

Rakotonirina Nalisoa Nomenjanahary (Nanou)

"You can live wherever you are in the footsteps of Jesus and Mary, also on a bus." This is how Rakotonirina Nalisoa (nicknamed Nanou) explained the spirit of the Focolare Movement to her father, having just come into contact with it. That she was able to live it, fully give witness to this in the last moments of her life. When the truck that was bringing her home after a pilgrimage overturned, she had been leading the prayer spreading among all passengers her great joy.

Nanou was born in 1982 in the town of Betafo , Madagascar. At 15, with her family, she moved to the nearby town, Antsirabe, a few miles south of the Capital Antananarivo. Just at that time, she met the Focolare Movement , remaining deeply touched by its spirituality. In 1997, in order to find out more about it, she decided to attend a formation school for Gen, the young people of the Focolare. At the end of this experience of communion with girls from different countries, Nanou promised her friends: "I'm leaving here with a commitment to bring about unity wherever I go!"

Upon returning to Madagascar she undertook to live this ideal with great enthusiasm, focusing primarily on those most in need. In particular, in high school she would devote a lot of time to schoolmates who were alone, and the lunch break was always an opportunity to help those who were struggling with their studies. Despite having to prepare for exams, she managed to spend each Wednesday afternoon with a group of young people in Betafo. She explained: "If Jesus instilled in my heart the desire to be of service to you, I'm sure that he will give me a hand with my exams! I'm here so that together we can give witness to the light of the Gospel."

Her tragic death, along with 35 other people, on 31 May 1999 was a great shock for everyone who knew her. They all felt, however, that Nanou was spiritually prepared to meet God face to face.

On the day of her funeral, her father asked everyone not to cry since Nanou's death signified meeting God whom she always tried to put in the first place.

Mass was attended by more than a thousand people of all ages and walks of life, including the Mayor of the city and a member of Parliament, who in one way or another were grateful to Nanou for her life and for having left visible traces of the presence of the Divine on earth.