Columns
Spirituality



(Unsplash/Marc-Olivier Jodoin)



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Editor's Note: Today, Feb. 2, was designated by Pope Saint John Paul II in 1997 as the World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life. It coincides with the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord (Candlemas Day) since women and men in consecrated life are called to bring the light of Jesus Christ to all people. Our columns today and tomorrow, and our feature on The Life for this month reflect that theme.

The 21st day of January 1966 was not a day like any other. A tiny baby was born in the village of Ting'ang'a in Kiambu, Kenya. A firstborn of nine, raised and brought up in a very humble beginning. We lived from hand to mouth in a small traditional grass hut.

My Catholic parents were attending church only on Sundays then; we had no common family prayers in my home, but for reasons I can't explain I was able to join a small Christian community, read the Bible for the elderly ladies and join in rosary recitation. At the age of 7 I recall vividly that I was able to proclaim the Word on Sundays by doing the readings. In fact, the leaders had to improvise a stool for me to stand on so the congregation could see the reader!

I was able to complete the primary level education and in 1981 happily joined the secondary school. I was an above average student, but had trouble with the school fees. During the holidays I would do informal jobs for a teacher neighbor who — I now understand — wanted to empower me to learn. She would give my pay to my parents to supplement my school fees, but there was an agreement with my parents — especially mum — that she was to give me money for newspapers for both Saturdays and Sundays. They kept their promise.

All this time I was not baptized. I attended catechism classes for three years because my mum would take me away to go for work, including during the exam time. This delayed my baptism. Meanwhile back in school I was the secretary of a Young Christian Students club. I seized every opportunity to "preach" to the school, including during school assemblies.

Nevertheless, in my second year of secondary school, He touched me! One afternoon as the students were sweeping the classrooms in preparation for the evening activities, I was with a group of young boys and girls, when suddenly I found myself at a loss. I was not following in their discussion, because something had struck my mind.

I had seen a beautiful, large flower in a nearby flower bed. I contemplated that this wonderful flower, though, will wither away shortly and lose its fresh, green, large

and beautiful leaves! I continued musing that my young life can also waste away if I do not take care of it. I still recall and relive this moment like it was just yesterday; that was when I made up my mind. The best way to take care of my life is to give it back to the Creator as His servant — a Catholic sister. That was when the long journey began, in July 1982. Remember, I was not baptized yet!



(Unsplash/Tamanna Rumee)

I began attending morning Masses to plead with God to bless me with this long-coveted sacrament of baptism. I longed for it so much because our parish priest — a holy Irish and people-loving man — had taught us in Sunday school that "children who die without baptism do not see God." And I really wanted to meet God! Within a year after this, eventually I did receive the sacrament of baptism, holy Communion, and — in a year's time — confirmation. I continued to attend morning Mass in thanksgiving for the gift of faith.

Despite the fact that I was really active in the proclamation of the Word, I did not respond to the parish missionary sisters' invitation to attend seminars for the parish youth. I really don't know why. That was even in spite of the fact that one of the sisters had been my mathematics teacher in secondary school, and after secondary school the sister nurse had given me work as an untrained nurse in the parish dispensary.

I can only say it was not God's time yet and that His ways are beyond our understanding. However, an opportunity arose when the same sisters wanted to record the history of Bishop Daniel Comboni, their father founder. Somebody must have told them to ask me to be the "voice," which I did for the sisters, recording on tape the history of the founder of the Comboni Missionary Sisters.

Another day that stands out in my memory was in September 1986 when I left home to join the sisterhood. It is a day that I will never forget. My people call God "*Ngai*," a name which means "one that shares or divides." On this particular day Ngai had shared with me His special gift of love. I do not understand fully, but from our humble home without a gate he crept in and took none other but the firstborn. This alone has kept me faithful to Him no matter what — the fact that God saw fit to trust me to respond to His love. I marvel at it!

Two years later I was in Nigeria, in West Africa, for further formation. On Nov. 16, 1991, I was espoused to Christ as an Immaculate Heart Sister and the rest is history.

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In my 55 years I do celebrate my gifts of nature and of grace. Among the philosophies of life that have made sense and provided inner motivation for me are:

- I will do what is right even when the whole world says it is wrong;
- I will return love for love in spite of challenges;
- I will love what I do and will do it with passion.

Those three principles have given me an unknown drive that has caused me to defy all odds and to go for my dreams. I am not where I would like to be yet, but given my humble beginning, I must say all my achievements have been by the finger of God. There can be no better explanation.

Today I look back, and in amazement attend Mass in thanksgiving not only for the gift of faith, but for many more gifts that He has continuously showered on me abundantly. When I look back on where God found me and where He is taking me, I shed a well of joyful tears.