

## E-BULLETIN #62

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*"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5,16)*

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Item 117

### ... faith caught in a storm

My faith caught in a storm! That was my experience a few years back when I was young, strong, well settled and 'busy for the Lord', living a consecrated life. In sharing this I hope it rings a bell in some of the readers' ears who are facing life caught in the midst of a storm as I was....

Let me explain **when, how and why** this storm shook the foundation of my **faith in God**.

It happened when everything was going well – a 36 year old consecrated woman getting more and more involved in one's mission as per one's talents and abilities, living fully for the Lord to whom I had given my life. After several years in the formation of younger members of my Institute I had the opportunity to update myself in theology, catechetics etc at a National Centre, attending an intensive course. I thoroughly enjoyed this and picked up more meaningful relationships that helped in all round growth. Then, just as Vatican II renewal was fresh, I was asked to join a team preparing lessons for the new catechism according to the new pedagogy. Not only was I fully involved but, coming from a teaching background, enjoying it! In this new life on the staff at the NBCLC (National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre) I felt I was called to do what is most relevant in the Church that time.



One day the most unexpected struck me. I took ill with severe pain in the abdomen and was rushed off to the hospital without delay. This was the era when it took 40 days to diagnose and undergo surgery, and when it was kept secret what it was. Everyone else around me, friends, near and dear ones and my Institute members knew what was wrong. It was the 1970s when cancer was rare and thus the secrecy. But I insisted to know when discussion started between the doctors and my family as to which hospital to shift me. Several complications had arisen, like intestinal obstruction etc, causing difficulties for the doctors. Meanwhile prayers were requested round the clock. Then, on my insistence, my doctor explained to me in detail and said that I had ovarian cancer and needed special treatment immediately, and in another city. Not all hospitals then had cancer care facilities.

Those were the darkest days, dark all around and within. Many questions arose - how can I take it ? why me ? (in those days it was presumed that, if cancer was diagnosed, the end had come). Why is God so cruel to me? Have I not given my life to serve Him? Basically I started questioning God and was in the

midst of a storm. My faith in God was shaken when I asked 'Is this how you show that you are a loving God?' There were no answers to all my questions, I was just angry with God.

At this time I had many friends who wrote to me, visited me and consoled me. By now both chemotherapy and radiation treatments had begun and a journey of eleven months, to different hospitals and in a weak and dependant condition. This condition lasted for several days. Slowly my darkness began to clear as I grappled with all the questions and as I began to cope with the treatment. Finally I slowly began to realise God's love for me shining through the darkness. And then it dawned on me that I had no faith at all, or rather what I had was a 'weak faith'. In reality I was going through treatment that was very crude by today's standards. But all along there was a strong inner voice telling me: 'you must live'. Later my doctors confirmed that my positive outlook on life helped me come through the crisis.

My experience at the cancer hospital was one of a beautiful community life in spite of all. Only short hours were allowed for visitors. There were no single rooms except those for dying patients. So I lived with five others - all suffering, going through the same treatment, unable to eat and sleep, feeling lonely etc. All six from different religions, backgrounds, states of life. One thing was common and that was we were all cancer patients and all in the later stages. When the priests brought me communion, those around me were all silently watching and later asking me what that was. Here I had a wonderful opportunity to explain who Jesus is and what he means to me. They knew I was a Catholic and a consecrated woman. So there were many queries. While we were silently suffering all listened to the melodious Bhajans and songs I had on the tape recorder which they used to request me to put on. One would help the other to eat when we had no appetite at all. That was a beautiful life together, when I recall. There were always one or two who had gone to eternal life when we met at the check-ups I attended for another 15 years.



I will never forget the third time I was given a blood transfusion. Everyone was informed for the second time that I was critical. It was then with full consciousness that I asked for the sacrament of anointing of the sick. I remember receiving this from the priest who was called in, when I was all alone because those attending on me had to go to make trunk calls and send telegrams (the only communication available in those days). What I experienced afterwards I have no words to explain. I was so calm and serene with no worry or anxiety of any kind. When my dear ones rushed in to see me the blood transfusion was over. The sacrament gave me total peace and inner strength – a deep faith experience I must say.

What happened to me, of course prompted by the Spirit within, was that as soon as the treatment was over I jumped back into life, took up full-time work – even though still very weak – and started living again. There were so many supporting me in prayer. I found myself returning to the hospital giving hope to other patients. My colleagues too noticed I was a different person after cancer, hopefully a better Christian, living my precious faith, eagerly fulfilling God's plan in all my involvements.

Many subsequent years of fruitful ministry have surely been God's gift, except that I find myself always falling short in fully living my faith in Jesus, and in the Church and society, 37 years after THAT experience.

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## ...a home of love, care and affection..



We celebrated the 50th anniversary of the canonization of our founder St Vincent Pallotti at St Francis Xavier Church, Udyavar, Udupi Diocese, Karnataka.

At 4.00 pm the celebration begun with the Holy Eucharist. Fr Cyprian Pinto, parish priest of Udyavar, was the main celebrant. The Episcopal Vicar for Religious, Fr John Baptist Sequeira ofm Cap. was present, together with Pallottine priests and our neighbouring parish priest. Fr Manohar Noronha sac, the parish priest of Farla Church, spoke briefly about St Vincent.

More than 400 parishioners joyfully participated in this celebration which continued at the parish hall with a cultural program imploring God's blessing with a prayer dance. Sr Leena D'Souza, superior of the Udyavar community, escorted the dignitaries to the dais – Frs John Baptist Sequeira, Cyprian Pinto, Stany D'Souza sac, Sr Priscilla Menezes (superior of St Francis Xavier convent), Mr Lawrence D' Sa (president of the parish council), Mr John D' Souza (secretary) and Albert Tauro (benefactor). In their speeches on the occasion, the guests focused on the life of St Vincent Pallotti and expressed their appreciation for the care given to the children of Snehalaya by the Pallottine Sisters.

**Snehalaya** is a home of love, care and affection to the children who are seeking the basic needs of food, shelter and education. Forty one children are accommodated. For the occasion Snehalaya children performed dances, songs and a play on the life of St Vincent. Sr Leena thanked everyone for their presence, encouragement and collaboration.



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