

The murmur of Claudine Thévenet in my life

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1. INTRODUCTION

My name is Marusa Delmar Albarrán. I am a Mexican and am 34 years old. I studied all my life in the Instituto Mexicano Regina, which was founded 70 years ago by the Religious of Jesus and Mary in a privileged zone of the City of Mexico, the place where I was born and where I live at present. The encounter with Claudine Thévenet in my life has been as subtle as imperceptible, nevertheless, her footprint in my life has been very strong and penetrating, to the point of engraving the seal of the Charism of Jesus and Mary in the deepest part of my heart. The silence of Claudine, her capacity to discover the “greatness of small things”, the attention of seeing and transmitting to her followers the care of the minimum details, her manner of transmitting her Faith in the goodness of God, the simplicity of her attitude, which is perceived through order and cleanliness, her capacity to reconcile herself with her own history through the mercy of God, and her family spirit are characteristics of Glady which have invited me to transmit her legacy, and above all, have encouraged me to transmit her admiration for God and her need to “Make Jesus and Mary known and loved”.

I have had the privilege of knowing the Religious of Jesus and Mary, who have transmitted God’s love to me, through the Charism of Claudine, of whom today I am a great admirer and faithful follower. My love for Claudine has increased my desire to know more the history of Claudine Thévenet, her spirituality, her pedagogy and Charism. Although I am not an expert in this theme, I have tried to imitate her attitude and would like to share her history with my pupils of Regina School, with my relatives and loved ones.

I have also had the great opportunity of knowing different houses and schools of the Religious of Jesus and Mary, where I have had the experience of the family spirit about which so much is spoken. I felt at home, and besides, I could see and live the charism which we can breathe in any place where the Religious are. They always fill one with details, but always simple, in the Chapel there are always flowers, they serve delicious food, for they are Mothers and act as true Mothers. In every place where they live, one can always find a corner in the open air which invites to contemplation, to reflection and to live a moment of intimacy with the Lord.

When they sent me the invitation to collaborate in this publication on the occasion of the celebration of the Bicentenary of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary, I felt a deep gratitude and was profoundly delighted with great emotion. The invitation I received was to write a brief text which would reflect my concrete manner of living the Christian vocation as a lay person since Claudine's life has inspired me. This is so special for me because on my birthday, my father gave me a nicely framed gift, in which there was a letter that I had received from Rome, from the General Secretary of the Religious of Jesus and Mary. The sentiments that I have experienced are so many when remembering my history with Claudine, that it has been very hard for me to write and to reflect on the impact that she has had in my life. I must confess that I let a lot of time to go by without writing anything because I felt that it is difficult to express in a few words a whole life experience. However, when I again received the invitation, I remembered the example of Claudine, that she was insistent, persevering and her response was always a YES, and therefore, I could not delay further anymore and decided to write whatever comes from my heart.

Then I begin to write these pages observing the famous picture of Claudine with the two orphans, since I could identify myself with the three persons of that picture: Claudine as a mother, who, with love embraces the two little girls to protect them: one older, who in turn embraces and protects the younger little girl, who also in turn, takes Claudine's hand while she looks up at Claudine, searching for the tender look of a mother. Because of this perhaps, with this image before me, I decided to divide my experience into three stages: - that of the little girl: my childhood and my experience as a pupil of Jesus and Mary; that of the older little girl: my young age as former pupil of Jesus and Mary and as a professional; and that of the adult woman: my experience as a mother and teacher in Jesus and Mary.

DEVELOPMENT

Observing the image of Claudine Thévenet embracing the two little girls, it is impossible for me not to perceive a circle of love and protection. Throughout my life, I have had the opportunity to identify myself with the three women of the image; first, with a good girl, defenseless, innocent, always looking for the approval of the adults. Then, I identify myself with the image of an older Sister, adolescent always imitating and repeating the model of the adult, assuming responsibilities, which did not correspond to me, and trying to educate or give an example to my younger Sister. And lastly, today I identify myself with a mother with a profound need to take care, to protect, to teach and to fill with love my children, my pupils as well as any person who could need something from me.

- *The little girl: my childhood as a pupil of Jesus and Mary*

I knew Claudine since I was a child, her history and her life, like a story with images and the moral teaching of goodness, love and pardon. As years went by, I was growing up and was living different experiences of suffering and pain in my family; and in my awakening of a child and a woman, I succeeded in understanding that story and that moral teaching, which gradually became part of my life. First I learnt to be in touch with my pain and suffering, since my parents got separated on two occasions; the first time, when I was 8 years old. At that time, I was terribly afraid to be rejected by my companions in school. So I decided to keep quiet and not speak about my pain and suffering to anybody. I hid the separation and dedicated myself to tell lies so that nobody would be aware of the situation in which I was living at home. My best relationship was always with the adults, my teachers, my aunts or with any person with whom I would feel protected or understood, because I could speak clearly about my family situation without feeling judged.

