

# SPIRITUALITY OF DINA BELANGER

María Lourdes Rossell, rjm.

## I - KNOWING DINA

At the end of the 19th century, the typical traits of the Christians that make up Christianity of French Canada are, among others, a clear, strong, simple but authentic faith, together with fidelity to the inheritance received from the past that, at least the majority maintain without discussion and which the State of Quebec proclaims in its emblem: ("Je me souviens".) ("I remember".)

In French Canada, the safeguarding of faith and religious practice are based on the vitality of the parishes. In general, the faithful support the Church and the bishops and priests are admirably supported by the Religious Institutes that collaborate in the parish ministry, offer education at all levels and support works of charity. Religious and priestly vocations are numerous.

In this environment, and in a deeply Christian family, Dina Bélanger was born on April 30, 1897 and was baptized the same day in the parish of Saint-Roch.

A year and a half later, a little brother is born who dies after three months. Dina is alone and her parents, Octave Bélanger and Sérafia Matte, know how to give her a firm education, marked by the religious principles of French-Canadian Catholicism. An education that, despite her shy and willful nature, prevented her from being a capricious and selfish girl and taught her to forget about herself and give herself to others.

Adored by her parents, with a good economic position and numerous friends, her talent and training augured a bright future, full of promise. She was young, graceful, with a sweet face and delicate gestures; endowed with a remarkable intelligence, a determined personality and an excellent talent for music perfected at the New York Conservatory.

Pianist and composer, Dina, was not only the young woman with great musical talent, who was much applauded at her concerts, but also the young woman whose spiritual life was a symphony, played in the key of fidelity, which leaves everyone who approaches her, amazed.

Her artistic temperament made her sensitive to the inner voice of Jesus, with whom she maintained, since childhood, a constant dialogue. Later, faithful to her call, to respond with love to the Love that seduced her, she left behind everything that could have been a future full of attractions: an endearing family life, a successful musical career, a promising future, the possibility of creating a happy home ..., gave herself with a total Yes, without reservations, to the one who wanted her only for himself, consecrating herself to Him in the Congregation of the Religious of Jesus and Mary.

Dina lived a life full of God. Her story is that of a woman in love with Jesus. The total absorption of herself by the One who captivated her, until the "substitution" of her being by Jesus, led her to be able to say "Jesus and I are only one: Jesus alone" (p.169), faithful echo of the words of St. Paul: "It is not I who live, it is Christ who lives in me" (Ga 2,20).

Her childhood and youth develop in a normal life, nothing seems to distinguish it from others. She is cheerful, sociable, loves beauty and nature. She is good with a kindness that inclines her to the weakest and most disadvantaged. Nothing allows us to guess the inner life that surrounds her. She responds to Love by making her motto come true: "Love and let Jesus and Mary have their way" (page 185).

Her whole existence was an absolute surrender to God, a commitment that constantly demanded "more." Dina allowed God to always have his way and only let herself be guided by Him. In her Autobiography, written under obedience to her superiors, with the language, typical of the French spirituality of her time, poetic and symbolic, she shows us her life and mystical journey with the accents of the artist: a song of love, a hymn of thanksgiving, following the stages that God made her travel, until she entered the sanctuary of the most holy Trinity (pp. 329-389). Yes, Dina is a mystic comparable to the great mystics and is also an apostolic mystic. Though her apostolic activity was soon reduced by illness, her missionary zeal never diminished. Dina wanted to "travel the universe and consume it in the infinite flames of the Heart of Christ" (p.204) because for her, as for Saint Claudine, the greatest misfortune was that of those who live and die without knowing God.

After a short existence, she died on September 4, 1929, a few months before turning 33 years, with the promise to remain at the service of her brothers and sisters on earth: "In heaven I will be a beggar of love; that is my mission and I begin it immediately" (page 238). In her last moments, she still wanted to suffer more, and she said that she was going to heaven to work until the end of the world ... for all souls ... (p 392).

Her radiance is immediate. The first publications on her life date from August 31, 1932 and the first edition of her Autobiography from 1934. Pope John Paul II beatified her on March 20, 1993.

The petition on the day of the beatification says: "Dina embodied to perfection, the charism of her Foundress: to reveal the working goodness of Christ.

Her spirituality is totally centered on the Heart of Jesus in the Eucharist with a filial dependence on Mary. Her apostolic heart burns with the desire to make Jesus and Mary known and loved, to the ends of the world. She wants to continue her mission in eternity and beg for love in favour of all souls, for the greater glory of God. "

Dina's story is an exciting story. Although brief and limited, her life always carries the stamp of love and her Autobiography is a love story. Her holiness is not in the multiple, extraordinary gifts that God gave her, but in her uninterrupted fidelity to grace.

In a world with fratricidal wars, in which religious options are out in the open, in which faith has darkened, in which money has been erected as a god, in which the human being does not count at birth nor at death, in which many young people do not find meaning in their lives, in which many artists allow themselves to be dazzled by the passing glory of immediate success, in which also some priests and consecrated persons have abandoned their first love, in which many sick people do not know how to open the window of hope in the One who awaits them with open arms, in which unknowingly there are many seekers of happiness outside of God, Dina, because of her prophetic witness, today has a message for everyone, for the Church and for this disoriented world. A message of a faithful, total and generous reception of Jesus in our life.

## II – SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality is the language that expresses the relationship between God and the human being. It speaks to us of that constant, conscious and absorbing need of God that shapes the life of a person or a group of people.

The spiritual person wants to be like Jesus in everything, to think like him, to live like him, to identify with him, and to follow in his footsteps (1Pe 2,21). The more the person resembles Jesus, the deeper his spirituality becomes.

