



Apostles for Today

Prayer and Reflection - November 2013

New Evangelisation and the dying - a personal experience *“Lord, the one whom You love is sick.” (Jn 11:3)*

I have been serving in Clinic Pastoral Ministry at St. Vincent Pallotti Hospital (VPH) in Bensberg since October 1980.

During my training I became aware that I was walking in the footsteps of Vincent Pallotti, in the sense that he had often been called to assist people in hospitals who were sick and dying.

During the first years of my ministry I was often asked what I was doing, since I could not even give a blessing... In the course of time I found my own "sacramentals": for example, approaching each person very consciously, glancing lovingly at someone whose face is disfigured by cancer (even though I needed time to learn to be able to do that). Such encounters often develop into fruitful, blessed times of accompaniment, especially with those in the final stage of their journey in this life.

My daily visits in the Hospice and Intensive Care Unit time and again present me with new challenges. I never know what will happen, and am often amazed at what actually does happen. For example, after the death of one woman, her daughter said to the nurse: "My mother found her way back to faith through the visits of the sister." For such great gifts I thank Jesus. If He wants to use such daily visits to come closer to a person, He can count on me. However, I also remember that I once passed the door of that same woman, because I just couldn't face trying to listen patiently to her many repetitions.

Now and then I meet with refusal by patients, sometimes because through my religious habit, I am for them a visible sign of the Church. In such cases I try to break through the wall by means of some small concrete act of kindness. In the case of one woman who completely ignored me, a breakthrough came simply by bringing her cherry jam which she desired. Some time later, she was dying, but she had not entered any information in her documentation about belonging to a

particular confession or religion. Her friend was sitting at her bedside and I came and sat with them, wondering whether or not it would be right to pray out loud. The dying woman had been a taxi driver, and several images connected with driving began to come to mind, which I tried to make into a kind of spontaneous prayer of encouragement: “You are on the main street – you have the right of way”...and so on. At a certain moment her friend called out: “Monica, you are on the priority road, go ahead!” at which point Monika drew her last breath.

Often, in difficult situations I remember the words of Pallotti:

Through your infinite mercy I am certain, that you help me now.

One day the nurse asked me to visit a patient who had expressed a wish "to put something in order". When I asked what I could do for her, the woman answered: "Sister, I left the Church when I was young. At that time I thought I was doing the right thing. However, over the years I realized that I had made a mistake. I searched on the internet how I could come back, but found it too complicated, and so I dropped the idea. Since my diagnosis it has become a question for me once again. Is there any way to do something about it here?" I was able to call the priest and within a short time she renewed her membership of the Church once more. Her gratitude and happiness moved me deeply and I was touched to witness God's mercy and his infinite patience with us.

*Of myself I can do nothing
with God I can do everything.
I will do everything for love of God.
To God the Glory!*

This is often my prayer – and God always surprises me with the words which He puts in my mouth, especially in difficult situations: in the delivery room at a miscarriage or stillbirth, when meeting patients after a serious accident or an attempted suicide or with relatives after a suicide.

Once, in the hospice, I had an experience with a Muslim patient. She radiated a great happiness on that day and I asked her the reason. She responded: “I was in the garden with my husband, and I saw the

‘Great Lady’. Tomorrow we will go there again and I will say to her: ‘Great Lady, help me to live two more years - then my children will have finished their studies, and you can come and fetch me.’ I understood that she had been at our Lourdes grotto in the garden. Weeks later she lay on her death bed. Before entering her room, I went to the chapel, lit a candle and prayed to Mary to assist her in her last hour. At her bed I told her that I was coming from the “Great Lady” and that there was a light burning for her.... The dying woman shook her head saying: “not Great Lady – but Great Mother!”

Blessed by such an experience I prayed with Pallotti:

*My God, through your mercy grant to me and to all
a deep and true veneration of Mary*

Once, sitting at the deathbed of a woman who was a nonbeliever, I breathed with her and in her own rhythm, I “prayed”
Breath out everything that is a burden...
Breath out everything that was not good in your life...
Breath out, what you don’t need any more...
The *New Breath* is helping you...
The New Breath brings you to your destination...
The New Breath does not deceive!!

*Breathe God in...
Breathe God out...
with a simple glance to God,
present everywhere.*

In a retreat I once heard a sentence about Pallotti which made me reflect on our Pallottine way of ‘doing apostolate’: *Most of what Pallotti did, he did through others*, in the sense of calling them to be apostles in their own right to collaborate in bringing the love of God to the wider world.

For 30 years I have been the reference person for the so-called “Green Ladies”, a group of about 20 people identified by their green outfit who minister as volunteers to patients and help them in many ways. Once a week they take their turn, sitting at the bedside of a patient, giving comfort to them, often just by being with them. They are

a blessing for many people, a sign of the love of God, especially for those who do not receive visits, those who are in crisis or are searching for comfort before serious surgery.

*Experience tells us that the good done alone
is usually lacking, uncertain and of limited duration,
and that the noblest efforts of
individuals cannot bear fruit
if they are not united and directed towards a common goal.*

This is a sharing of my ministry in collaboration with many others, by day and often by night.

With Pallotti let us pray:

*My God I am infinitely in need of asking you:
I want to become hope for those who are in despair
I want to become reconciliation for those who have gone astray
I want to become desire for the discouraged
I want to become joy for those who are mourning
I want... I want....*

Sr. Maria Reginata Nühlen, SAC

(Pallotti's words taken from *Vinzenz Pallotti, Hunger und Durst*, edited by Josef Danko SAC, 1988.)

Suggestions for individual and/or common reflection:

- What can I, what can we as community, do to help the seriously ill and the dying to experience the special closeness and love of God?
- How can we, as individuals and as a community, especially in this month of November, draw close to those mourning the death of a loved one, witnessing to our hope of eternal life?