

NO TURNING BACK

Sister Vida Mones, OSB

I was in my fourth year in College when I joined the newly organized Searchers' Group in our campus. This was composed of students, who like myself, were searching what vocation God might have for each of us. It was obvious, however, that we had this common interest in convent life. We invited married women, single, and sisters from different congregations like Dominicans of Sta. Catalina Convent, Maryknoll Sisters, Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, and the Benedictine Sisters to give talks to us. It was Sister Carmel Simpauco, OSB, the Vocation Directress at that time, whom I met twice during that year of searching. I found Sister Carmel very holy, gentle, soft spoken and always smiling. During our first meeting with her, she told the group that to qualify to become a sister we needed to have a big mind, a big heart, big hands and good health. It was something to seriously think about. The second time was supposed to be a documentary film-showing about the Benedictine Sisters but I asked to be excused since I needed to work at the college fair.

After graduation, I came to Manila to prepare for the licensure examination. One day, a friend back in the Searchers' Group called. She was then a faculty member in St. Scholastica's Academy in Marikina. She asked me to join her to spend one weekend at St. Scholastica's Formation House to observe. So I went and we were billeted at the basement of the big house. It was my first time to stay overnight in a convent. I could never forget the experience of hearing the hourly gong during the night. It matched the drumbeat in my chest cause by terrible fear for I was clueless what it was for. Yet that was compensated by the warm hospitality of Sister Concepcion who saw to it that there was a "welcome" poster and flower arrangement on our small table. A writing pad and a pen were also available in case we had any need for them. I was also touched and inspired by the beautiful singing of the community in the chapel which was at the second floor where the present library is now located. When it was time to go the following day, Sister Concepcion gave us sandwiches lest we be hungry on our way back to our separate places.

For the next six months, I had the joyful experience of listening to similar prayerful singing in San Beda Chapel. I would walk from the dormitory to the chapel everyday to attend Holy Mass and since I was always minutes early, I had the chance to watch and to listen to the morning prayers of the monks. It never crossed my mind that St. Scholastica and San Beda had close connections.

It also never crossed my mind that I would be walking in and out of any St. Scholastica door. I became secretary in the Priory for one year and most mornings I listened to the Sisters singing the Lauds that has become so familiar to me. I was awed by the soulful singing of the Our Father sang in different tunes. I knew I had the desire to join them at prayer but I did not have the courage to take the entrance exam yet. Half of me wanted to be a Sister, yet the other half wanted to experience working in an accounting office.

When I was hired to work as bookkeeper at St. Scholastica's Academy, Marikina. I admired how Sister Amada Halili, OSB, handled her job as treasurer. She knew the whole system like the back of her hand. It was also there were I was patiently trained by the Novice Thitz (Sister Marita Binuya, OSB) on bookkeeping and reporting. I also had the chance to talk to other formandees asking them about their life inside the convent. Still, I wanted to experience working in a bank. After barely two years in my job, I

transferred to BPI main office where I worked in the auditing department. It was there that I knew the glamour of working in a big corporation. It was there that I experienced the rat race and the “survival of the fittest”. I enjoyed the company of my peers at work and after work. The thought of convent life, however, would come back from time to time. I tried to join a Charismatic Movement at Edsa Shrine thinking that that would suffice but that, too, did not last. Finally, I had to find answers to my questions. What was my life meant to be? What would make me settle down? What would bring me real peace?

Giving serious thought about those questions was like listening to God’s answers. Things went so fast after that. I met with Sister Carmel and told her of my intention. She endorsed me to Sister Kristia who immediately scheduled an exam for me. I started talking to my family, friends and employer about my decision. There was no turning back after I tendered my resignation from work. I breezed through the process and through the transition in my life. God was there all the way to strengthen me. He brought me to where I am now with His guiding hand. He also allowed me to continually grow in all the joys and pains that I had to go through all these 10 years of my religious life. May God see me through until I reach the end of my journey.