Spirituality gets moulded through the work of God in his creature. The person is freely given through strong and sustained encounters with God, moments when, without knowing how, God is present in an extraordinary way. These meetings capture the totality of the person until it is only God who directs his life. From these deeper and deeper encounters, the response to the action of God is born in the person and his own spirituality is forged.

Holiness has different ways of expressing itself and therefore spiritualities are also diverse. Among others, according to the school that forges them, there are spiritualities like: Benedictine, Carmelite, Mercedaria, Dominican, Franciscan, Ignatian, etc.

Dina always let God direct her existence. To enter into her spirituality is to discover her relationship with God and how she made her own, the spirituality of the Congregation of the Religious of Jesus and Mary, marked by the Ignatian influence. We are going to sketch some features through her own Autobiography, taking into account that her life is so rich that it is impossible to make a complete analysis.

### DINA AND THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CONGREGATION

Dina left a deep stamp as an authentic religious of Jesus-Mary, fully living the spirit and spirituality of her Congregation, concretised in the Constitutions: "The spirituality of the Congregation, Christocentric and Marian, has its source in the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. This love, following the example of its Foundress, should permeate the spiritual life and animate the apostolic zeal of each religious. Its spirituality is centered in the Eucharist, gift of love and fruit of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. From its beginnings it has always been influenced by the doctrine of St. Ignatius." (C 9).

All these traces are found in her autobiography, which is the mirror of her life, an interior conversation with Christ with whom she shares her redemption plans in favour of our world. In the case of Dina, as she says, it is not about "private revelations", but a classic way of living and expressing the spiritual life in the form of an inner dialogue with the Lord (p.105).

Dina's life, like St. Claudine's and St. Ignatius', was entirely apostolic. "The misfortune of those who live and die without knowing God" marked her life and her spirituality.

Christocentric, her love for the Virgin, her Eucharistic centralism, her apostolic being and the influence of the Ignatian spirituality, stand out, on just opening the first pages of her Autobiography. In the first part of the Autobiography, Dina describes, with the exactitude that characterizes her, her childhood, adolescence and youth and how she let herself be led by God until she reached the "substitution" of her being for Jesus. In the second, almost like a spiritual Diary, Dina expresses her inner experience, comparable with that of the great mystics, and how God takes her through stages, deeper and deeper, until she enters into the contemplation of the essence of the Trinity. Dina converts her existence into a song of thanksgiving and praise to the glory of the Father and enriches, with unsuspected harmony, the motto of her Congregation: "Praised forever be Jesus and Mary" (C 11).

Dina lets herself be trapped entirely by God. In her, they were not sporadic moments, but a habitual state of life, until feeling and tasting that it was no longer she who lived but it was Christ who lived in her (Gal 2, 20).

Dina, like St. Ignatius and St. Claudine, lived the experience of being led by Another. This action of God, far from seeking to overwhelm her, of causing her some tension in the fulfillment of her daily duties, made her more and more active in her response to the Lord, causing her to discover herself loved by a God who is Love and who asks to be fully accepted.

Because of her reserved artistic temperament, she managed to live in a state of inner silence that, however, did not alienate her from others, but she lived outwardly with great attention and was present in everything, yet in such a way that no one could suspect the richness of her inner life, where the Spirit worked.

## **GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY**

The most outstanding features of Ignatian spirituality stem from the mystical experience of

St. Ignatius, which from the beginning was an experience of God the Trinity near the Cardoner. That experience accompanied him throughout his life and in the end it filled him with mystical graces of relationship with the three divine Persons, as stated in his spiritual Diary. That vision, near the Cardoner, where Iñigo was filled with God, changed his life, leaving him committed to suffer with Christ, carrying the cross and to participate in his saving mission. Ignatius understood that God is an active God, always working in the life of the human being and for that reason we must be attentive to this active God and respond immediately.

Ignatian spirituality is an apostolic spirituality in terms of participation in the saving mission of Jesus, sent by the Father for the life of the world. It is an integration of one's life to this saving mission; someone who stands in solidarity with others, who tends to the universal good because Jesus brought salvation for all.

The whole spirituality of Ignatius was marked by the intimate love for God and the personal following of Jesus and left it especially reflected in the Spiritual Exercises. Here are the typical features:

**1.- Christcentric: An endearing love and personal following of Jesus Christ:**

internal knowledge, love, follow-up and service to His mission: with Him and like Him. Ignatian spirituality is strongly Christocentric.

**2.- Constant search for God's will:** what He wants from me. Hence the importance of the internal disposition of attention and response. To do this, we must be indifferent to everything created, indifference that leads to freedom to seek and find the will of God and adhere fully to it.

**3.- Spiritual Discernment:** A permanent attitude of inner freedom; to see how I can improve my reality to make it more in line with the Gospel, and distinguish movements that reinforce my orientation towards God from those who separate me from Him. What have I done for Christ, what do I do, what will I do?

**4.- Periodic examination:** Know my reality, both positively, to thank God, and in the negative to ask for forgiveness and overcome it with His help. Detect and respond to the presence of God.

**5.- Sense of the Magis:** the most, the best, the greatest self-denial, with discernment. Constant effort to know more, love more, serve more, follow Jesus poor and humble. Jesus Christ is the horizon and reference of the Ignatian "more". It is the "most" for the love for Jesus Christ and identification with His attitudes. It is a "more" humble. To feel a great desire but, at the same time, to be aware of one's own limitations and of the help that is needed from grace.

