**GENTLE LIGHT LEAD ME ON…**

“AMIDST YOUR THOUSAND STARS, LORD, LET ME PLACE MY OWN LITTLE LAMP”.

Children often write about their first day at school, but teachers usually don’t.

However, I felt that I too should write about my first day at school.

It was the most unforgettable day of my life, so how could I just wipe it off from my memory?

It was the first day at school. A missionary school for boys; however there were a handful of girls in class eleventh and twelfth.

Fr. D’Costa, the principal of the school took me to the class twelfth.

“ Hello young friends, this is your new teacher Ms. Curie Rodrigues, she will be taking Hindi and Konkani with you.”

I took a quick glance at my students, thirty-three young energetic brats, had a mischievous twinkle in their eyes. They were full of life and vigour.

Oh God! How will I ever handle them? This was my first question to myself, it was my greatest fear.

However I tried to maintain my calm and composure.

From the very first day, the students tried every possible way to test my patience, they were least bothered of how many degrees I had, or whether I had mastery over my subject, what they were really interested was if I was efficient enough to handle them.

I was a complete fresher ,just out of college, come to teach these students almost of my age. I had no teaching experience, and it was the biggest challenge before me.

Most of the boys were from the neighbouring villages, big made, unruly and indisciplined.

However there were some seminarians who were comparatively sober and well -behaved.

A small ray of light at the end of the dark tunnel.

A week was over, but my ordeal wasn’t.

“Do you’ll trouble all the teachers like this? Do you think it’s right to do this?

The boys looked at me, but didn’t give any answer.

“Teacher”, Daniel stood up and exclaimed in a philosophical style, it sounded more theological to me.

“The Bible says that Jesus carried his cross patiently and silently without complaining. “

Daniel was a seminarian, aspiring to be a priest. I looked at him . Was he giving me a spiritual solace or an open challenge?

I smiled at him with utmost sincerity, “Daniel my dear boy, Jesus had to carry only one cross, but I have thirty-three crosses.”

The class burst out into a loud laughter.

“ Our teacher is very smart, she has prompt answers to all our remarks.” Simon spoke from the last bench.

weeks were over. Things seemed a little better. May be I was getting used to them. Just before the break, Fr. D’costa called me to his office. “ I have heard that the 12th class boys are troubling you. Is this true?”

I was surprised, who had gone and informed the Principal about it?

“ Father , I want to learn to fight my own battles, I am sure I will win over them one day.”

Soon after the break , the Principal came to my class. I wondered what he was going to speak to them.

“ Yes , I have got the news that all of you are troubling this teacher, Is it true?”

“Don’t think she has complained to me about you. If she wanted , she could do so. But she didn’t, because she cared for all of you.

It’s one of you here who had the courage to come and talk against his own companions.

I said nothing. They too said nothing. Silence spoke volumes.

That moment was a turning point in their life and mine too. They realized their mistake and I realized that there was someone who really cared for me.

Slowly, they became my best friends, cooperative, supportive and even protective.

“Yes,” I asked them during the class ,one day, “Can you’ll make a frank confession? who was the one who went and spoke against his own companions and stood by me?”

Daniel stood up silently.

I had no words to say. That moment, I felt I owed the whole world to him.

“Thank you, Daniel for this great act of kindness.

Thirty-five long years have passed by since I have left the school and my students.

It was one of the happiest phase of my life.

Daniel had become a priest, and was a Principal of a school in a small town . I was very sure that he would attain great heights one day.

Last week one of my friend who is now also a Principal happened to meet Daniel at a Principal’s Refresher’s Course.

My friend told me about Daniel and gave me his phone number.

I was too happy to hear about him after such a long time. I rang him up.

“Hello”

“Yes, is this Daniel speaking?”

“Mam, may I know who is speaking?”

“Daniel, go back thirty -five years down the memory lane, to your school; do you remember any teacher who was special to you?”

“Are you Curie Teacher?” His voice was overwhelming.

“Yes Daniel, I am your teacher, I am proud of you and your achievements.

“Teacher, what I am today is all because of you ...you were my guiding light.

My heart was filled with undefined happiness. No words could ever express it. I was proud of him and also of myself for making a difference in his life. I thanked my God for this wonderful moment.

**Curie Pereira**