

## **CONVERSATIONS: IMAGINED AND ACTUAL**

*Sister M. Lioba Tiamson, OSB*

It was just two years after the liberation, 1947 to be exact. I never knew any sister. I never studied in a Catholic school. Simply, I had no contact with any religious, this I can tell. I was a party goer. I not only attended all the dance balls not only in our little town of Guagua, Pampanga, but went as far as Manila to join the veteran dancers in the elite city. I glorified in my crown as Miss Guagua in my heyday and I prided myself in having boys running after me. Never mind who these prominent bachelors were.

One day, I felt that this was not the joy that would give me everlasting peace. Hence, I joined the Sodality of our Lady in our parish. As the Prefect of this religious organization, I took upon myself the responsibility of making the statue of our Lady as clean and immaculately white as possible. While “bathing” the statue with Chinese soap and water, I had a colloquy with Mama Mary. I told her that I wanted to serve the world. I heard her whisper in my ears, “Would you like to be a Sister?” that was farthest from my mind because I never chanced upon a Sister to talk about my vocation. Secondly, I questioned her about my weak lungs. How could I possibly survive in the convent? I knew I would not last because convent life is very demanding. Again, I heard the Blessed Lady encouraging me, “Try. If they do not send you home on account of your weak lungs, then you are for the religious state. If they send you home because of your health, then, go and marry the most eligible bachelor.”

I really do not know whether I was just cooking up this dialogue. Nonetheless, deep in my heart, I could feel God’s mysterious ways through the “bath” I gave our Blessed Mother. My cousin, a noted benefactress of many seminarians, asked me to deliver the rice to the Jesuit-run San Jose Seminary in Sta. Ana, Manila. It was the famous Fr. Henry Irwin, SJ, the Jesuit drama trainer for young Ateneans, who received me at the parlor. In our conversation, I told him my desire to become a religious. Without batting an eyelash, he told me to proceed to St. Scholastica’s College and look for a Sister. I did this without a second thought. I found myself in the portals of St. Scholastica’s College.

The porter called Sister Galla Caesar, OSB, to the parlor. After hearing my desire, she told me that I would be accepted in the next entrance of candidates. Up to now, I really cannot fathom God’s mysterious ways – from “bathing” our Lady, to delivering a sack of rice, to meeting Fr. Irwin, to conversing with Sister Galla. Against all odds, I entered the convent. Fifty-four years of my religious profession have passed. I never regretted joining the Benedictine Sisters in seeking God.