



FORUM ONLINE

“Let’s go out, it’s urgent”

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Maria Shanti

A BRIEF PERSONAL SHARING ON DISCERNMENT BY MS.MARIA SHANTI

(MAIDS OF THE POOR) FOR ASIA

I wish to share my personal experience of discernment beginning from my childhood

I. MY CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE

Two incidents which happened on the street created a deep impact in me as a child. Since then I got interested in working for women in difficulties.

a) A woman falling at the feet of her husband and crying desperately as he was heading towards the railway tracks to commit suicide.

b) A lame man with both his legs twisted and crossed, walking with the support of his hands on the ground; use to make a living by begging on the streets with his wife and 3 little children.

As a child, every time I looked at these helpless women, I use to wonder and question within me how can they face such pathetic situation and from where do they get strength? In the process of discernment I realized the true cause of inner strength is God which I will be sharing in the different stages of my life experiences.

II. MY YOUTH EXPERIENCE

I took up the profession as a teacher but could not continue for more than two years because I wanted to join cloistered convent. It looked like I was jumping from within the four walls

of a class room to the four walls of a cloistered convent. My aunt, a religious nun was running a social work centre. When she got the news she invited me to stay with her for one year to do some social work in the villages and in the mean time discern my vocation to consecrated life.

I was happy moving around the villages in the country side both near and far to conduct meetings for both men and women who were illiterate, daily wagers, poor and considered as low caste. Their colonies were separated from the superior caste areas in the villages. I travelled on my bike mostly and sometimes cycling. I used to experience fear and anxiety when I had to cross lonely places but nothing could stop me because the more I began to live with them, the more I understood their problems, the conditions they were living without basic facilities, and though I had to face challenging situations. Sometimes I had to keep myself under lock and key to avoid attacks from men who did not want to see the growth of such lower caste communities through my help. My desire to work for them became stronger and simultaneously from the daily gospel reading, I understood that Jesus walked from one place to another to do his ministry facing all sorts of challenges thereby Jesus became my model and strength. I continued to work for the downtrodden for 10 years.

I would also like to share my city life experience. While travelling in the public buses, whenever I saw men seated in the seats reserved for women, I use to fight and make way for women to sit in the seats reserved for them. The reward for being the voice of women was showers of bad words and curses from agitated men. Definitely it was not a pleasant experience, but I use to draw strength and energy from Jesus, recover myself quickly and move forward saying the harvest is plenty but the laborers are few.

III. MY CALL AND DISCERNMENT

Bharath Gold Mines Limited was a central government undertaking, is in a place popularly known as Kolar Gold Fields (KGF), Karnataka, India. In the year 1999 the central government decided to close down the gold mines without providing any alternate jobs to these mining workers. This particular mining workers community has an interesting but a painful history with the British colonialism. One can imagine the plight of the mining workers and their large families without jobs. What was once called a Gold City in front of our eyes was turning to become a Ghost City. I joined the KGF People's Movement, which conscientised the workers and their families to fight for their rights against the Government. Though it was taking a toll on me I continued to fight for their rights and voiced on their behalf to the Prime Minister of India, The State Chief Minister, the Central government ministers, met few Scientists, Human right activists, NGO's personnel, underground communist workers etc. In the process, I had to encounter police on the streets and it was then I took up law studies to fight for justice in the court of law. All along my God and my family was my support.

The thought about joining the cloistered convent vanished from my mind. At the right time my nun aunt introduced me to the Secular Institute of the Maids of the Poor. For the first time when I visited the Generalate house of the Maids of the Poor in north India, as I was stepping into the house with my luggage I saw few incoming members (they were coming to attend the Chapter Meeting) were also carrying their luggage's and bowing in front of the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel at the entrance of the house. I too imitated them and bowed down but to my pleasant surprise I heard a voice loud and clear saying "the spirit of God will lead you where it will". The very next moment I felt within me that this is my place and I had no second thought about it. It is here I realised and felt very happy because without giving up the cause I was committed to I can offer myself totally to live my consecrated life in the Secular Institute of the Maids of the Poor.

IV. MY EXPERIENCE AS AN ADVOCATE

When I started my practice as an advocate in the courts, our office was handling a property case of a young and uneducated couple with four school going children. The neighbor of our client was locally powerful and wealthy man. He wanted to grab their house and the little land they had. One day he barged into my client's house and destroyed all the items at home and tore the night dress of the daughter who was 16 years old, beat her and threatened her with abusive words. I accompanied the woman and her daughter to the police station, stayed there with them and helped them file a complaint and waited till 1 a.m. (past midnight) until the Sub-Inspector arrived. Meanwhile their nasty neighbour bribed the other police officers but the Sub-Inspector was shrewd to sense the truth. Hence we succeeded in getting a FIR (First Information Report) filed against the neighbour. I accompanied the client to government hospital for a medical proof check-up and when I came back it was 4 O'clock in the morning. Humanly speaking this was not possible for me but the Spirit of the Lord was repeatedly telling me within to, "Stay with them". I obeyed the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

V. MY EXPERIENCE AS A MEMBER IN THE INSTITUTE OF THE MAIDS OF THE POOR

I must share with you that when I shared the above incident with my Formator during my formation about being in the Police station and government hospital late in the night with my client, I thought I will get a bad remark for being out late in the night. To my surprise and joy I was in fact appreciated for my actions, I was made to feel by my Formator that I was like the light amidst darkness and like the leaven in the dough while being with the battered women during

their challenging times. She also advised me to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit that leads me and not on my own strength.

At this juncture, I would like to quote Pope Francis' words which are applicable to my experience that "we are radical and at the same time free and creative in our Christian witness both in the Church and in society", and that we should desire to live a "Holy Secularity" so as to receive the Holy Spirit the most opportune way of living. (Ref: Pope's message for the 75th Anniversary of the Apostolic Constitution "Provida Mater Ecclesia" published in the Vatican News by Lisa Zengarini).

Two sentences impacted me during my formation 1) that I must become like "the leaven in the dough" and 2) "I am called to sanctify the world." When women around are trying to get the title as Miss Bangalore and Miss Beauty or at least to dress up and look like them, I feel that there can be no greater title for a woman than to be "Called to sanctify the world from within"

VI. CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude my sharing by reminding all the members of the Secular Institute that our beloved Holy Father Pope Francis has given us one more task, apart from the choice of we coming out of the sacristies, committing ourselves to make the world present in the church. This he further explains that "it does not mean returning to the sacristy, but being 'receptive antennas', which transmit messages" So, my dear sisters and brothers, let's prepare ourselves day by day to transmit not simple messages but powerful messages as the humanity is in need of liberation from one's own bondages. (Ref: Pope's message for the 75th Anniversary of the Apostolic Constitution "Provida Mater Ecclesia" published in the Vatican News by Lisa Zingarini).

Dear friends! Together we can!

I thank the CMIS organizers for giving me this opportunity. It was indeed wonderful being with you all.

Maria Shanti

Institute of the Maids of the Poor