**6.- The greater glory of God.** The primacy of the divine: the glory of God. Ignatius was a passionate man. Before his conversion, he wanted to be the best warrior; later, his whole life was for "the greater glory of God": synthesis of Ignatian spirituality.

**7.- Apostolic service widening the heart to the dimensions of the world with availability and freely:** The Cardoner's vision led him to "help souls". This was for him the apostolic spirituality, to help everyone in everything, especially to return to God, giving freely what has been received freely.

**8.- Search and find God in everything created** by being contemplatives in action; united to Him in everything that is done. Permanent desire to seek God in all things.

**9.- Union and familiarity with the Most Holy Trinity.** Life of intimate union with God in prayer and action. The personal experience of Ignatius was from the beginning and throughout his life an experience of God the Trinity. The Principle and Foundation speaks to us of: praise and glory with the Father, follow-up and service with the Son and acceptance of his movements with the Spirit.

### III - ELEMENTS OF IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY IN DINA

In Dina there are many elements of Ignatian spirituality: the meaning of God, the love and following of Christ, the order of the Principle and Foundation, the union with God, obedience, the apostolic sense, the desire of the "magis". In addition, as a characteristic trait: the glorification of God and the search for his will; the indifference and inner freedom, the discernment, the contemplation to reach love, the spirit of renunciation.

Some of these traits are already present before entering the Congregation of the Religious of Jesus and Mary. After her entry into Jesus and Mary, she progressively assimilated the influence of Ignatian spirituality but with her own spiritual personality; she managed, in fact, to harmoniously merge the Marian Christocentrism that she already lived with the influence of the spirituality of Jesus and Mary, giving it a stronger consistency, by living the Christocentrism in the Trinitarian, Eucharistic and Marian principle.

Although she never studied theology nor the works of Saint Ignatius, in the religious life, she had a formation marked by Ignatian spirituality, especially through the Spiritual Exercises that she probably did for the first time upon entering the postulancy.

In her first retreat she intensified the sense of fidelity to God, the "disappearance", the silence and the exemplary observance of the common life. Dina understood how great God's love had been for her and how much effort she had to put into giving him hers in return. Hence the growing desire to give everything to the Lord with the vow of the most perfect (pp. 138, 152, 181, 265 ...), to give him always "more", simply to tell God that she loves him, that she counts on him, that she is sure of him and that she abandons herself to his action (p.221), but also as she says: "the vow of the most perfect, not only is the vow of love and abandonment, ... vow to constantly smile at the infinite and merciful love of God, but of total self-forgetfulness so that God alone is always everything "(p 253).

At the end of another retreat, the intention was: "I want to be a saint" (p.139 and 163 ...), I wish I had been a child, and the goal: "Jesus and Mary, the Rule of my love and my love the rule of my life "(p.139) have an Ignatian tone, as well as" fidelity to God and the most perfect union with Him during the day "(p.142).

The portrait of a fervent novice of Jesus and Mary, written by Dina, clearly shows the Ignatian influence: praise to God, readiness in service to Jesus, zeal for the salvation of souls, the search for the glory of God, the detachment from creatures, obedience, love of God (pp. 134-135).

The Ignatian sketches are even more evident during the last years of her life: the greater glory of God, the Principle and Foundation, the loving adherence to the divine will. Everything was growing, especially since her religious profession. The docility and fidelity to grace and the offering of her life bring her spirituality even closer to that of

St. Ignatius: "Eternal Lord of all things ..." (SE 98) imbuing it in that silence that the SE asks to perceive the voice of God.

Her intimacy with the Lord led her to be faithful in the humblest gestures, and her fidelity led her to total and trustful abandonment in Jesus and in Mary. Her motto: "Love and let Jesus and Mary have their way" (p.185), led her to the total oblation of her person expressed by

St. Ignatius in: "Take, Lord, and receive ... give me your love and grace that it is enough for me" (SE 234)," wishing to reproduce Jesus crucified in all her being "(page 379).

Following some aspects of Dina's spirituality, we discover the features of the spirituality of the Congregation of the Religious of Jesus and Mary: Christocentric, Marian, centered on the Eucharist and with an Ignatian influence.

### **Cristocentric: Love dear to Jesus Christ**

Dina's mystical experience is characterised by a wonderful Christocentrism. Christ was always the center of her life. In the Introduction to the Autobiography (page 39), Dina writes: "It is not I who lives, it is Jesus who lives in me" (Gal 2, 20). There is the key to reading her spirituality and the guiding thread of her whole life. Dina made her own "it is fitting that He should grow ..." (Jn 3,30) as an indispensable condition for "substitution" and her ideal was: to disappear, to allow herself to be replaced by Christ until she could say: "We are no longer two: Jesus and I ; we are one: Jesus alone. He uses my faculties, ... it is He who thinks, acts, speaks, ... in a word, who lives "(p.169).

Before entering with Jesus and Mary, her union with Christ had already reached very high levels and her spirituality was already strongly Christocentric. From a young age she was ready for any sacrifice to prove her fidelity and love for Jesus, even with martyrdom (p.70). Dina let Him act. In November 1923, the Lord had substituted himself in her (p.171), he was acting in her place and she understood that she could act as if she were Jesus and use her merits for the salvation of souls. The fact of being replaced by Christ never involved a passivity understood as inaction. It was always a voluntary abandonment to grace. Dazed in Jesus, Dina says she never lost her will; she accepted what the Lord asked of her, with full freedom and responsibility (p 205). The more the process of Christification grew in Dina, the more Dina testified to Jesus her fidelity and her docility. It was about cooperating with Christ, letting Him transform her and work in her place.

