

MON FILOMENA YAMAMOTO (1930-2014)

Mon Filomena Yamamoto, a Japanese Xavierian Missionary of Mary, left this earth on April 28, 2014, in Miyazaki. She was 83 years old.

About ten years earlier, she had recounted in a Xavieran publication how she had come to know Christ:

Thinking of the environment in which I grew up and of the events that preceded the grace of baptism, I clearly see the loving hand of God who guided me in a silent and hidden way. I was born to a Buddhist family of the Zen current. In the house there was an altar where the mortuary tablets of our ancestors were venerated. Every morning we offered a cup of tea and a little cup of rice, and we stopped to pray with folded hands. When pilgrims passed by on their way to some temple or when poor people came, we would offer them rice to eat.

We had a profound connection with the temple. As a child I often went to visit it. I listened to the monk's sermons and I wondered why people are born and then die, why there is suffering and why those who do good in the world so often are the ones who suffer while those who do evil succeed and live in comfort. I would often dwell on these thoughts, but I did not dare to ask adults, because I had the impression that they would not be able to answer me.

Through nature, with the marvelous spectacle of changing seasons, I believe the Lord spoke to me. I felt that, above the deities of the ancient religions of Japan, there must be a God who created heaven and earth and that I had to look for the true religion. I prayed to find it, but I did not know where to find it.

When I was 23, I left my town to go to Miyazaki. Invited by a friend, I began to attend the Catholic Church and catechetical lessons. At the beginning,

I felt a certain resistance towards faith in one God, because Japanese culture is imbued with the presence of many deities that are not exclusive of each other. But, continuing the study of Christianity, when I could listen to the passage about the Passion and Resurrection of the Lord and understand the marvelous work of redemption, I felt within me the firm conviction that I had finally found what I had sought for years.

From her early youth, Mon wanted a life entirely dedicated to others, but it was only when she met Christ that she found the way to do it. While still a catechumen, she was fascinated by the idea of giving her whole life to the mercy of God. She said, “When I was still a catechumen, the Xaverian missionary Father Sandro Danieli lent me the autobiography of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, and I read of the offering to merciful love that she made of herself. It was the first time I came across this idea. Later, entering the Xaverian missionaries, I was surprised to discover that the founder, Father Giacomo Spagnolo, had a deep devotion to the Merciful Omnipotence of God and that all of us, in our perpetual profession, entrusted our life to Merciful Omnipotence of the Lord.”

Love for Mary helped to guide her choice. When Mon entered the Xaverian Missionary Sisters of Mary in 1961, the Xaverians had been in Japan for only two years. One of them, named Maddalena, remembered, “Mon was a sister who was faithful to the choice of her life. She created harmony in any community that her obedience led her to. Her serenity, her humor, her simplicity gave everyone the opportunity to be welcomed. She was a ‘true’ person of the Gospel, one of those people to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs. Accepting everything, and living in the present moment, she offered everything with Jesus and in prayer. She was at peace and spread peace.”

Another Xaverian sister in Japan added, “Open-minded, she was able to face new and unexpected situations beautifully, with a spark of humor. She kept up to date on world and national problems so that she could

take them to prayer and share them with us and with the people she met. She gave special attention to visiting the sick, the elderly, and the lonely.”

A Xavierian father who met her at the beginning of her missionary service remembered, “In the parish there were many sick people, and Mon asked me to go with her to visit them and bring Communion to them. It was the first time I had done this ministry, and Mon helped me in countless ways. From her I learned how to approach the sick, how to pray with them, how to comfort them, and how to bring Jesus into their lives. Mon opened the way for me to be a true missionary. She showed an acute sensitivity to the physical suffering of others, but her gaze penetrated the deepest recesses of their hearts, and she wished to prepare them to welcome the salvific work of the divine Doctor.”

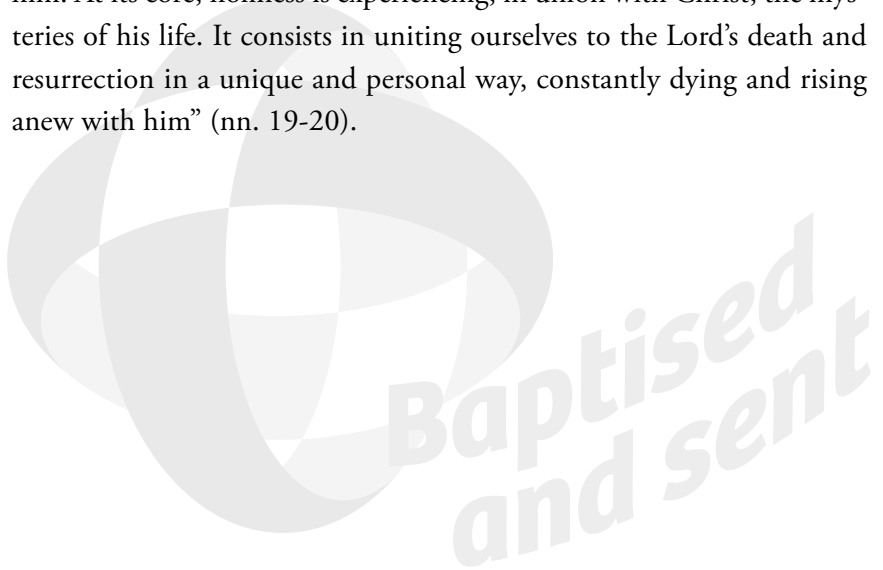
The Director of Shinmeizan Center for Interreligious Dialogue offered this testimony: “I owe much gratitude to Sister Yamamoto Mon, not only because for three years she generously contributed to the life and activities of Shinmeizan, but also and even more for the quality of her presence and for her example of religious life. Always serene and jovial, she was however also very serious and precise in the observance of community life and in other aspects of religious life. Prayer was very important in her life. She was sober and simple and avoided useless chatter, hardworking and very diligent in carrying out the work entrusted to her.”

In 2011, Mon was diagnosed with a malignant tumor. “I went to visit her in the hospital,” wrote a Xavierian missionary friend. “Even then I remember her concern for others. She had made of her room a ‘little church’ where she was in the company of Jesus. While doing chemo she had the opportunity to prepare for death and talked about it with those who went to see her, leaving behind a testimony of faith and serenity from her unconditional trust in Jesus.”

When she saw her smiling, she wondered if she was really ill. She had words of thanks for everyone: “It is thanks to your prayers...” she always said. During her various convalescences, her serenity struck many people:

“People who have faith are different,” they said. In her last days, she prayed continuously, “Lord, come quickly and get me.”

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, Pope Francis wrote “Each saint is a mission, planned by the Father to reflect and embody, at a specific moment in history, a certain aspect of the Gospel. That mission has its fullest meaning in Christ, and can only be understood through him. At its core, holiness is experiencing, in union with Christ, the mysteries of his life. It consists in uniting ourselves to the Lord’s death and resurrection in a unique and personal way, constantly dying and rising anew with him” (nn. 19-20).



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