



## **Mother – by Father A. Christophe**

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Mother was destined not to be a nun, to live a life in the convent. Still, I will tell you her story. Perhaps it may inspire you, just as she had inspired her three sons, John, Paul and myself.

Mother did not publicly profess the vows of any religious order, i.e. Chastity, Poverty and Obedience. Yet, she made her life as an offering to God. After she died, I discovered amongst her papers, her daily missal. In the missal, there was an old holy picture. At the back of it, she had written, in a handwriting similar to that of a 12-year old, an act of consecration of herself to God's will. She had always put God first.

Mother did not make the vow of Chastity. When my father died, I was only 5. John and Paul were 4 and 2 respectively. Mother was only 35 years old and she chose to live in chastity. Once, she confided in me, "I do not want to remarry and give you a step father. I'd rather work alone to bring you up." In fact, she took us to daily Mass, and Christ was her constant companion during her 48 years of widowhood, her daily communion. She once shared with me about her life in a boarding school. She had asked a nun, "What time is it?" The sister replied, "It is time to love Jesus with your whole heart." Mother told me that she has remembered this response ever since, and it had guided her in the upbringing of her sons. Indeed she knew how to correct us, uncannily choosing the most appropriate time and way.

Mother did not make the vow of Poverty, yet she lived a very simple life. After Father died, she took over his trade as the village's coal distributor. Mother would heave the coals onto the scales, bag them and thereafter haul them for delivery to the customers. She manhandled, perhaps, tons of coal weekly. They were sold to pay for our education in the seminaries. After paying for our fees, she had very little for herself. That didn't matter, as she was detached from material wealth. For a very long time, she was the only one in the extended family that did not own a television. She read the newspapers to keep abreast of the news. She was contented with the bare essentials.

While she did not make the vow of Obedience, she led a life obeying God's will. For example, when John was 12, he returned home from an alter server's retreat bearing a letter from the superior of the Minor Seminary addressed to Mother. It wrote, "Following after your eldest son, Andre, your second son, John, has also expressed his desire to enter the Seminary." Mother was very surprised. Since he was a small boy, John had always said that when he grows up, he would be a farmer, just like grandfather. Mother looked at John, who was standing quietly by her side. No words came forth. A few days later, John and I knew that she had accepted God's plan for John.

Two years later, it was Paul's turn to break the news to her. He too would be entering the Seminary.

I became a diocesan Priest, then joined the MEP and came out to Singapore. John too became a diocesan Priest and later a Trappist Monk. Paul was also ordained, but as he was very



scholastic, he taught in the Seminary, and thereafter in a number of Catholic universities in France till he retired some years ago.

Mother insisted on working till she was 65 so as to earn a state pension and not to be dependent on others. During the school holidays, we came home to lend mother a helping hand. Although she badly needed and welcomed these extra young hands, she would at times instead encourage us to go out and take charge of the youth in our village.

John, Paul and I admired Mother's spirit of sacrifice, her courage and the way she lived her Christian life. Indeed she made the offering of her life to the Lord. She offered all her 3 children to Jesus, whom she loved so much.

Have you seen or noticed any signs of "calling" among your children? Did you encourage them? Did you help nurture them or did you ignore them, or worse, did you discourage them?

Did you notice how many priests in Singapore had recently celebrated 50 years of priesthood? Without new vocations, our Church in Singapore will quickly deteriorate, like it did during the last few decades in France.