Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



Sister Hilda, third from the right, stands with her students under an evergreen tree. The picture is taken outside Maria Reina, the sisters' hostel, in the village of Curahuasi, Peru. (Courtesy of Hilda Mary Bernath)



by Sr. Hilda Mary Bernath

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Love is the most precious of all things in the world. It is a powerful medium and instrument in our lives. It was out of love that God created the world, and it is because of his love that we came into being and are sustained in this world.

A tree was created with love to give fruits and shade. A river was created with love to give water to all the living. The sun was created with love to give light.

They never tire of giving their love and sharing what they are. Likewise, God who created the world never tires in blessing, because he loves us; his love never ends.

We, the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, are the branches of the tree planted by Blessed Hélène Marie Philippine de Chappotin de Neuville — better known as Blessed Mary of the Passion — who loved for us to bear many fruits through her mission.

Her love was a growing tree, her mission was a running river, her zeal was a shining sun, and her love never ends.

As a Franciscan Missionary of Mary, I admire the lifestyle of our founder, who truly imbibed the strength of the Holy Spirit. Though she was born and brought up in France, when she came to India as a missionary, she adopted our culture for the sake of Christ and the development of women in society.

When I read her life history, I was inspired by her life-giving words and how she dedicated her life for the sake of Christ. Her inspirational sayings have challenged me to follow her ways and be a true missionary. Taking my cue from her, I say: Let us walk in truth and charity to accomplish marvels, for God will not forsake those who dedicate their lives for the sake of his love.

To be a faithful missionary, she practiced these values: no gossip, a pure intention, and a focus only on the mission. She also urged us to show great respect for our sisters in community — and no politics! She adapted to new cultures with difficulty, always enduring suffering and pain without complaints, and encouraged us to persevere in learning the language of the people with whom we worked in order to achieve our goals.

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Like a tree rooted in the soil, she created a strong foundation, and her mission branched out all over the world, with many young women coming forward to join her to continue God's work and service.

It isn't easy for a seed to grow into a tree. It dies painfully, and it takes time to sprout, slowly developing into a tree which will bear much fruit.

Similarly, God had a plan for her and she obliged his will, spending much time before the eucharistic Lord to receive strength from him. We know that she was faithful in making retreat and meditation, because she wrote her reflections in her diary as a journal.

She journeyed full of hope and faith, saying that her mission was not her will — that "if it is God's will, it will flourish." And God never forsook her in difficulties, but strengthened her vocation and her mission to spread his work all over the world — focusing on the people in society who were suffering.

In my life too I heard his call, felt his presence, and offered my life to him for his mission. As in the life of Blessed Mary of the Passion, each event of my life was sent by God's love for a special reason. God chooses each of us to be his instrument of love and service in a particular way.

My inspirations from the life of our foundress are to live simply, to walk humbly, and to love genuinely. Inspired by God and our founder, like a tree I want to give shelter to our needy female students, here on our mission in Peru, a country in South America.

The creation of God is always marvelous. I especially admire the nature and qualities of a tree. And my favorite tree is the evergreen, which never changes its original color. It remains green forever, throughout rain, thunder, clouds or storms. It will not give up, because it is strongly rooted in the earth.

The tree gives shelter to everybody, regardless of creed, race or gender — just like our foundress struggled and suffered to give shelter and empower abandoned girls and powerless women.

The one who gives life to the poor will be like the evergreen tree.

The one who respects a person will be the fruits of the tree.

The one who sacrifices for the sake of others will be a saint of the church.

The one who understands others positively will be the heart of the world.

Being inspired and affected by the shadow of God, we all can bring glory and hope to people through our work, service and charity. God's love and blessings are always there in the life and growth of any human being, the crowning image of all his creatures.