

Transcript

Welcome to our Ted talk. Here we are at Loretto College. I'm Sister Sarah Rudolph. And I'm Sister Sonal.

We are here to talk to you today, or at least talk to each other today and to share our conversation with you about the theme of the 'small remnant'.

That's right, *les petits restes*. So the question that's asked, and I guess that will kind of form our conversation here is: how can we as consecrated persons inhabit a secular society?

I think it would be helpful to start with... actually the theme. Because I have to say when I was presented with this topic...as I was reflecting on it. I had a fairly strong reaction to it and in fact the idea of being part of this small remainder doesn't quite sit well with me, I guess. And it's funny because I've had conversations in our community. In fact, there's a group of us who are 80 years old and under. We have referred to ourselves or have been referred to as the remnant, you know, as of a larger, once larger, community of Loretto Sisters. But now we are fewer in number, and so the small remnant are the ones that are thinking about: how do we plan for the future? What do we think about? The future of our congregation, and more broadly speaking about religious life. But I find it hard for myself to see myself, to understand myself as part of this remnant, because in fact I haven't lived the religious life that they have lived.

I entered the community in 2014 and at that time there was already some movement towards diminishment and certainly we had been letting go of different properties and ministries. And so I entered into a religious life and into a community that was already at a place of letting go. So coming in I see myself as actually being on the edge of something new. And what that new thing is I don't quite know yet, but I see myself as entering into a time that is quite a fertile time, a time that is really tumultuous, I think, and challenging in many ways, but I see it as I'm starting in this point of smallness, and so I don't see it as like something that is remaining, but in fact this is just what is: the smallness. And whether it remains small or whether it grows larger, it's sort of up to God.

For me when I was thinking of *les petits restes*, one of the questions I had was: I am relatively young in my religious life. I entered the novitiate in 2019 and then made my first vows in 2021. And God willing, this summer I'm renewing them. And so one of my questions was: Why? Why choose religious life? Today, what is what is that call? And so one aspect of it is really responding to this call from the Lord to follow. Recognizing that and wanting to not be the only person in my own life who makes decisions but this aspect of stewardship that we're created to live in community we're created to be part of something that's larger than ourselves. And so that's what really drew me in this desire to live in community, this desire to not be on my own. And so the aspect of prayer and liturgy.

But with that also comes this question: well, is religious life diminishing? And if it is... and we see that it is, what is our place in fact, in church and society today? And what role do we have? Not in the sense of we have something to show or to teach or to offer, but it's well, how do we continue to be laborers in the vineyard? And trusting that this call that God has for us continues to remain. C'est toujours actuel aujourd'hui. Et donc dans ce sens les valeurs de l'Évangile que je trouve c'est vraiment ce côté d'être fidele a cet appel et d'être disponible. To be available as you said. So looking at what are the needs of today's world and the needs to be society. And recognizing that I myself and you too. Like we all have desires. And so how do these desires and these needs in fact intersect?

And coming from the Ignatian tradition, we understand that our deepest desire is where our desire and God's desire for us meets right, so. There's a lot of life and a lot of energy and creativity that comes from those desires. And being able to express them and live them as religious.

And I think something that's interesting as well, in what you said about joining the sisters at this time where you know for your like. I've entered something that is small and this is the reality. And it's the same with me, like my community has never been large. We've always been a small community. It's the how do we trust? And looking at in fact: in the gospels as well... when we were having this conversation the other day, there were two aspects in the Gospels that came up quite a bit. One was this widow who gave all that she had. Which wasn't much right? But she gave all that she had. And then les cinq pains et les deux poissons qui deviennent l'abondance.

I remember when I was discerning, a call to religious life. It really was like, I mean, I felt. I felt on fire with this call. And I felt compelled, you know, to seek out a resolution to satisfy the desire. And there was such a strong desire to be of service, to be of service to God to be of God's Service in the world really. To be an instrument of God's love in the world. And I think that that was also like we you said something about you know a desire to be part of something larger than yourself. And that too was at the the root of this call to religious life. And so entering a community that is small and and is becoming smaller over time. I think that in some ways, it doesn't really matter: I've entered into religious life. I've I'm alive and I have been called at this particular point in history and so my call from God is to live that whatever it turns out to be, you know. And so it's not about a focus on numbers, but it is about, I think like you said like it's about being faithful like that, fidelity to the call and to. Fidelity to, I think even belief. That God has called. That God has a plan for each of us in religious life and being willing for that to unfold in God's time. Because I know myself that I'm often very impatient and I think like 'let's make decisions now' going and like, 'you know, I'm young, I have lots of energy and capacity. So like just put me to work,' but it doesn't always happen like there are. Obviously there are decisions that need to be discerned more carefully. There are lots of considerations that we need to take into account, you know, and so part of my learnings as a temporary professed is, is by being available by being patient actually. So it's learning to be patient and to wait. And in that waiting being available to respond to whatever the present needs are in the present circumstances are.