In Dina's Christocentrism there are traces of her originality: Her most vehement ideal and desire was for Jesus to carry out in her the "substitution" (p.169), for which it was necessary: to empty herself, abandonment of herself to God and recollection. This was possible thanks to Dina's coherence, her fidelity to grace and Jesus' guidance. From the beginning of her religious life, Dina had the will to imitate Jesus, to put him first and let him reign over her and because she loved, suffer for the wounds caused by souls due to their infidelities. Thus, the express desire of Jesus that all souls be saved was always Dina's desire.



Progressively, replaced by Christ, she let Him be the soul of her soul, until the death of her own self. Letting Jesus do his will was not in Dina's aspect, secondary to her spirituality, but something central. Dina played everything for Christ. In her progressive disappearance, Jesus became the protagonist of her life, her deepest self. The most personal relationship with Christ through a constant union of love was Dina's secret. She was aware of the presence of Jesus in her and her intent was to love God totally and completely. Thus the process of Christification became ever more intense and profound as Jesus' action became more penetrating and she collaborated in it. The fantastic tenderness between Dina and God reached even to the point of feeling called by Jesus "my little other-self" (pp. 296 ...).

Saint Ignatius in the Exercises leads the retreatant to live more and more the mystery of Christ in all its aspects, to know him interiorly. In Dina this life in Christ culminates in the offering of Christ to the Father under the impulse of the Holy Spirit (p.232). It is Jesus who lives and offers himself in her, identifying with her in all his mystery (pp. 374-376).

Undoubtedly, we can affirm that Dina, not only lived a Christocentric spirituality but that she was a creature christified by her docility to grace, until she felt that the Lord told her "you will not possess me more in heaven because I have absorbed you completely." (P.214) Letting Jesus and Mary do their will, she let Love work. God alone was her all and in him her existence was consumed, rich in grace and faithfulness.

### **Principle and Foundation**

St. Ignatius in the Exercises shows us God as the Principle who creates out of love and instills in the creature the end which is eternal happiness that one obtains with "indifference" and the measured use it by creatures, to serve him freely, always with the end in view. The Principle and Foundation is that part of the Exercises that establishes the norm, meaning and foundation of life. God creates man out of love and to communicate His love to him, and from this relation of creature before God derives the purpose of his life: to praise him, to reverence him, to love him and to serve him; hence to use all the means as far as they help his purpose (SE 23).

Dina places in Jesus her Principle and Foundation. In her, the sense of being "creature" is always present as awareness of her own limit, and the sense of sin as infidelity that distances her from God. Her ascetic commitment since she was a child moves in these two directions and tends to achieve the goal: union with God and eternal salvation. Like every creature, she experiences its limits and at the same time feels called to a supernatural life. Before many attractive options, she has to choose some and renounce others, in order to access the fullness of communion with her Creator (page 67). Conscious of God's love, praising him, revering him and serving him is the logical consequence of this love. She lives the relationship of the creature before God, the Principle by which she strengthens her fragility and the Foundation that gives wings to her love.

In the introduction to the Autobiography, Dina expresses the will to live in Christ and highlights the gratitude of having been the object of the infinite love of God, who has loved in her, her extreme poverty as a creature (p 39). Thus she shows in what sense

she recognizes Jesus as her Principle and Foundation, the abyss from which she was called and to whom she directs every thought in every moment of her life. In this perspective, she let God always work in her and, adhering always more to Him, acquired in each event, in each thought and action, the will for the greater glory of her Creator and Lord. The influx of Ignatian spirituality was not something external to Dina; she lived it in depth.

### **Praise**

In the Autobiography, praise, thanksgiving, loving reverence for God are frequent and, from its Introduction, Dina promises Jesus to live only for Him (p 39). The title of the Autobiography: "Canticle of thanksgiving or Canticle of love", is like the synthesis of her life and highlights the praise of God, through gratitude for his loving presence.

Saint Ignatius in the Exercises asks for the grace that all intentions, decisions and actions be totally directed to the service and praise of the divine Majesty (SE 46). By "substitution" Dina wanted Jesus to grow in her in such a way, that the Father saw only the image of his Son and heard his prayers and supplications (p.212). That her life be a constant praise to the Father.

### **Constant search for God's will**

To seek the will of God is always a choice and to do it is to allow oneself to be loved, to be the work of his hands (Eph 2:10). Dina always sought the will of God. From a young age she lived in a family atmosphere of constant conformity to what God wanted (p 41). Obedience to her parents, to her teacher, to the spiritual director, she lived everything as acceptance of God's will, seeing Him in authority and welcoming with faith what they transmitted to her. Wanting to do God's will, she let herself be guided by him, blindly abandoning herself to his action (p.72).

Throughout her life Dina felt a holy indifference for everything that was not God's will. " The will of God, in the present moment, was her only happiness " (pp. 107, 136, 204 ...).

### **Obedience**

Saint Ignatius wanted obedience as a characteristic virtue of the Society. In the spirituality of Jesus and Mary also, obedience "above all" is a characteristic that St. Claudine wanted to imprint in the Congregation (C 29-33).

To obey is to listen to God "as a result of", seeking and finding his will. Dina was always noted by a prompt, exact, total, cheerful obedience, in family, in the school, in the Conservatory and as a religious, not only to what was asked, but also to the simple desires. She herself says that, attracted by the desire to fulfill the will of God, she submitted to the smallest recommendation with the same fidelity and promptness as to the most severe orders (p.51). Out of obedience she would have accepted everything, even the renunciation of musical work, if this was the will of God (p.122).

