

Catherine's Story

My encounter with God happened very early and I feel this was normal – God knows each of us and with me He knew it would take time and patience!

From the age of 8 years I knew somewhere within me that I would offer my life to God one day. It was within the family that my faith was first awakened: my father instilled strong values in us: confidence, love and generosity. But it was my mother who taught us to pray very early on as children.

It was in Primary School that I first discovered the path I would follow. I loved my teacher, Sister Marie Anna, and I wanted to be a Sister like her. When we helped her do the washing-up she would suggest that we visit the Chapel afterwards. I used to do the washing-up just to go to the chapel with her!

One Christmas my mum gave me a Black Doll. This awakened in my little mind the idea **“to be a Missionary”**. This idea would go, come back, go again – I wanted to be a Missionary, then a singer, then a missionary, then a teacher It never left my head!

Thanks to several encounters my decision gradually took shape. Priests and several Sisters always responded to my questions as a teenager. At the age of 20 while I was studying Chemistry at University I decided to respond to this “Call”. For me, it was the best way to thank God for all He had already given me.

It was an encounter with the Oblates of the Assumption that drew me along my path. I lived for 2 years in their Community at Lille while completing my studies and continuing my discernment. I became a Postulant, then a Novice and finally took my vows.

I used to think that to become a Sister was “to do more things for God”. Now I understand that this is not the case but rather it is God who does all – He asks us simply **to participate in what He is doing** with enormous love. I discovered that my faith actually lacked life – following my reading and the witness of others I discovered that faith was not exactly what I

had understood it to be – that it went much further, much deeper. My reading often spoke of “personal encounters with Christ” and I desired this with all my heart – my prayer became one long cry: **“Lord, teach me to love you.”**

During these years I experienced several trials. I experienced uncertainty and doubt. Prayer became particularly difficult – I couldn’t remain still during prayer. Life, too, was to hold periods of suffering with the death of my father following a long illness and the sudden unexpected death the following year of my brother. But I held on.

Then during my annual retreat I received the grace of the encounter I had long yearned for. Meditating on the Gospel of St. John and in particular the passages relating to Nicodemus and the Samaritan Woman, I discovered I was a “prisoner” of how **others** saw me and that I feared real love. It was easy to understand then why I was unsettled in my prayer before the One who looks on us only with Love. This was **the key**: because I was afraid of how others “saw” me, it would be through allowing myself to **be seen** by **“The” Other** that I would be liberated. The Lord did indeed place me under the long gaze of His love and I didn’t run away! And so I knew God’s love, a love I could no longer doubt. From this moment I knew that my life would be simply to proclaim this great love.

What gives me life is to see life around me. Everything in me desires joy: joy linked to celebration, to friendship, to encounters with others. I like nothing better than moments of friendship, moments of encounter with “strangers”, with my work colleagues in the Press or with young people in the Chaplaincy.