That's right, and trusting that even when things aren't visible, that God is working. That God is working in the background and that this call is valid for today and I wonder if that might be perhaps something for us to consider a little more is how do we accept this call today: that God, Jesus calls us today as well? It's not just a call that happened for me in...well, my I don't even know the first time I started discerning religious life. But it's like and then, you know, the times we made our vows and the renewals and such. And but that it's every day that we are being called.

That's true and it's listening to that call and it's responding to that call. And trusting that call, as you said. Despite all the craziness that sometimes surrounds us and the uncertainty absolutely.

I think something that helps me quite a bit is community life like as much as it can also be a space of- You know where all of us come in our humanity and the gifts that we have but also our own weaknesses and areas of growth, - but at the same time to have that and then another aspect has been in friendship. I think like the little temporary professed group that we have here in Toronto to be able to share and to learn from each other as well.

No, I agree completely. I think in terms of my own experience of religious life in my community you know, I feel very blessed I've had, in some ways, I hope that they will forgive me if they hear this, but like it's like a community of grandmothers in a sense. But like women that are very nurturing, that are loving, that are supportive, that maybe cannot accompany by living my life with me in the same phase of life that I'm in. But in fact that reach out to me with love and with the desire to be there for me and to encourage me. And and to offer mentoring too. But what I have found so important, you know, as a as a newer religious is making those connections, so feeling a sense of community that goes beyond my own community. So for example, this Around the Well retreat group that was started in 2017, I had the privilege of going to the first retreat in in in Saskatoon and so meeting a group of you know men and women religious across Canada and and finding that and we are all in different phases of like of religious life in terms of formation or being finally professed. But that we found a peer group of sorts to be with and people that we know that we are journeying with, even though we're not physically together, that we have these common interests, common experiences that are kind of stretched across the country. But that we find purpose and meaning and great joy, I think, in religious life and and having each other to share with, to learn from, to dream with. That actually was a big part of our retreat, that we had a couple of years ago in Mississauga and you know, we were asked like to dream big. And to dream big together because we are not all about diminishment. It is a reality that we are living, but that's not the sum total of religious life in Canada today. In fact, there is great possibility for a future that is vibrant and alive and self giving and so the invitation to dream together, I think was energizing and there are little ideas that have been that were planted, I would say a couple of years ago that hopefully are slowly growing and maybe coming to fruition, but. I think that knowing myself as a member of my own community but also, as part of a community of communities has been really important for my formation but also my identity and growth as a religious.

Oui, je pense que c'est dans cela qu'on trouve aussi la credibilite de la vie religieuse aujourd'hui. Que c'est vraiment dans des relations – les uns avec les autres, les unes avec les autres. It's in this friendship and recognizing that we're not individuals I mean, we are individuals. That is who we are. But that it is in the in the sharing and the togetherness, in fact, that we find our strength and that in this sense it shows..qu'en travaillant ensemble on ne devient pas *une chose* but that we're able to in fact share the the vastness of our various charisms of the various histories in fact.

And I feel like I'm enriched. You know, when I get to learn about what the xaviere charism is. I'm enriched in my own understanding of ignatian spirituality and just the gift of the Ignatian tradition to the world.

I think it's a highly misunderstood aspect of it that just like when you talk about the vows or the Evangelical Councils, however you want to call it. It's not understood well by people who don't live it. You know, I think there's lots of misconceptions, certainly around, you know, the vow of chastity or celibacy, even the vow of poverty. I mean, sometimes even just looking at, you know, the buildings where or the homes where religious live, you might get another kind of, you might be skeptical about the vow of poverty. And then the vow of obedience. I mean, who the heck is obedient today to anybody. Who wants to be obedient to anybody? Right. But I think that that is. That's actually the the vows, I think, are what make us such a powerful. Prophetic witness in the world. You know, whether we are properly understood or not, you know, I mean, it's probably our responsibility, I think, to try to make ourselves understood what it means to be religious and to live out the vows. But I think that it's such a powerful witness in, in a world that really struggles with any kind of

commitment...hat, as you've said, like and also in terms of not seeing the church as a credible witness to its own values, perhaps sometimes. And religious, too. Not being credible witnesses to values. If we think about Canadian history and residential schools, certainly.

In our contemporary world today, there is a lot of animosity towards religious because of of, you know, the recent findings. But I think that is a challenge to us as younger religious, you know, whether we want to take it on or not. But I think it is a challenge, an invitation, perhaps more so. An invitation for us to live out our vows well. To be healthy, to be loving, to be integrated individuals, but also as a community. To actually truly live and express in whatever way we can. You know God's love for for this world.

C'est vraiment un expression en fait de l'amour du Christ dans ce monde. And that the vows are really this response, in fact of love received. And so that our commitment, notre engagement dans nos vœux soit vraiment cette reponse. And in that sense, we end up becoming channels.

How in our vows, in fact we're being available by saying yes today. And in that saying yes, it's actually a yes that's rooted in hope, and belief in a consecrated life that will flourish, actually.

Exactly, and that it flourishes because we are flourishing within it, in fact. And so our human flourishing through this, yes, in fact, is of service today. And not just the past.