

## Consecrated Life – A Mystery

*“There is a love, such an extraordinary love, which is more immense than the ocean. Lullaby singing love songs. God love me so much, while I am still in the dark, while I am fragile, you have lovingly looked to me, guide me, and lead me into his passionate love”*

The lyrics of An Duc, a priest-musician's song echo in my mind forever. The priest, perhaps, loves God so much that he has composed that beautiful song. I personally cannot remember exactly when I began to reflect deeply on the word "vocation". It was probable when I was young; I saw some priests and sisters who came to my parish. The way they were serving made a deep impression on me. They were really holy. At that time, I dreamed of becoming a sister in order to dedicate my whole life to serving God, and then I decided to enter a convent that belongs to the Sisters of the Holy Cross of Hue.

How can I forget my first feeling entering the convent, so different from anywhere I had ever been at home? Looking back, I think that it is in fact a miracle. I believe that God chose me to become one of his disciples in His vast field. Life is a priceless gift which is given to me. I am blessed for my existence. Time flies, the consecrated life for me is a sweet dream that God makes true. In reality, by choosing this lifestyle it seems I am going on an ups and downs road - called the Way of Cross.

I gradually realize that becoming a sister means not to do what I like but to love what I do, not to live with whom I choose but to love whom God sends to me. It is said that doing what you want is freedom yet loving what you do is happiness. In fact, the journey of vocation is really challenging, I almost fall down and want to turn to another direction, however I need to move forward in order to seek Jesus who so loves me and gives His life for me and for the whole world.

Choosing Christ means that I will follow His steps closely on the way of Cross. I confidently believe that I will find Christ in the poor, the hungry, the suffering. I compare my life to a tree. I am not able to stand firm if I do not really

root firmly in God himself. Challenges and hardships otherwise will beat me anytime. Every night, kneeling in front of the Tabernacle, I search myself all a day long with multi-assignments, I wonder how much I am thinking of and praying with God? I am aware of God's love; how can I repay him?

Looking to the life of Our Lady, St. Joseph, they are examples of simplicity and humility. They did great works. One, who gives birth to God, is the mother of Jesus Christ and one is the patron of Jesus who defends Him from harm. These two people, who have tender flesh and heart; carry great responsibilities.

At present, I am a novice of the Congregation of the Lovers of the Holy Cross of Hue. I am motivated by Jesus who qualifies as the model of obedience, poverty and chastity. Furthermore, following Jesus includes the imitation of what Jesus did, as narrated in the Scriptures. I wish to follow Him on His ministry. Mother Teresa Calcutta once told the following story about her mission and service: "One day I saw a poor man, with sores and maggots all over his body and rotting calves, lying on the roadside. I picked him up and took him to the monastery to take care of. Before he died, he had made a satisfied statement with a bright smile: 'You are like Jesus in the Bible.'" Mother Teresa's life has depicted the image of a suffering Christ. Without God in her heart, she could never have found it happy to be with those people, nor could she have had the courage to set foot on the stinking blankets throughout India. Another example was Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan. Although being confined in a prison with only cockroaches and mice as friends, he still had a passion for God.

They really were the finest examples of the consecrated life. They completely joined their lives to God, voluntarily following God and allowing God to lead the way. I was empowered by their daily prayer and contemplation of the Eucharist. The Body of Christ was my motivation to overcome numerous difficulties and challenges. There was a time when I was torn apart by various options, not knowing where God was. If I hesitated to carry the Cross, I would never find peace.

God led me step by step. He strengthened my faith, hope, and love. The closer I lived to God, the more I perceived the thorny path that He went through. He was

hurt, disappointed, misunderstood, and betrayed by his disciples. However, all were transformed and sanctified by God's immense love. He was very close to me. He was a retired sister, a poor handicapped child, a stubborn child, or a sister I did not love much ... God is in me.

I used to aspire to achieve many things because I thought a religious one must have different abilities in order to serve well and be blameless in others' eyes. I was wrong. I realized that when God was not put at the center of my life, everything would become meaningless. The hustle and bustle of this life as well as the anxiety would make me forget God. I was not aware that I was just an instrument in God's hand. Now I know I need a daily transformation through pruning and my worldly desires need to be sanctified by God. I want to be led by Him on all the roads. However, have I really allowed God to completely control my life? There was a time when God came knocking on the door and I didn't open it just because I was obsessed with something else. I thought my success came from my own strength and effort, not from God's blessings. I was unaware that a divine power was lifting me up and making me more Godlike day after day. I am the personification of Christ on earth.

I silently thank God for creating me and giving me His perfect love. He engraved my name on His palm and marked me in His heart. He gave me all the blessings and led me. Living a consecrated life means that I no longer live for myself or do whatever I want, but that I should let Christ live in me. It was also the experience that St. Paul passed on to the Galatians: "I no longer live but Christ lives in me".

I choose the Cross because there hung the Savior. The One I love. He is the Crucified Christ. I want to follow the path that He used to walk. Even though I am weak, God has chosen and loved me personally. I love what people assume craziness. The One that nobody wants to see is now my spouse. The suffering that everyone avoids is my glory.

*Maria Phạm Thị Lộc*