

RELIGIOUS LIFE

Interview with Sr. Madeleine:

- Q. Sr. Madeleine, you are one of those responsible for helping young girls to decide whether or not they are have a vocation. How do you go about that?
- R. I meet young people who show interest. I give them an idea of what religious life is like today. I explain that religious life has changed very much from the time when I entered. I describe how we live today and invite them to visit our Convent. If they are very keen, they can spend a weekend with us.
- Q. Now, it was a few years ago that you first felt that you had a vocation. How did you feel it? Was there a moment when you suddenly thought, "God is calling me to be a nun".
- R. I think the seeds were sown in me very young. When I was five we used to have a little picture of children and it was called the 'St. Joseph's Fund' and we used to save our pennies and prick these little holes in this pink card and the money went to the missions. Looking back that must have been the time when the very first seed was sown in me. In Bellevue we had a big Vocations Exhibition when I was a teenager, and that fascinated me. I met lots of Sisters from different countries. I wanted to know more about these missionary sisters, brothers and priests so I asked them lots of questions.
- When I left school I went to college and I did nursery nursing and I did my training in a residential nursery and I often wondered what happened to the children when I went home, when I finished at the end of the day. Who looked after them in the evening? Who got them up in the morning? I wasn't there then. I just wanted to know more and more. I think that is how God was speaking to me.
- Q. But at the same time, being a Sister like you means that you have to give up a lot of things. You are looking after a lot of children. It means that you cannot get married and have children of your own. Do you miss that at all?
- R. I think there was a stage in my life when I did miss it. It is a normal stage that you go through, its very human and I don't think it is easy; you can't just dismiss it. You learn how to accept that you will not have a family of your own and offer this sacrifice to Jesus. In that way it and raise it up to another level, because on the human level it is probably very difficult, but on a spiritual level it is easy because you give up the opportunity of having your own children, but there are other children, God's children and there are elderly people who need you very much. You live in a family atmosphere with other Sisters, so you create a spiritual family rather

than a human family. And you love people just as dearly in another way as you do your own family, where you come from, your own brothers and sisters and their children.

- Q. You mentioned that religious life has changed over the years since you first heard your vocation. In what ways is it different now?
- R. We were first founded for children who were orphaned - the children on the street. Our work now is much more orientated towards the elderly. They are the vulnerable in society nowadays rather than the children. The children are well cared for in England, but in Africa we have AIDS babies and in America we have the elderly. They are the needy. Christ looks after the marginalized. He went for the poor, he went for the outcast, he went for people that others didn't really find attractive.
- Q. Is there still a need for Sisters like you?
- R. I am afraid there is a great need for Sisters like us. For example, yesterday I attended a Mass in Bexhill for the closure of a lovely big house and the elderly all had to go to different homes because we are lacking personnel. There is a great shortage of Religious today and we are still needed. We are still needed to take care of the elderly, we still have a school in London, we still educate young children and there is a need for Religious, because Religious Sisters give the whole of their life to the care of these people. They don't go home to their husband or wife or the rest of their family. They stay; they live with these people, which is slightly different to what lay people do.
- Q. So for anyone who hears about your life, what would your message to him or her?
- R. My message would be try to be quiet, just listen, just look into your heart and ask yourself "Is God calling me to something special?" Do you feel restlessness in this world? Is there something bigger, something more that you really want? There is a satisfaction that you cannot get in this world, and only God can satisfy it. Are you going to be open to this? Are you going to listen to what he has to say? The world is very busy and very noisy so you have to find a space for your heart. You just have to listen to what is going on inside your heart, and He will tell you if you are open to hear it, He will tell you.

TASKS

1. Why do you think Sr. Madeleine chose to become a Religious Sister?
2. She believes that there is still a need for Sisters today. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.

3. What steps should a young person take to try to discover what God's want them to do with their lives?