

## MY VOCATION



**M**y vocation began when I read an excerpt from one of the Gospels, specifically that of the call of the first disciples (Jn. 1:35-39). It is a passage I have re-read often, especially when I have to make important decisions such as accepting difficult acts

of obedience, changing my lifestyle, etc. In the past few days I have reread this biblical excerpt once again, but for a special reason, namely: so as to thank the Lord.

Jesus asked the two disciples who were following him, "What are you looking for?" The men were surprised and probably didn't have a ready answer to that question, so they countered it with one of their own. They asked Jesus, "Where do you live?" and he replied, "Come and see."

When I was growing up, I too—like the disciples in the Gospel—was eager to discover God's will for me—the path in life he had prepared for me so as to lead me to happiness. I knew that if I made the right choice in this matter, I would be able to fulfill my desires and find joy.

But when Jesus asked me: "What are you looking for?" I was no longer so sure about what I wanted... I was 19 years old and already thinking about starting a family of my own, but how could I say *no* to the Lord? On his part, he waited for me patiently and the moment I said yes to him, I experienced great freedom and peace.

That was the beginning of my adventure with the Lord among the Daughters of St. Paul. While I was still in formation and immersed in my academic studies in Brescia, I was asked if I would be willing to go to the missions—to Africa. My life as a missionary there began in Uganda, where I made my perpetual profession. Over the subsequent years, I was transferred to Kenya, Nigeria and then back to Kenya. The last of my assignments on that continent were in Nigeria and Ghana.

I have lived long enough to be able to affirm that we only have true peace when we surrender ourselves to the Lord and are really convinced that he is the one who is guiding our life. This is what being a consecrated per-

son means for me today: allowing myself to be loved by the Lord and following him where and in whatever way he asks, in order to proclaim to everyone I meet that Christ died and rose again for us so as to give us life. I would like to shout to the whole world that only the Lord enables us to live in joy, freedom and peace.

Today, after almost 50 years of religious profession, 46 of them spent in Africa, I thank the Lord with all my heart for gifting me with the grace of a call to the consecrated life and to the Pauline missionary life in particular.

Those years were filled with many beautiful moments but also with difficulties that allowed me to experience God's faithful and loving presence. I went through some very hard times characterized by fear, failure and sin. There were times when I felt incapable, unsatisfied, alone and misunderstood. In those moments, the invitation of Jesus to "come and see" returned to me in my times of prayer, enabling me to experience God's love, fidelity and presence, which gave me the courage and strength to persevere.



With regard to the many sisters with whom I lived as a missionary over the years, I want to say that their ability to simply be themselves and remain true to their identity helped me to grow in freedom and in my love for God and for all people. Their fidelity to the Lord and their love for the Pauline apostolate helped me tremendously. I am grateful to the Congregation, to my formators, to my superiors and to all the sisters who have accompanied my journey as an FSP up to now.

Looking back over the decades, I thank the Lord for calling me to spend 46 years of my life serving him in Africa. I thank him for all the good I received from the people I met, for the sisters with whom I lived, and for all the meaningful things we were able to accomplish together.

*Mariuccia Pezzini, fsp*