As a religious, she applied herself to the rule with absolute fidelity (p.126). She followed the advice of the Mistress of novices and of her Superiors as an expression of God's will (pp. 153, 373 ...). She asked for the spirit of obedience ... so as not to deny anything to Jesus and be faithful to all his graces ... out of love (p 159). From the retreat, at the end of the postulancy, she drew the conclusion of "obeying blindly, suffering joyfully, loving unto martyrdom" (p.124). On many occasions, after intense moments of temptation, obedience freed her to be able to receive communion, (pp 257, 373, 388 ...).

Letting Jesus have his way was her most significant motto and submitting completely to obedience gave her the assurance of doing God's will. In her religious life there were circumstances in which the will of God, expressed through obedience, demanded very difficult renunciations. When, in March 1924, her Superior asked her to write her life, she felt the weight of obedience as never before, but she submitted out of love and she did it with a simplicity and humility that leaves us in admiration (p 39). She also obeyed, to pray for her own cure in August 1924, although it cost her a great sacrifice, because her only wish was to join Jesus as soon as possible (p.194). Later, when she was allowed to make the vow of perfection (p.196), Dina put first and foremost obedience to her superiors as an expression of God's will: "first of all, obedience was my rule of what is the most perfect "(page 198).

The last years of her life were a continuous act of obedience, always submitting to the will of God in the midst of suffering and continuing to write when she could, until July 1929 (p. 392), although it cost her, all her secrets with the Lord, all the celestial favors of which she was full (p.295). Such obedience supposes a high spiritual level and is that of those who have overcome the narrowness of their individualism, opening themselves to the infinity of God.

### **The greater glory of God**

The "greater glory of God" is one of the foundations with which St. Ignatius marked the Society. Claudine Thévenet pursued this same ideal in the Association of the Sacred Heart before the founding of the Congregation and then had it reflected in the Constitutions. Dina made it her own, since it confirmed her very ideal of life.

Dina had no other desire than that of the greater glory of God (p 183, 276). The "greater glory of God" is to live in everything, the primacy of the divine: the glory of God. This primacy of God is evident in her life and it is indisputable that she made it her own since childhood thanks, above all, to her family education. Her parents had helped her to know how to see God in everything and her great desire was always the perfect union with him and his greater glory.

Working for "the greater glory of God" was for Dina the imperious duty of "being holy" (p 41, 54, 139, 163, 207 ...). Wanting to be holy is to be very clear in life that only in this way is the love of God answered and that one works for His greater glory (p.108).

From the beginning, prayer, attention to avoid any offense to God, fidelity to grace, seriousness in everything she did, the fulfillment of her own duty with commitment and responsibility, are the most evident fruits of an exclusive love for Jesus and the

most eloquent testimony of the primacy of God in her life. To try to love and suffer more, the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls became for her a true passion (p.250-251).

### **Magis**

Dina tells us: «I was extremely ambitious by nature; I aimed for the first place, and then I was determined to go to the top "(p.71). Dina was faithful, diligent, towards everything with passion; in school she always aimed for the first place and if she lost it she worked until she regained it (p.51). As soon as a defect appeared, she wanted to destroy it because she was determined to avoid anything that might displease the Lord (p.73) and although her angry nature sometimes emerged, out of love for Jesus, by struggling against her own "self" (pp. 73, 76, 101), she managed to maintain control of her emotions.

Dina burned with the desire to be a martyr; she often said: "Jesus, you have died for me, my love will never be full if you do not grant me the grace to die a martyr" (p.70). This desire grew with the years. She always wanted to give more and more to Jesus and in everything was faithful to grace.

Jesus himself was her interior Master and everything she did was to seek what was the most perfect, to witness to a total love without reservation; "For me, to give less, seemed like a lukewarm love" (p.109). It is not a "more" of voluntarism, but one of not being content with the acceptance of mediocrity. God puts in the heart the desire for "more". It is wanting to imitate and look like Jesus Christ, to desire to identify with all that Christ loved and embraced (SE 167). In Dina, the "magis" is born from the experience of being loved and feeds itself on gratitude for that love and for all the gifts received, which makes the "more" not only bearable, but desirable. It does not grow in external actions but in fidelity and inner commitment, sustained by the experience of love. Religious life gave her many motivations to desire and live the "more" by identifying with Christ. With this great desire for "magis" her Superiors allowed her to make the vow of perfection, on October 2, 1924 (p.196).

### **Spiritual discernment. Periodic examination**

Dina practised the discernment of spirits and the examination with great fidelity, because her only desire was to seek and always do the will of God. Very often, even before entering religious life and then until the end of her life, the devil tried to set traps to discourage her (p.161, 120 ...). Knowing how to discern was a great help for Dina not to fall into illusion, especially when the Lord communicated in the depths of her heart. The technique of discernment was perfected in the school of Ignatian spirituality.

Silence was necessary for discernment and the means to receive and recognize the Word of God, distinguishing its Voice from that of the Evil One. When discerning, Dina realised that the latter was manifested through a boisterous, noisy, agitated language; the voice of God was heard only through recollection, harmony, absolute silence (p.104); the evil one is anguish, coercion: offer yourself! Jesus is peace, freedom; Do

you want to? (p.316) Obedience calmed her anguish and allowed her to keep peace (p.373). Often, the demon tempted her, but thanks to the attention given to the voice of the Lord, Dina managed to deflect the attacks and feel animated. When she was afraid of falling into the trap, the Lord drove her to contrition and humility and allowed her to discern better the phenomena she lived (p.229, 234).

