

PROFILE

The providential hand of God

(Part 2)

This month we continue with the second part of the story of Gis, one of the early companions of Chiara Lubich. We had reached the point last month when Gis's mother had allowed her sister, Ginetta, to live in the first focolare house in Trent, but had forbidden Gis to live there.

An inspiration!

Gis did not allow herself to be defeated by this. In her free time, she went to the focolare in Piazza Cappuccini, until the point came when she too could live there. She recounted: *'Foco had come to Trent on one of his many visits to see Chiara and get to know more about the community of the Movement. Foco, or the Honourable Giordani, was an authoritative person, someone well known in our Catholic environments...He saw that I always arrived at the focolare running and that I always left, running. He asked why I was in such a rush and Chiara told him about my situation. There and then Foco had an idea, which was truly an inspiration! He took paper and pen (the headed paper of Parliament) and wrote a letter. It was 23rd October 1949:*

Dear Miss Calliari,

It was a pleasure to meet you briefly today. I was truly impressed by your sensitivity and your breadth of experience. This is why I have thought deeply and decided that I wish to invite you to Rome as my secretary. I would then be sure of having a reliable and balanced person assisting me, as the role requires. If you are willing, please let me know as soon as convenient. Meanwhile, I send you my cordial greetings.

Yours, Igino Giordani, (member of Parliament):

Always with Chiara

'It could not have gone better,' said Gis, 'because my mother knew Foco through his books, and admired him

hugely. Seeing that Foco had such admiration for her daughter made her feel proud and she allowed me to leave home, on condition that I did not live with the focolarine. I arrived in Rome on 6 December 1949. I was so happy, as you can imagine, and went to the Garbatella, which was the first focolare in Rome. Before she died, though, my mother did give me her blessing saying, "If I were to be born again, I would go with Chiara." So I had her blessing. Those words were like her approval of my vocation.'

In December 1949, the first focolare in the capital, was opened in Piazza Oderico da Pordenone, the Garbatella area of Rome. Chiara, Giosi, Graziella and Marilen were there, and intermittently Lia and Vale, who commuted from Rovereto. At that point, also Gis arrived. The Garbatella focolare became a real magnet for many people. They were attracted by the Ideal that Chiara and her companions gave to everyone. The apartment was always full of people especially at suppertime, when salt and water was added to the soup until there was enough for everyone.

From then on, Gis was almost always with Chiara, in her focolare. In the early days, she was responsible for the Movement in various cities in Italy: Trent, Rome, Milan and Florence, starting and supporting the Movement in various zones, and for a number of years she was responsible for the women's section of the focolarine.

On one occasion she spoke about life in focolare with Chiara: *'What can I say about my life with Chiara? It was very simple, clear and deep. I lived with her for many years, although there were gaps because I went to several zones. I feel as though I have nothing of my own... All that is hers is mine. All that is mine is hers, apart from my shortcomings of course, which were cer-*

tainly mine. Life with Chiara is very deep and very simple. Supernatural life is natural. Chiara is the most normal person on earth and the most supernatural.'

Only in heaven...

Only in heaven will we fully grasp the life of focolare that Chiara lived with Gis and the other first focolarine. In 2002, she shared an extract from her diary that helps us understand how precious an experience it was. *'The philadelphia (love among all)...in my focolare is more than a reality. It is there that I draw strength to face the daily crosses, after my personal union with Jesus. Here, each one is concerned about the other ... Here, we go from wisdom, communicated spontaneously, to practical tips on health, clothing, the house, on food; to continual daily help and service, often at the cost of countless sacrifices. In other words, here, you are convinced that you will never be judged, but loved, forgiven, helped. Here, even the slightest betrayal is inconceivable. Here, the blood that circulates is that of a family, but a heavenly one.'*

A spring of love

In recent years, those who greeted Gis – and there are many testimonies of this – found themselves before an overflowing spring of love, warmth and tenderness. Her words of greeting were full of wisdom and affection. Her words expressed and recalled Chiara, despite her weakened mental capacity during these last months.

Last spring Gis found out she had a very serious type of cancer. She lived this new chapter in her Holy Journey by staying put, in her own characteristic way, deeply rooted in 'the will of God'. At the start of July, she became much worse and it seemed then that she would leave us, her death only a matter of days or even hours away. Then she recovered and improved. Several times since mid-July it seemed she was at the point of leaving for the next life, but to everyone's surprise, including her doctor, she recovered each time. Her eyes spoke of



Illustration: ©Citta Nuova

Paradise and it seemed that her new task was to build a bridge between her room and heaven.

Go into the whole world

Many, many people came to see Gis. She spoke to them, or looked at them, or smiled. *'I said that we must all become saints little by little,'* one visitor recounted, *'She looked at me questioningly. So I said, 'Gis, OK! A race to holiness then!' and she said, pronouncing the word carefully, "Run" and repeated it five or six times.'*

Every Thursday, the young people, the Gen came to sing at Mass with her. Once Gis greeted them with real force: *'Go out into the whole world!'*

Gis had an unshakable faith. Palmira one of Chiara's first companions said: *'I have known Gis for 70 years and I have always shared my work for the Movement with her. Gis is truly the personification of her word of life, a phrase from the Gospel that Chiara had chosen for her: "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Mt. 8: 26). She has given us a great lesson in living the essential, being radical, and trusting in God's plans, and in unity with everyone. Together with her, let us remain one heart and one soul, grateful for her example of heroic faithfulness to her design.'*