

FROM “ROOTS” TO “FLOWERING”

Sister Celine Matsumoto, SSND

“All the works of God proceed slowly and in pain: but then, their roots are sturdier and their flowering the lovelier.” (MT 2277) From “roots” to “flowering” has been for me a 42-year process of watching and waiting. I started my search for God in 1961 in the newly-established Notre Dame Women’s College in Kyoto, Japan. We had only a few Christians among students and staff, reflecting the fact that Catholics are only 0.35% of the population in Japan. So, we began our SSND mission, not by evangelizing, but by planting the seeds of pre-evangelization in the non-Christian soil.

I had the privilege of experiencing the growth process of the college for 42 years from its foundation. The college has responded to the needs of the times by expanding its intellectual fields. In recent years, changes have been rapid and revolutionary. Somehow “speed” seems to be an obsessive concern. We have become people on the move, and we expect instant, visible results. In the midst of my efforts to meet professional demands, I heard an inner voice asking me, “Why do I look for tangible success?” and “Do I still minister to the young ladies by sharing spiritual values?” Sometimes I felt at a loss—unable to see God’s seeds growing in this vineyard.

I left the college in March 2003 because of mandatory retirement. By then, we had nearly 10,000 graduates. Most of the women have families and are enjoying their grandchildren after their hard child-rearing years. Some have lost their dear husbands and beloved children. Many faithfully attend to their elderly parents-in-law. Some are divorced because of unavoidable circumstances, and others patiently suffer from illness and incurable disease. Some are very efficient, professional women leaders in the society.

For my retirement, the graduates planned a gathering in May. Needless to say, we enjoyed the picnic lunch they provided and a walk around the pond, chatting and admiring the beauty of fresh greenery. The highlight of the day—a surprise gift to me—was to celebrate Mass together. Most of them, who are not Christians, remembered how, as students, they used to pray with us, the Sisters, although they did not fully understand the meaning of the Mass. The seeds sown in them have been gradually growing, and through their life experiences, they now appreciate even more the value of prayer. Some things cannot be hurried. God has been acting slowly in them and continues to reveal to me his lovely “flowering” in the graduates.

Though I have retired from my profession, there is no retirement in religious life. I will continue my mission—to serve as a harbor for the graduates when they are caught in the storms of life and as an oasis for them when they thirst for a spiritual drink.