at me and asked, "Will you still be fine when I ask you to go to Russia?" An incredible surprise, before the Blessed Sacrament, at the turn of the century! The God of the Covenant is a God of surprises!

With Germany in my heart, I left for a completely different world. Sr. Joseph Marella, one of the "founders" of our Moscow community, was at the airport to welcome me. We would be partners for the next eight years. Another sister, Sr. Augusta Monti, was waiting for me at home—a small basement apartment. My first community was a little "trinity" in a country almost three times bigger than the United States!

I felt I had been sent to Russia to evangelize and be evangelized. A new stage of formation as an apostle began for me: I had to learn a new language, insert myself into a new culture, forge new relationships and face new challenges. I learned many things from the Russian people and deepened my ability to abandon myself into the hands of

the Lord, to look at reality with the eyes of faith and to wait for God's "hour."

But in 2009 I was obliged to return to the United States because my mother was very ill. For me, leaving Russia was another "goodbye" to people I will never forget and to whom I owe so much.

56 years of Pauline life, 51 years of religious profession.... The celebration of my Golden Jubilee of profession last year was a milestone overflowing with joy and gratitude. I cannot find adequate words to thank the Lord for all he has done in my life. I can only repeat the exclamation of Mary: *Magnificat*.

For your faithful and intimate presence, Lord: *Magnificat!* For the grace of allowing me to collaborate in your very same mission: *Magnificat!* For the joys and surprises: *Magnificat!* For the sufferings and challenges: *Magnificat!* For every person I met and for the sisters with whom I had the privilege of living: *Magnificat!* For the abundant riches of your graces: *Magnificat!*

I am a very happy Daughter of Saint Paul, totally in love with God—this God who is totally in love with me!

Mary Leonora Wilson, fsp