It is not a coincidence, but a '*diosidencia*' – *Godincidence* - (as I usually say) that on the day that I dared to tell a friend the truth about my family situation, was precisely the day of the canonization of Claudine, March 21, 1993. That day the Religious of Jesus and Mary had organized a Mass in the Basilica of Guadalupe in the city of Mexico, to celebrate the canonization. It was when I looked at the image of Claudine which my friend had in her room on the occasion of the canonization, that I was able to breathe deeply, and, for the first time, I felt very close to Gladys. And at that moment I asked her for strength and courage to accept before others, and before myself, that there was pain and rancor in my heart. That day I learnt to accept my reality and to forgive, to forgive myself, my parents and my circumstances. A process of reconciliation with myself and with my own history began like this, and it lasted many years.

After a year and a half, my parents again got together, and remained together for 5 years; a time which I remember, I always lived with fear of suffering again, to have to keep silence, to feel rejected or abandoned.

When I became an adolescent, at 13 years of age, my parents again got separated. This was a very painful stage for me: it was a stage of changes which meant important losses and mourning, but it was also a stage during which I began to establish true relationships of friendship. I tried to identify myself with my peers; I sought my identity through recognition on the part of others. That was the time when I ceased to be the girl in the image (Claudine

with the two orphans), and I began to become an adolescent who suffers for the simple fact of being an adolescent; nevertheless, it was here where I began to experience God in my life.

At that time I had the opportunity to go on a mission and encounter the pain and sufferings of others, with poverty, with the need of knowing God. During this stage of my life began the profound desire to communicate the love of God to other persons. I sought to compensate my pain and suffering as an adolescent with the joy of giving myself to others. In that first missionary experience I was accompanied by a Religious of Jesus and Mary, who opened my eyes of the heart. It was there that I began to be interested in the history of Claudine. That first experience led me to continue participating during many years in missions, and I also joined the Youth Eucharistic Movement (MEJ) and I participated in all the activities organized by the Mothers. The need that I felt one day to transmit or communicate the love for the Congregation never left me in peace, and so there arose the need of doing something, though I did not know what. I convoked my friends of Regina School, with whom I shared the same concern, so that when we would graduate from school, we would continue forming part of the Congregation. Thus a group emerged which we called “Friends of Jesus and Mary”; we met once a week in the afternoon, simply to pray, to sing the songs that the religious taught us, and to share life in communion with God. In those meetings there were some unbelievable moments, intimate reflections and prayers that my friends and I shared, leaving aside our prejudices and labels, and above all, leaving aside our daily life so as to make a place for a lived experience with Jesus.

After several years of meeting together, I knew that Claudine had also begun her Project in the same manner: meeting with her friends, sharing concerns, and, above all, the need of doing something for others. It was there that I became aware, that in spite that Claudine and I are completely different persons, we had something in common: a great love for Jesus and the need to “Make Jesus and Mary known and loved” through our own lives. This is how my life as a committed lay person with the Church began, once I was out of Regina School.

The young girl: my youth as a former pupil of Jesus and Mary and as a professional

I began to study to obtain a Bachelor’s Degree in Psychology in the Iberoamericana University, where I knew the Jesuits and I began to understand better the profound admiration that Claudine had for Saint Ignatius of Loyola. During this stage of my life I had the opportunity to study a career that allowed me to make practices and to live experiences of dedication to others; working with persons of different ages and needs, in a country greatly hit by poverty,

injustice, violence and marginalization, inequality and corruption. I have had practices with children who need affection, with adolescents immersed in an extreme violence, elderly people abandoned by their families, delinquents locked up in jail, in need of pardon, and reconciliation, with persons isolated from society who were mentally ill. I gave my social service during one semester in New York, where I had the opportunity to work with Latin migrants who have lived the loss and detachment from their things, the loss of their freedom and who have suffered discrimination and have been victims of injustice and inequality.

