Voices of Sisters



"Mary Magdalene," circa 1530, by Jan van Scorel (Artvee)



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Recently, a young acquaintance kept addressing me as "Amma" (mom). Although we had not met in person and were unsure of our age differences, I asked her to call me elder sister ("Chechi") rather than mom. I felt that to be called a mother requires a lot more qualities than I have.

Although she agreed to address me as I asked, she still insisted that nuns are the best mothers on earth. Although I brushed off her claim, I remembered another incident. When I joined the university for doctoral studies, I considered myself just a student; to the fraternity around me, I was "the mother"! It simply meant a person who had greater love and care.

While presenting on the topic "Communicating Christ: A Woman's Perspective" at a national conference, I chose to speak about how women communicate through actions. The role of women as communicators is important, as communication is not limited to words or the sharing of information; it is revealing Christ through every action, especially through the innate nature of being a female. St. Joseph Freinadametz, a Divine Word Missionary to China, said the language everyone understands is the language of love.

In a world that is torn apart by disturbing differences and resentments, a compassionate heart, soothing presence and powerful witness can create a significant effect on life. These characteristics are innate to women. Drawing inspiration from biblical women characters as communicators, I chose Mary Magdalene, the Samaritan woman and Mary at the cross as examples of powerful narrators of good news. They were vulnerable and unworthy beings in the eyes of society, but when they encountered Christ, fear, prejudices and unacceptance became tales of transformation. Their narratives serve as a blueprint for communicating Christ today.

I follow a female vlogger who speaks about issues that men are limited in expressing. Although not a Catholic, she is one of the best catechists of the times, speaking on social and moral issues and upholding the flame of values. She just speaks — no camera works or filters — like a mother who lovingly admonishes her children. And the comments under the videos validate the relevance and the authenticity of her stand. The world needs such valiants to communicate with conviction and love.

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Everyone cannot be Mother Teresa, but we have enough opportunity to be one in our own circumstances. One day, I spent an entire afternoon helping young girls drape saris. Later, when I reflected on it, I realized it was an act of communication in which I imparted my skill to them, and they enjoyed the occasion. It was not a waste of time or indulging in silly business. Even if it took a whole lot of energy, I was unconsciously contributing to their memory bank.

Looking back at the lockdown days and being marooned on the university campus, I vividly recall the love of a woman professor who went out of her way to keep me mentally and physically healthy. These acts of kindness remain as the bestseller — to be read over and over again, and act upon when faced with similar situations.

Recently, I watched a social media video created for a nun on the occasion of her retirement from teaching. It brought tears to my eyes to see the love the school community showed her. Beyond caste, creed, gender and age, all were in tears when they bid her goodbye. And most beautifully, when they brought her back to the convent — symbolically giving her back to the congregation — the superior and the entire community were there to welcome her back! At a time when many religious people feel lost and aloof from their flock, these videos show that care, love and compassion have not disappeared from society or religious congregations.

We cannot be ambassadors of peace all the time. But recognizing the challenging situation around us, we can choose peace over war. It may be easy to be good in a broader circle, where the role of a compassionate giver is passive. The real-life situation will be challenging. In such circumstances, we can choose the lesser evils.

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With the proliferation of digital devices and platforms, women, especially sisters, are stepping forward as digital missionaries. Through shorts, narratives, witnesses, storytelling methods and intercessory prayers, we have created a significant digital

footprint. The move, both steady and gradual, is both a boon and a bane. While the digital era has further opened the doors and windows of the church post-Vatican II, it has also brought back the dirt from the digital streets. There are no measuring yards to keep account of how much is too much, but with a goal of growing together and networking, we can build a future.

Cyber harassment and attacks call attention to the responsible use of media. Excessive presence on digital platforms can create tension in maintaining an online persona while remaining authentic. Even if the world has theoretically progressed from being patriarchal to inclusive, the whispers of women remain unheard.

A friend of mine experienced domestic violence and marital infidelity for nearly 16 years. Thinking about her family honor and the sanctity of marriage, she chose to suffer silently. Nothing changed until she gained the courage to speak out about her ordeal on a safer platform. Her story not only became a bestseller but also a relatable narrative for many women who faced the same situation. We need to share stories of hope, not just problems; we need to listen deeply before speaking.

Ultimately, we are to be

- like Mary Magdalene, go and proclaim: Use available and safe platforms — both online and offline;
- like the Samaritan woman, invite others to encounter Christ: Use life-giving narratives in communication;
- like Mary at the cross, stand in faithful presence: Be authentic in online and offline behaviors.

Communication is an action — a smile, a pat on the back, accompaniment in silence, sharing tiffin, lifting a bag, cracking a joke, using your talent — everything can become an act of communication.