

Sr. Sarah O'Rourke shares her story with us:

What are you going to do with your one, wild and wonderful life?

This line from a poet whose name I cannot recall, came back to me as I reflected on what I might share with you today. On August 5th this year I will celebrate the Silver Jubilee of my profession as a Salesian Sister. I can honestly say that I don't know where the time has gone. There is no one particular moment or reason that I can identify, in finalising my decision to become a Salesian Sister. It was something that evolved over time. I went to a Salesian Sisters' Secondary School and was very impressed by the way the Sisters related to us pupils. I couldn't believe my eyes when they actually played basketball with us and spoke to us between classes on the corridors. I was particularly fascinated by the variety of hymns we learned, and whose meaning I could clearly understand. From an early age I had been in school and parish choirs often singing words that I could hardly get my young tongue around. From my Primary School days I was very interested in the developing world or the missions as I called it then, and was a promoter of the Africa magazine for the Kiltegan Society. In Secondary School I was a member of a Mission Awareness Group which participated in the production of an annual Diocesan mission magazine. As editor of a number of these magazines I had the opportunity and challenge of trying to coordinate a group as well as address justice issues. It was these experiences but in particular the Sisters' approachability and obvious interest in what we teenagers were interested in, which prompted me to become interested in the lives of St. John Bosco and St. Mary Mazzarello. Both of these people were weavers of relationships. Like Jesus in today's Gospel they walked with people especially young people, listening to and interested in the circumstances of their lives, empathising with them in their struggle to make sense out of, and to find meaning in life. They helped young people to recognise Jesus not just in the breaking of Bread but 'in the bits and pieces' of everyday life, educating them to become honest citizens and good Christians. I liked the down-to-earthness humanity of the Salesian Sisters I knew, I was inspired by the humanity of their founders and I wanted to share in their dream of helping young people find meaning in their lives by getting in touch with, and being in tune with the humanity of Jesus Christ.

When I told some of my friends and relations that I had decided to become a Salesian Sister they thought that this was a passing fad and that I would soon get sense! My parents didn't discourage me but they didn't encourage me either. It was to be my decision. For that I am now deeply grateful because I did also know that if religious life didn't work out for me the door at home was always open.

Towards the end of my noviciate, my third year in training I took 6 months time out. During that time there was a restlessness, a something in me which I find hard to explain and yet I knew I had to

address it. Deep down there was something about the Salesian charism or way of life that I couldn't run from if I was to be happy and fulfilled as a person.

I believe in encouraging young people to discover and develop their own giftedness and at the same time to be happy for the achievements of others. Since last September I have been involved in the chaplaincy here in U.L but prior to that I have been involved in Primary School teaching and administration. These ministries have given me and continue to give me an opportunity to share my talents but at the same time to allow others talents, achievements and experience enhance my life. I have been privileged to live with and work with people whose commitment to the holistic development of young people is both inspiring and heartening.

In many ways I have lived a charmed life. Without doubt during the past 25 years there were some challenging and difficult times for me. Yet like the two disciples in today's Gospel, it is only in hindsight that I recognise that the Lord has been walking alongside me. I am blessed with family and good friends. There has always been someone there who encouraged me, trusted me, laughed with me, cried with me, believed in me. It is a special privilege when someone trusts me enough to share some of their life situation or story with me. It is moments like this that put us in touch with what is deepest and most worthwhile in life and within the heart. I believe it is in that part of the heart we discover who we really are. It is in that part of my heart that I carry the confidence of these people, honouring their story as holy ground and remembering them in my moments of prayer.

I am always energised by the words of John Paul II when he says:

We need heralds of the Gospel who are experts in humanity, who know the depth of the human heart, who can share the joys and hopes, the agonies and distress of people but who are at the same time contemplatives who have fallen in love with God.

For me these words sum up the kernel of John Bosco and Mary Mazzarello's dream for those of us who are Salesians, and for those who in the future will vivify that dream, in an age of rapid technological change.

Perhaps each one of us could ask ourselves the question that I began with. It's a question whose answer is not immediate but needs time and thought. It's a question whose answer may surprise us!

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