When I returned to Mexico, I felt committed to do something for the people of my country. I began to work in the public sector, later in foundations dedicated to help those in greater need; nevertheless, in spite that I knew that I was working with people in need of affection, of love and pardon of which Claudine has taught us so much. I began to become aware that I being a privileged woman, born in a high socioeconomic milieu, even if I tried hard to be empathic with the persons with whom I worked, this was not sufficient, since that reality of poverty and marginalization, was absolutely similar to my reality. This is why, after receiving many invitations to work in Jesus and Mary, specifically in the School Regina, I went back to my school to offer my services as teacher and psychologist, convinced that my social surroundings are also surroundings in great need, if not economically, with great need of values, need of love and need of God. It was clear to me that it was precisely in that environment, with persons who can exercise influence in the more important decisions for the benefit of more marginalized Mexicans is where I could develop and open up and follow one of the examples that the life of Claudine has instilled in me until now. Therefore, besides occupying different charges in the School, as responsible or coordinator of the third year of High School, and later as Psychologist of the whole section, since I began working in the School, I have always been giving classes of Education in Faith, a Subject which I greatly enjoy, because it gives me the opportunity to create spaces of encounter with God for the pupils, and for which I feel privileged, since in my country to speak of God is free and gratis.

- *The adult woman: my experience as mother and teacher in Jesus and Mary.*

To work as a teacher in Jesus and Mary has been a privilege, since it offers me much more than what I can give. I have had the opportunity to know incredible persons, the opportunity to grow in my Faith, to get closer to God, to know better the charism of Jesus and Mary and to give back to my dear religious a bit of the love of so much as I have received from them. To share the experience of God with my High School pupils, and favor spaces or places

so that they may also have this experience has been very gratifying. And to have the opportunity to participate in retreats, to have celebrations with Mass, to celebrate the 200 years, is something which fills me with pride and which invites me to repeat the words of Claudine: “How Good God is”.

During this adult stage, I have been able to become a professional, but above all, as a woman and a mother. Five years ago, I got married to a good man, who every day reminds me that “charity and love have to be the pupil of my eyes”.

It is only three years ago that I became a mother, first of a little boy who filled our home and family with joy, and then of a little girl of big eyes, who connects me with my femininity. To be a mother has been a whole adventure and an experience of love. Finally I have succeeded in understanding that facet of Claudine, which before was unknown to me, in which the circle of love in the image of Claudine with the two orphans is compassed, and which has inspired these words: Being a mother to the pupils is something difficult to understand without first having experienced the great love which this implies.

In my history, I have had a great example of the love which is involved in being a father. First, thanks to my parents, that in spite of the difficulties they have always shown me the face of the love of God the Father: always present, always watching for my wellbeing and that of my brothers, always united in the education of their children, in spite of being separated as a couple. They have always showed their love towards their children, educating them from the heart and were committed to their role as parents. Then the example of the Religious of Jesus and Mary, whom in Mexico we call “Mothers”, since they have dedicated themselves to love us and to educate us with “gentleness and firmness”, as true mothers, as Claudine had dreamt it. And at the end, but not less important, I have experienced the infinite love of God the Father and the protection and example of Mary, whom it is not necessary to understand or to question her, but simply to contemplate her in order to be able to experience the profound love of being a mother.

With these three examples, I want to educate my children and my pupils, for whom I feel a great responsibility to continue growing in love and to be committed with Claudine to “Make Jesus and Mary known and loved”.

To speak to my pupils based on my own life, giving concrete examples of situations that I have experienced, positive as well as negative experiences that I have lived, being in empathy with their histories, is the form in which I have learnt to give witness of the Goodness of God which Claudine preached so much. That goodness, which I still do not understand how she

discovered in the midst of such great desolation, and which today invites me to become aware that the context in which we live is not important, there is always a moment in space to feel and experience the Goodness and Mercy of God.

In my last meeting on the occasion of the Bicentenary, after that the speakers contextualized the life of Claudine and compared it with our time, in the XXI century, there arose in me the concern to ask Claudine questions: what would she have done if instead of poverty and violence, where there was nothing more to do than to give hope and consolation, would she have found herself in a context of persons who are empty, who are materialists, who feel they need nothing, and, for this same reason, they do not feel the need to know God? How to make Him known and how to create this need if the persons around me believe that they have and know everything? These questions which I ask myself today invite me to discover a new way to take care of those, who for me are those in greater need: those who feel that they need nothing.

What would I be, if Claudine had not said YES to construct “a foolish and presumptuous enterprise”? I do not know, but surely I would not be the one writing this brief text of experiences of love, goodness and pardon. I profoundly thank Claudine, for having shown me the face of the Good God, and thus I repeat together with her the motto of our Congregation:

Praised forever be Jesus and Mary!