

1. Testimony by Father Silas Bada Silas, CM

For me, the celebration of the Lumière of Pentecost of Saint Louise de Marillac was not just the memory of a distant experience that marked the Church in 17th-century France but was, we might say, a personal call regarding my vocation. At the end of the celebration on June 4, 2023, two questions came to my mind: Am I capable, like Louise, of singling out the event that triggered my initial motivation to commit myself to the service of the least fortunate, Jesus Christ's brothers and sisters? Am I still enthusiastic and zealous for this vocation?

I recall two events at the source of my commitment in consecrated life. The first concerns the repeated and dedicated actions of the Daughters of Charity in my parish, Saint Joseph, in Moutourwa in the Far North Region of Cameroon, on behalf of elderly people, people who are alone, orphans, etc. Almost every afternoon, even Sunday, I saw them set off on foot or motorcycle to go out to meet those most in need. These witnesses of concrete assistance to people who are poor were at the origin of my desire to serve in the Church and more specifically in a congregation whose purpose is to follow Christ, evangelizer of people who are poor.

The second event that challenged me took place in a small chapel of a village named Zalavad where I went with five leaders of Cop' Monde, by way of ACE (Children's Catholic Action) group visits from the parish. That day, I was struck by the lack of catechists for a celebration of the Liturgy of the Word. The person who was presided over the Sunday celebration was a sort of "Simon of Cyrene of Zalavad," called upon without warning to salvage the situation when no one was prepared. This gave me a great desire to dedicate myself to the service of the Word of God. I had the joy of being directed towards the Priests and Brothers of the Congregation of the Mission, known as the Vincentians.

"Am I still enthusiastic and zealous for this vocation?" I would simply say that the desire remains... and the effort falls short of the ideal. This is why I constantly ask the Lord to grant me the "flame" of the love of God, another name for the virtue of apostolic zeal, according to Saint Vincent.

2. Testimony by Sister Marie Yonide Midy, Daughter of Charity

For nearly nine years now, I have been involved in the service of imprisoned people as part of the Catholic prison chaplaincy service. I had always felt a strong attraction to this apostolate, but I often wondered how it would be possible. Like Saint Louise, "my mind was instantly freed of all doubt" when a priest from the chaplaincy staff at the penitentiary in Fresnes came to ask me if I could accompany Spanish- and English-speaking prisoners as there was a real need for this. The Company sent me on mission there. I thus went out to meet our brothers and sisters in prison. I thought I was going to bring them something... at best the Good News, but I soon discovered that they were often themselves Good News for me.

I frequently recall a question from a young prisoner after we read together the Gospel passage in which Jesus asks the blind man, "*What do you want me to do for you?*" I had asked him, "*And you? What do you want Jesus to do for you?*" He answered me simply, among other things, "*to be better,*" and, after a brief silence, he asked me, "*And you, what do you want Him to do for you?*"

I still see the face of Mr. X, baptized and confirmed one Easter Sunday, telling me, "*You know, Sister, I took the life of the person whom I loved the most, and I will never be able to bring her back, but I want to spend the rest of my life restoring life to others and giving them a reason to live.*"

Subsequently, I learned that as a “support fellow prisoner,” he helped 101 people to avoid suicide during his five years spent at Fresnes.

Tonton, as his fellow prisoners called him, was assistant on his floor. He witnessed to the Gospel by caring for Nicolas who was letting himself slowly waste away, imprisoned by guilt and remorse. Tonton knew who needed an extra ration and would say with a smile, *“He’s young, he has to eat, could you stop by and see Y? He’s not been doing well lately.”*

As prison chaplain, I saw sparks of light when E, a twenty-five-year old man whom I accompanied for five years, “caught” in a human trafficking ring, went from a penal sentence to a moral sentence or sense of guilt by finally recognizing the existence of victims and undertook a process of “rebirth with Jesus” by requesting Baptism.

3. Testimony by Samuel Perrier

A light in my life!

My name is Samuel. I lived more than ten years on the streets.