As for the examination, Dina clearly speaks of the particular examination (pp. 142, 159, 170 ...) and the attention to it reveals her Ignatian formation. The subject of her particular examination, since entering the novitiate, was to make her life a continuous prayer, to be united to him without interruption in prayer, work, rest; "The practice of union with God continued to be the object of her particular examination" (pp. 132, 151, 160 ...). The two subjects of this examination were: "It is necessary for Him to increase and for me to decrease" (p.138) and "to fulfill everything for the love of Jesus" (p.139).

Dina, even before entering religious life, every night faithfully made the examination of conscience which, according to her, helped her to remain in peace (p.79). For the general examination she practically maintained a time for thanksgiving and another time for reconciliation with God, while the subject for the particular examination varied somewhat according to her spiritual journey. In the practice of meditation she was faithful to the additions and to the examination of prayer (p.184, 319).

### **Apostolic sense; availability, gratuity**

As a child, she learned charity to her neighbour by accompanying her mother on visits to the poor, sick and destitute of every kind (p.46). She was very sensitive to human misery.

In its Constitutions, the Congregation of the Religious of Jesus and Mary is defined as "essentially apostolic" (C 2). "Claudine, entirely given over to the action of the Spirit, filled with an intimate knowledge of the active goodness of God and touched by the miseries of her time, had only one desire: to communicate this knowledge, and one anguish; to see abandoned to their misfortune those who do not know God" (C 3). Dina also, totally dedicated to the action of the Spirit, filled with an intimate knowledge of the goodness and love of God, is moved by the anguish of those who live without knowing him.

A characteristic of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary is the union of a deep inner life with an apostolic-educational activity. These are two complementary aspects. What is surprising in Dina is the perfect identification as a religious of Jesus and Mary of the union of the interior life with the apostolic commitment, within the limits set by obedience and the deterioration of her health.

Daughter of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary, Dina knew wisely to combine "action and the mystical union" with the resolution to serve "only God" present in her neighbour. Dina was contemplative in action, assimilating personally, the Ignatian spirituality. Therefore, despite the inactivity imposed by the illness, she was an apostolic soul, vibrant with love for souls, exactly as St. Claudine wanted her daughters to be.

Dina sought, through constant and persevering adherence to the will of God, union and identification with Christ and, through a loving attention for her neighbour, lived the apostolic ideal of her Congregation. Often during the day, renewing her Vows, she added: "I ask you the grace to live and die a martyr of love, a victim of love, an apostle of love" (page 151).

St. Ignatius speaks of concern for all souls: "My will is to conquer the whole world ..." (SE 95). He also tells us that the mission is not only to offer ourselves to work, but also to be disturbed and to show it "... imitate Jesus in accepting all insults and all humiliation and all poverty ..." (SE98) with Jesus and like Jesus. And there is no greater poverty and humiliation than that which brings disease, bodily weakness, dependence on others; in short, all the passivities, received and accepted as God's will, as Dina did, because this will is never clearer than in the passivities that life provides.

Apostolic availability moves us to get out of ourselves, "out of our own love, desires and interests" (SE 189) to make room for God. There is no true spirituality that does not detract from ourselves. "To enter God" is correlative with "to get out of oneself". This calls for "self-denial" and this was what Dina lived and thus her whole life was fully apostolic.

In the novitiate, her first employment was teaching the piano. Her students have excellent memories, even though she was demanding and knew how to make them accept to fulfill their duty. Following St. Claudine's will, Dina tells us that if she had allowed herself some preferences, it would have been for the girls who were less gifted or for those who had difficulties in studying (p.135). In St-Michel and in Sillery she also taught music during several periods, interrupted by stays in the infirmary due to having contracted a contagious disease while taking care of a student (p.166). Going back to teaching was a joy, which, perhaps, she had renounced faithful to her motto: Love and let Jesus and Mary have their way. Her impulse to love made her a missionary. Her hunger for love, is actually a hunger for Jesus, for souls, for all souls (pp. 203, 227). During the day her apostolic intentions were manifold and at the end of her life, before the desire for the Lord, she dedicated each day of the week to a particular intention (p.343).

Although the apostolic activity, due to her illness, was short in the life of Dina, the frequent stays of Dina in the infirmary did not manage to extinguish her apostolic ardour and, following the charism of her Foundress, she assures: "My mission in eternity, from now until the end of the world, is and will be to radiate, through the Virgin, the Heart of Jesus in all souls, for that reason I must remain annihilated, must love and let my Divine Substitute and the Virgin do all "(pp. 273-274). Dina says: "In heaven, I want to quench the infinite love of God. To realize my ideal, I need to use the infinite treasures of the Lord. He has said: Ask and you will receive. Well, in heaven I will be a little beggar of love, here is my mission! And I start it immediately. Jesus needs to give himself to souls. If I could, I would exhaust his treasures of grace for each of them! Yes, I want to exhaust the infinite Jesus to satisfy Love infinite "(p.238). "He has given me his Heart and I can do whatever I want with his inexhaustible treasures ..." (p 260). "Jesus, I am hungry for souls, for all souls and for their perfection!" (p.203). Dina is convinced that she will spend her heaven doing good on earth ... "The Virgin is the one who will distribute the riches of the Heart of Jesus, I, hidden in the Heart of



Mary, will ask incessantly to pour them out. Yes, in heaven, until the end of the world, I will constantly beg for love "(pp. 238-239).

For Dina, union with Jesus is communion with her work of salvation so that all people may be saved, that none may be lost. She tells us. "By applying the merits of Christ, I would like to close hell forever" (p.146).

