



Dear Sisters,

Today, November 17, 2021, at Albano Laziale (Rome), at 2:00 AM, in the heart of the night, the Bridegroom arrived for our dear sister

SR. M. LUCIA - BERNICE BOUCHÉ
born on September 14, 1935 in Rangoon - Burma (now Myanmar).

Born into a Catholic family, Bernice was baptized at Saint Mary's Cathedral in Rangoon on September 23, 1935.

The story of this sister is an icon of the crossing of the desert by the people of Israel and the current drama of millions of refugees today who are forced to seek refuge and security in other nations. We will recount the essential elements in order to allow ourselves to be carried by the same song of praise. She was interviewed by the Pauline brothers of the community of Vicenza, where she was located, on the occasion of her 25th anniversary of religious profession, and she told them: «I think my vocation is special. I was a refugee and, if I had remained in my nation, in Burma, perhaps I would never have met the Pauline Family. It is a miracle of God who desired that I become a Sister Disciple. When I fled to India with my brother and my mother (*my father, originally from an ancient French family, was not there because he had been called to military service*), I suffered a great deal. In fact, during the difficult journey, they lacked the means and resources necessary to live. When we arrived at the nearest airport, it had been bombarded. After a day on the train, we had to continue on foot since all the railroad tracks were destroyed. From the time we were unable to take the train, we had no means of sustenance and no change of clothing, since we did not have the strength to carry anything with us. No food was to be found. It was only possible to eat some roots found in the forest and it is by a miracle of God that we survived because I do not recall ever having enough to eat that was sufficient to continue on. After having walked for a long time, mamma was unable to continue because of the exhaustion and she told us: “The two of you go ahead that the Lord might send someone to help you. I cannot go on; I will remain here to die”. We found a hut, there she bowed her head and died. In the meantime, two men, warriors from the forest called *Nagas*, arrived. They lifted us up and took us with them. They placed us in two separate huts. They were head hunters and, it seems to me, that my brother was killed in that manner. In the meantime, I was 8 years old, and I remained with those people, expecting the

end from one moment to the next. However, some people from the English government arrived and, knowing the customs of these warriors, they became aware of my presence and brought me to India. A fact that has always remained impressed in me is that the first church I visited in India was run by the Pauline priests. I then lived for 12 years in a community of the Canossian Sisters and here I met Fr. Alfonso Ferrero, who often visited the boarding school. Every so often I would take a walk to the Paulines who were in Allahabad, and sometimes I would stop there even for some days. Every once in a while I met Fr. Ferrero, who spoke to me about the Pauline vocation. I told myself: "Why cannot I also dedicate myself to this apostolate to serve the entire Church? In fact, I think that the adoration and prayer are very important for evangelization". I then asked Fr. Alfonso for more explanation and, two years later, the Sister Disciples arrived in India. I still remember the first time I went to visit them. I was impressed by their hard life, but the various difficulties did not affect my choice, as I was attracted by the prayer. I was convinced that this apostolate could help the priests in their mission. Urged on by this conviction, I entered the Congregation on January 23 of 1955».

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of our presence as Sister Disciples in India, she recalled her meeting with the Sister Disciples: «Reflecting upon the marvels the Lord has done in these years of faith, sacrifices, offering and joy renews within me a sense of gratitude. I relive the first moments of my vocation when I met the Sister Disciples for the first time. ...the thing that consolidated my will and my vocation during that initial time was the example of joy and prayer, of sacrifice and the good spirit the two sisters lived with great simplicity».

In August of 1956 she came to Italy for the novitiate and then made her first profession in Rome on March 25, 1958. She made her perpetual profession on March 25, 1963 in Bombay, today Mumbai (India), where she had returned in 1960. The apostolic service for which she was qualified, and in which she offered the best of herself, was primarily that of the work of a cook. She fulfilled this service in Mumbai and then in Allahabad SSP. In 1971 she was assisting in the Liturgical Apostolate Center in Mumbai. In 1975 she returned to Rome and offered her collaboration in the Center for Souvenirs at Saint Peter's from 1975 to 1982. Then, for some years, she was the cook in the houses of the Society of St. Paul in Vicenza, in Bari and then in Catania. She spent two years in Florence SMF (2005-2007). Then in 2009 she was in Turin DM, in 2012 in Albano, again in Turin in 2014, and then definitively in Albano, available to offering her assistance for as long as her health permitted.

In 2003 she received permission to return for one week to her beloved country, Myanmar: «I went as a guest of the Pastor of the Cathedral in which I was baptized. I hope to sow good seeds also in my native land, with the hope that one day we will be there with our presence to bring Jesus Master way, truth and life also to the Burmese people» (to Sr. M. Laura Mancini, Provincial Superior).

The life and language of Sr. M. Lucia are characterized by gratitude, in the awareness that the Lord has done great things for her. She expressed this again, almost as a summary of her life, when she recalled her 60 years of religious profession to the Provincial Superior at that time, Sr. M. Provvidenza Raimondo and her council: «*Thanks be to God* for all that you have done to make our 60th Anniversary of religious consecration so beautiful and wonderful. My heart is filled with wonder and emotion for the powerful experience of love, family delicacy, that was given to me by God the Father and by the Congregation. I truly tasted the beauty of our wonderful family in every gift I received. I would like to raise a song of thanksgiving and of praise: I will sing of you with my life, Lord, and I will give you thanks. With the Psalmist, I make this hymn my own. I also wish for you the joy of a fervent offering that is filled with the Presence of God and is communicated in goodness to others. United in faithfulness! With affection and gratitude!» (June 29, 2018).

Already suffering for many years from heart and metabolic problems, in great silence in the heart of the night, she reached her threshold: the homeland of heaven where she could finally be reunited with her loved ones! She is the first Sister Disciple to be buried in the communal cemetery of Ciampino (RM), where a funeral chapel is projected to be built for the Institute.

To Sr. M. Lucia Bouché, who lived with great faith and trust in Jesus her Lord and Master, we entrust the many needs of the Congregation that require wisdom and discernment!

S. H. Paolo Mancini