This light came to me in Lourdes in 2013 during the “Diaconia” pilgrimage organized “with and for” people living in situations of poverty and exclusion.

During this pilgrimage, we are invited like Jesus to wash others’ feet.

At the moment when I was washing the feet of another pilgrim, it was as if the Blessed Virgin was looking at me.

I felt a great warmth overcome me.

What was happening to me?

It was a strange situation.

After this experience, back in Paris, I asked if it was possible to be “rebaptized.” It is not, but the deacon asked me if I was confirmed. I wasn’t. I therefore prepared for my confirmation that would take place in 2014 at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris during the Easter Vigil.

Since then, I have served as a volunteer in several organizations that accompany people in situations of great precarity. I have found stable housing in a supported residence.

My life was turned around, and I also found a family in these organizations and in a group where we share on the Gospel.

4. Testimony by Vincent Vo Diep

I come out of the darkness and find light once again. It is the Lord who guides me.

Starting at four years of age, I was raised by the Daughters of Charity for two years in Vietnam because of my single-parent family’s limited financial means. This was my first experience of the Catholic faith. My family was of the Buddhist tradition.

Many years later, having come to France and married, I accompanied my very prayerful, practicing Catholic mother-in-law to this Chapel. My beloved wife also regularly wrote her prayer intentions to be left in the prayer basket here.

I thus increasingly rediscovered my Christian faith. It also occurred thanks to my service with the Association of the Little Brothers of the Poor with elderly and sick people during national pilgrimages to Lourdes. In 2016, the theme of the pilgrimage was “The joy of conversion.” It was at that time

that someone offered, *“If you wish to be baptized, we could accompany you.”* A sign, a light... After a time of preparation, I was baptized in my parish at the age of 61. My baptism was the result of my long journey, a journey of grace.

I also came regularly to the rue du Bac for Mass and Vespers. I felt very well accepted and accompanied by the Sisters and the rector of the Chapel. One day, he invited me to become involved in serving pilgrims. Wanting to welcome as I had been welcomed, I accepted. For me, it was a time of grace that began and that continues. For seven years now, I have been at the service of the liturgy and reception of pilgrims, and I receive more than I give.

With the other volunteers, this mission brings us close to all those who pass through, believers or non-believers, from all sorts of backgrounds. We try to live active charity through acts of compassion and kindness. We listen to them while sharing with them our faith and trust in Jesus Christ our Lord.

5. Testimony by Sister Amalia Alvarez, Daughter of Charity

“The light of Christ that cuts through all pain.”

During my twenty-seven years as a Daughter of Charity, I spent more than twenty years serving in residences for girls (Argentina, Uruguay, Porto Rico, Dominican Republic...): neglected girls, those living in the countryside, HIV-positive girls, abandoned girls, victims of all sorts of abuse committed by the people who were supposed to protect them, etc.

I have seen so much pain, suffering, loneliness, feelings of abandonment and loss, that one could think that this is the only thing present in the heart of these girls and teenagers.

Many times, I was overwhelmed with anguish at seeing them suffer so much, by my powerlessness with regard to those who had abandoned them, made them suffer or with regard to the government that didn't do much to make those guilty pay for the damage they had caused.

I realized that my faith was insufficient, and I prayed, *“Lord, increase my faith!”* I felt Jesus telling me in my heart, *“What's important is not the quantity of your faith, but the quality.”* A living, strong and effective faith.

I hadn't realized that God had sent me “little rays of light” through these girls. I discovered that they were more than the abuse or violence, more than the horror that they had experienced. They reflected the light of God. Their suffering was the light of Christ to strengthen my desire not to be trampled underfoot and that they not be considered incapable of defending themselves! They were the light of Christ for me that helped me not to become used to seeing suffering and to help them to move forward.

They were that light through which the Lord increased my desire for justice, my empathy, the tenderness of my regard, my hunger for answers, my capacity to risk everything to heal the most wounded hearts. And my desire to do everything to make sure that this light not only remains in me but reaches all the people with whom I share my life and service.