Jesus made her understand the truth that "people are in solidarity with one another in both spiritual and social life and this made her see that she had a part of responsibility towards all souls, present and those created in the future. . A single act of love that Jesus offers his Father can save millions of worlds. Therefore, if He lives in me and I remain numb in Him, Jesus, can freely fulfill his apostolic mission, ... but, if I wanted to be reborn, I would be an obstacle to divine action and be responsible for the good that could not be fulfilled because of me ... (p.174) Now I understand the mission that Jesus told me about before entering the novitiate "(p.105).

To follow Jesus Christ is to live sharing his life and his mission. Without union with Him, the apostolic task is a functionality. Dina lived the third degree of humility by choosing redemptive suffering and converting it into an apostolate. Friendly and smiling, she offered all the services she could from her sick room: musical compositions, correspondence for the nuns, translations, piano lessons through her letters ... After her death, the nuns were astonished to see the amount of work she had done even when she was sick.

Of her it can be said that she was a woman of divine glory, of radical self-denial and of ardent zeal for the salvation of souls.

### **In everything Search and find God**

In the Autobiography we discover that Dina has a special gift to recognize the love of God in her life and in her history and thus find God in all things and all things in God. In "observing how God dwells in creatures" (SE 235), her contemplative sense was refined to see God in everything.

As she grew older, her sense of internally tasting the presence of God in everything created grew. "Flowers amazed her ... seeing only one, lifted her to God" (p.55). In the countryside, during the holidays, she was moved by the spectacle "of a twilight, of a moonlight, of the stars, of the plants, of the flowers, of the fruits, of the streams, of the rivers, of the butterflies and birds chirping ... "(p. 61). Everything was like a lover who seduced her to take her to God and helped her to unite with him. Dina tells us: "Everything led me to silence or even, unconsciously, inflamed me with gratitude and love towards the Infinite, it consumed me with the desire to possess Him, ideal Beauty "(p. 62).

Dina not only found God in nature, but also in daily events, in her own life and in that of others.

When as a novice she began teaching the piano, she saw Jesus in her students; he was represented at the age of each of them and she felt that the teacher was the same Jesus living in her (p.126).

In community Dina also observed her sisters and in them she discovered God. In any event that arose, she sought the presence of God. Everything led her to grow in her seeking and finding God in everything and everything in Him.

### **Marian Spirituality**

The Marian spirituality, so characteristic of the Congregation of the Religious of Jesus and Mary, is strongly anchored in the life of Dina. Dina is a creature with marked Marian radiations. One marvels at the extraordinary place, the main role reserved for the Virgin in the ascetic and mystical life of Dina.

Almost on every page of her Autobiography, Mary appears. On the day of her First Communion she gave herself completely to the Virgin for the practice of perfect devotion, called the Secret of Mary by Grignon de Montfort (p. 65). She considered the total gift of herself to Jesus through Mary, as the privileged path of her union with him. According to Dina, everything must be done with her, through her and in her. Speaking of the Virgin, Dina, tells us: "I would like to consecrate all souls to her, because she is the one who leads us to Jesus" (p.66). Dina also insists on the motherly role of Mary in all stages of her spiritual journey: "Jesus and Mary are never separate in the history of the divine graces I have received constantly" (p 43). She says that "all the graces of heaven descend on the earth through the Virgin ... and she will be a small beggar of love for the benefit of all souls for the greater glory of God" (p. 238).

This presence of Mary in Dina's life is reflected, among other things, in her motto "Love and let Jesus and Mary have their way" (p. 185), and in her goal: "For the Virgin, radiate the Heart of Jesus over all souls" (p 273).

The more Dina is raised by the Holy Spirit to the contemplation of the mysteries of the Heart of Jesus, up to the sanctuary of the adorable Trinity, the more she feels the need to be closely united to Mary, mediator of all graces. She knows that "Mary constantly offers Jesus in her place, to praise and thank God, fulfill his infinite attributes and obtain mercy for souls" (p 297). Dina always made her offering of Jesus to the Father through Mary (p.344) and "asked her not to allow any obstacle to hinder the action of Jesus" (page 381).

### **Eucharistic centrality**

St. Ignatius lived the love of the Eucharist with great mystical depth. When he celebrated Holy Mass, especially during the last years of his life, time passed without perceiving it and the Lord absorbed his whole being, even to shedding tears.

Dina, from a very young age, was a totally Eucharistic person. When the day of her First Communion arrived, she said to us: "The exterior things did not occupy me, I thought about him who was going to be my sacred Guest ... Jesus was mine and I was his. This first intimate union left in my soul, together with other graces, a hunger for his Body and Blood, a hunger that would increase with each of his future visits "(pp. 57-58). In front of the Divine Captive, Dina was enthralled and wished earnestly to see Jesus and her supplication became an increase of faith in his real presence; On the



other hand, when she had received communion in the morning, she feared nothing (p.59).

"On March 25, 1908, at 10 years of age, during my thanksgiving after communion, Our Lord communicated with my soul with a new light. It was the first time that I understood his voice so well- inwardly of course-, a sweet and melodious voice that filled me with bliss "(p. 61).

During the thanksgiving after communion, Dina always wanted to apply the merits of Jesus to save all the souls that are in danger of getting lost (p.146).

In the novitiate she writes: "my hunger for holy communion always grew. A day without communion, is it not a day without the sun? "(p. 149). For her to be deprived of Mass and of communion, because of her illness, was a great sacrifice, but that did not stop her from uniting more intensely with Jesus (p.167, 291 ...). Often the evil one tempted her so that she could not receive communion, with the help of Jesus, she recognized the traps and felt how He, with his authority, calmed the tempest (pp. 315, 330).

