

Sister Françoise Bernier

An Example of Adaptability and Steadfastness in Faith



In the preceding issue of the review, it was reported that Sister Françoise Bernier had passed away last December 4. She was a jovial and generous soul, but discreet and reserved with regard to her spiritual life.

For Françoise, the first calling to the religious life was heard at about 14 years of age, but as the years went on, Françoise nevertheless hoped to get married. However, events would lead her, in suffering, to the vocation God had destined for her.

So it was that, at the age of 24, at the end of a pleasure trip to the United States with her sister, she confided to her: *"I have made my decision; I am joining the Sisters Servants of the Holy Heart of Mary."* The family was greatly astonished upon hearing this. Then, Sister Françoise, a woman of commitment, gave of herself wholeheartedly

in order to live well the life she had chosen, and she was happy there.

Yet, one day, after 20 years of happiness – nine of which were spent in Cameroon –, the Lord suddenly asked her to leave her Community. Without understanding, but having learned to be flexible over the years, she obeyed in pure faith, having no idea what the future held in store for her. However, the Blessed Virgin was continuing to prepare her for Her Community...

Thus, five years later, in 1984, she came to know of the Army of Mary. Then, everything went very rapidly, for Françoise was ready. In 1985, she joined the Family of the Sons and Daughters of Mary; in 1986, she joined the Community and, in 1987, she made her vows and received the ring. Two weeks later, she was appointed Mistress of Novices and, the

next year, Superior General. She would hold that position for five years.

Sister Françoise's journey might appear disconcerting in the eyes of the world. Yet, she fulfilled what Mother Paul-Marie had written: *"God draws straight lines by making what, in our eyes, could seem to be curved ones. When, in all things, we can see their spiritual significance, we are never scandalized by the CROSS which configures us to Christ the Savior."* (*Le Royaume*, May 1990)

At a companion's request in July 2017, Sister Françoise accepted to set in writing the great grace of her life which, until then, she had only confided to Mother Paul-Marie.

ACCOUNT OF AN ASTONISHING GRACE... WHICH LED ME TO THE ARMY OF MARY!

At Port-Cartier on the North Shore, in the little Community of the Sisters Servants of the Holy Heart of Mary where I was living, I experienced a very powerful moment which I consider to be a really beautiful gift from Heaven. So, I go back in thought to that very precise time in order to give an account of it.

It was in the evening of April 22, 1979. After Complies in our little chapel, each Sister would withdraw to her room for the night. I deeply appreciated those periods of complete silence in the evening in my room. That evening, I started to pray... and to reflect, thinking to myself at the same time that it might be a good idea to take stock of the good and the not-so-good times experienced in the course of my religious life, simply to see exactly where I stood. After twenty years in the Community, it seemed to me the right time to cast a serious look at the different stages of my life "in religion". And so, before God, there came to my mind the thought of setting down on paper all the positive and all the negative elements in the years lived in the Community, after which, I thought to myself, I would tear up this page and throw it in the wastepaper basket. So that is what I did. I wrote and I kept writing, sometimes at length, adding all the details that came to my mind. Everything was clear to me in my soul and in my conscience, and I had no difficulty recounting the events lived, as much the negative ones as the positive ones.

Then, I reread what I had just written and I realized, to my great surprise, that I had many positive points, yes, but even more negative ones... How could that be since I had put so much effort into living well my religious life every day? I realized then the heaviness still present in me as a result of past strayings. The perception I had of this at the time led me to start crying, as I sat there, alone, at my desk... I was overwhelmed with regret and I asked forgiveness of the Lord..., but also His help.

At the precise moment when I was asking forgiveness, I heard a "voice" saying to me: *"Leave your Community."* This

voice came from the left, above me. I turned around to see if there was someone, but there was no one there and I saw nothing. At the same time as this occurred, I felt a very great Peace within me... never experienced before, and I said to myself: *"And yet, the devil is not the one that gives such Peace."*

I firmly believed in my soul that the few words heard that evening were quite real; I even had the inner certitude of this. Here I will add that this Peace still dwells in me today; I still possess it! But I will never forget that very short but so intense moment in my life!

The very evening of this event, I began making the first arrangements to leave the Community without knowing where I would go or what I would do in the future. I was 44 years old then. At the time, I was also working as a secretary at the high school in Port-Cartier and I immediately took the first steps towards my departure from the school. Thus, I left the Community and my job in July 1979.

The very morning of my departure from the Community, the local Superior drew, at random, a thought for each of the Sisters. Here is mine which really confirmed what I was living that morning: *"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called, and went forth... he went forth, moreover, not knowing where he was going."* (Heb 11:8)

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I found out about the Army of Mary five years after having left the Community of the Sisters Servants of the Holy Heart of Mary and I joined the Community of the Daughters of Mary in October 1986, that is, two years later. A short time after I had arrived in the Community, during a meeting with Mother Paul-Marie, she confirmed that it was truly the Blessed Virgin who had come to get me. Therefore, my soul is eternally grateful for this signal grace received on April 22, 1979!

Sister Françoise Bernier,
August 22, 2017