

THE GIFT OF PARTICULAR CHARISM AND HOW THIS HAS SHAPED YOU

As one of the young sisters of our congregation, one of my tasks is to promote vocation in our locality. I love doing this kind of job, for it makes me remember my vocation journey when thrown with questions like: "To whom and where shall I go?"

Each of us is called to a particular vocation in life. In my case, I am certain that I am called in this way of life. How did I come to the point of knowing this? Well, aside from the sign that I asked from God, my own personal charism leads me in this way of life. Theologian Wilfred Harrington, OP, explains that *charism which comes from the Greek word charisma means free gift, favor. In religious language we called it the free gift of grace. It is a free gift because it is gifted to us by the Holy Spirit for building up the body of Christ, which means it links with love, service and for the common good.* Since I was a child, I loved to be at the service of God and God's people. This made me realize, that my sense of volunteering in the church and other institutions is one way of God calling me to serve God fully for the rest of my life.

I remember before my First Profession, I went through a process of discernment- discerning if I am ready in this way of life. I have realized that it is not only the "service" that I was able to give to God but EVERYTHING that is in me - my total self, my whole self, with all my gifts and frailties, with all that I am from the moment I said Yes in my profession until my last breath. From the very start, I knew that religious life would not be easy. I will be experiencing lots of joys and pain, happiness and sorrows, affirmations and challenges, as well as accepting and letting go, because it was clear to me that in committing myself to God and to my congregation, it takes persevering effort to be responsive to the grace of God and the challenges of the Gospel, particularly through community life and service of our neighbour in obedience to God's will.

So, every time I encounter someone who is confused and unsure what vocation they would like to choose, I always affirm that their feelings of confusion are normal and would usually encourage them as they go through the process:

First, is to have someone to accompany them in their discernment. Discernment is a Christian practice and a gift from God. Its main objective is for us to become closer and more intimate to God in all our actions, in all our decisions, and in everything we do. Though discernment is always associated with decision-making, it always differs because discernment is not about choosing and making right and bad decisions, but rather it is choosing between all the good choices in life.

St. Ignatius of Loyola has a profound teaching in the process of discernment. One of the terms he uses is "indifference". This word may sound negative, but Ignatius refers to it as our capacity to make free choices, ready to move, ready to move your attachments, possessions, and ready to do whatever God is calling you to do. This readiness may be experienced through community life. St. Benedict would say, that committing oneself in this way of life involves us entering a *School of the Lord's Service* and life-long discipleship. In and with the community, we learn to practice the

instruments of good works which enable us to amend unhealthy habits, grow in charity and love, as well as turning to the living out of Gospel values.

Second, once you are in the process of discernment, try to know the identity of a particular religious congregation. St. Benedict identified as religious one who lives and belongs to a congregation or a community, who serves under a Rule (Gospel Values) and a Superior. There should be a balance of way of life: prayer, work, study, and leisure. Scripture scholar Sandra Schneiders, IHM, suggests that religious life must be lived as a “single-minded quest for God”, which means that the way of life integrates not only prayer but also ministry and community.

I remember when I was in a gathering for groups of Religious Women, a Franciscan Religious Sister said, “My friend told me how amazed she was seeing photos of different religious sisters together.” “She continued, ‘Sister, I noticed that every time you go out together, you are always with this woman, (pointing to me on the photo)’”. My friend replied, “She’s always with us because she is a Religious Sister”. I am quoting this story because one of the very distinct identities of a certain congregation is their habit (the clothes that they are wearing) and the ministry or apostolic work that they are engaging with. It would be good that in your discernment to consider the different gifts, which in religious terms we call “charism”, connected to the charism of a particular congregation and fits to your personal charism.

Lastly, is to Listen with the ear of your heart. Clare Cordon, sgs, said that “to listen is more than hearing the word, it is also opening ourselves and letting the Spirit lead us in finding meaning within the depths of our inner being, with the intellect and from the place of our true identity”. This listening with the ear of our heart expects us to listen to one another, to our Superior, to the people around us, to all of God’s creation and most of all to the Word of God through our prayer.

When the time comes that we see ourselves like Simon Peter asking Jesus, “To whom shall we go?”, (Jn 6:68), let us be strong, and let our hearts take courage (Ps.27:14) and let us be consoled with the promise of God, as St. Benedict has written in his Rule: “Once you have done this, my eyes will be upon you, and my ears will listen for your prayers; and even before you ask me, I will say to you: Here I am (Isa.58:9).”