Dina is convinced that "if the souls understood the treasure they possess in the Eucharist, it would be necessary to protect the tabernacles with impregnable walls; because in the delirium of a holy and devouring hunger, they would go themselves to feed on this manna; the churches, day and night, would overflow with worshipers consuming themselves with love for the august Prisoner "(p.231).

Dina found in her religious family, whose "spirituality ... born of the love of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary ... is centered in the Eucharist" (C 9), a response to her deep aspirations. For Dina, the manifestation of Jesus' love reaches its peak in the Eucharist, an outpouring of tenderness, an overflow of the Infinite in the finite ... (p.231). Dina's prayer is eminently apostolic because it is first of all Eucharistic. Dina has no other desire than to fill the Infinite with the very riches of Infinity, to satisfy, if possible, God's desire to give himself, by offering Jesus to the Father. From there is born her supplication in favour of all souls: "Behold Jesus! The Infinite, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, through the inflamed breath of your creator Spirit, I offer it to you ... "(pp. 232-233).

An important feature of Ignatian spirituality, lived intensely by Dinah, was devotion to the Heart of Christ. In an original way, Dina progressively enters into the mystery of the Heart of Jesus in the Eucharist, always knowing him in a deeper way as the experience gets greater.

"The Eucharistic Heart attracts me more and more to the Host. Only when passing near the chapel, I feel an irresistible force that invites me. Beside the tabernacle I feel a joy that cannot be defined. When the Blessed Sacrament is exposed, I am totally invaded and paralyzed by the Eucharistic Heart ... Jesus wants me to enjoy Him in his Eucharist ... "(p 273). She is aware that the Heart of Jesus overflows with graces for souls and asks to lead them to his Eucharistic Heart (p.368).

In the Eucharist, Dina also found the Heart of Jesus immolated for the salvation of souls (p. 284 ...). The chalice of agony and the thought of the Eucharistic Heart are

graces of light in the history of salvation in the world, lived intensely by Dina. These graces led her more to mission than to contemplation. Particularly at the time when Jesus introduces her more deeply into his mystery of redemption, showing her the role of priests and consecrated persons in the realisation of the Father's plan of salvation, Jesus asks for "consolation" for consecrated men and priests, who do not respond to his inspirations (p.310-324), "if all consecrated souls would not deny me anything, if they let me always act freely in them, all other souls would be saved" (p.320).

### **Silence and Solitude**

St. Ignatius, in Annotation 20 of the Exercises proposes the search for solitude: "... the more the soul is alone and isolated, the more it becomes capable of approaching and uniting with its Creator and Lord, and the more it unites, the more it predisposes itself to receive graces and gifts from his divine and extreme goodness ".

Dina's behavior, from childhood and throughout her life, was always reserved, silent, lover of loneliness and in this loneliness God worked very soon (p.52). Dina recognized that she had received particular graces of predilection, and in her, recollection grew easily (pp. 58, 61-62), the nostalgia for God, and her refined contemplative sense to see him in all realities, until she let herself be seized, even in the midst of people, by the thought of God (p.74).

During her religious life, not only the time she had to be in the infirmary was for her an occasion to listen to the Lord in a continuous retreat, but she sought, through inner recollection, never to lose this contact with the Lord, and this inner exercise, far from distracting her from her obligations, helped her to fulfill them better (pp. 149-150).

Dina's silence was a silence of adoration, of praise and apostolic petition in which she let God work freely. She knew that God had in his heart all souls, especially consecrated ones and priests (pp. 310 ...), and she made this desire of God her own.

### **Union and familiarity with the Most Holy Trinity**

Dina always let herself be led by God and He made her go through different stages, making her enter into the mystery of the Trinity (pp. 209-219, ...), in her closed Garden, in her Shrine, in her Tabernacle, until she reaches the core of the Essence of the Trinity (pp. 329-389).

She was aware that Jesus, substituted in her being, offered himself to the Father to fully fulfill the infinite Love of God, and realized that it was possible, for Jesus offering himself to the Father, to fulfill not only the Love of God, but also all his infinite perfections. Then, as she says, her ideal, immense as the infinite, was the desire to "fulfill for Jesus all the infinite attributes of the eternal and adorable Trinity: Wisdom, Omnipotence, Goodness, Justice, Mercy, Infinite Love, Holiness, etc ... "When she sees that her poor expressions do not translate their ideal, she begs Jesus and Mary to express them in her place (pp. 241-245).

In her relationship with the Trinity, she began a tender devotion to the Holy Spirit. On May 3, 1926, the vigil of Pentecost, she composed a supplication to the Spirit of Love, for souls, yes for all souls, present and future and for each one of them (p 268).

This union and familiarity with the Holy Trinity also has an Ignatian echo. St. Ignatius was captivated by the Trinitarian presence that God gave him along the Cardoner and that accompanied him throughout his life, making him an apostolic mystic.

## **CONCLUSION**

Through these lines we wanted to outline how Dina Bélanger perfectly embodied the spirituality of the Congregation of the Religious of Jesus and Mary and how the characteristics of Ignatian spirituality are clearly reflected. The Lord gave her great gifts and her holiness was forged in a constant fidelity to the grace that made her life an authentic symphony in the key of the Love that always seduced her.

### **Notes:**

- The pages cited are taken from the 5th edition of the original Autobiography of Dina Bélanger in French. 1995. Impossible to quote them all, due to the great wealth of Dina's inner life.
- C: Constitutions of the Congregation of the Religious of Jesus and Mary. 1977.
- SE: San Ignacio de Loyola. Spiritual exercises 1996.