



# “DARKNESS YIELDS BEFORE THE COMING OF LIGHT THE OLD IS REPLACED BY THE NEW”<sup>1</sup>

## THANKSGIVING...

*How can I repay the Lord for His goodness to me? The cup of salvation I will raise; I will call on the Lord's name (Ps. 116:12-13).* It is especially thanks to God, the Bl. Virgin Mary, Friar Volantino's "yes" to founding the Religious Community of the Little Friars and Little Nuns of Jesus and Mary, Sr. Veronica's beautiful guidance as Servant Mother General, Fr. Antonio and Sr. Effata's tireless care for souls, and my loving family – that I am able to write and share my witness.

## THE BEGINNING...

How beautiful it is to contemplate and to behold the wonderful works of God in one's life! The earliest and one of the cleverest confirmations that I have recognized took place all the way back in the year 1992. I don't believe that it was a mere coincidence that God chose this specific night between the feast days of St. Bonaventure (July 15) and Our Lady of Mt. Carmel (July 16), that I, then Anna Emilia Murphy, be born, for it is that our community's charism has both the Franciscan & Carmelite spiritualities.

Despite the freshness of new life, a tragedy entered into my life: I had a very strong reaction to the vaccines that were injected shortly after my birth, which affected my speech and other areas in such a way that doctors were led to believe that I would not be successful in life – not only in academics, business, etc., but even physically and mentally. In spite of this, I believe Jesus kept His "broken" little vessel in hand (cf. Jer. 18:4) for a purpose (cf. Rom. 9:21). He raised me up, surrounding me with a loving and supporting family and friends to encourage me onward and help me take one step after the other – founded in Scripture (thanks to my dad, who read us Bible stories every night) – in conquering one obstacle after another.

## CONVERSION...

My conversion first began in the year 2005 (at the age of 12), when one day I was hanging out upstairs in the choir loft of the Episcopal Church (that we had been attending for some time) with my family, Megan (a family friend), and some others. At one point, I looked over Megan's shoulder and asked her what she was doing. She told me that she was putting tabs in her new Bible and... that she was in the process of becoming Catholic. In my childlike simplicity, I thought, 'I want to become Catholic too!'

On Easter Vigil 2006, in the Diocese of Lansing, Michigan, my family and I were accepted into the Roman Catholic Church, and received First Communion and Confirmation. I had St. Agnes of Rome as my Confirmation saint and Megan as my Confirmation sponsor.

## DISCERNMENT...

Only a matter of days after my conversion, Megan came over to the house and showed us a community newsletter of the Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist. Flipping through the pages, I was struck by the brilliant ray of light that seemed to radiate from all the photos of the religious sisters! (cf. Mt. 5:16.) Seeing the sisters' radiant light of true joy and happiness attracted me to the point where the strong statement came to mind, '*This is it! This is what I wish to be!*' Afterward, I went deep into prayer, requesting, 'Lord, I know this is my desire... but I wish to know if it is also Your will' (cf. Ps. 119:14-16). After three days of making this yearning prayer, Christ made it known to me (cf. Job 33:14) within my heart that it was His will and that He wished for me to be His bride.

As a woman is commonly pregnant for nine long months, so, in a way, I was pregnant with my vocation for nine long years – looking all over and visiting one religious community after another – Dominicans, Benedictines, Missionaries of Charity, Franciscans, Poor Clares, etc. – in search of where the Lord was calling me. I asked many religious sisters how they knew it was “the one” and their response always seemed to be that they had “a deep/indescribable sensation that they were home.” I pondered, ‘*Great! ...but where can I experience that feeling?*’ I felt like a lost sheep (I was without a spiritual director), spiritually fatigued, and desperate... for I kept finding closed doors, being told to gain more life experience, experiencing rejection, etc.

Through a friend’s suggestion, the Lord then led me to find and experience a year-long internship (working for the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau in Missouri) where He showed me “the one” on Facebook – “the one” being the religious community of the Little Friars and Little Nuns of Jesus and Mary.

For a year and a half, I was in correspondence with Fr. Antonio and Sr. Effata. My interest increased as time went by and my heart began to yearn... but, fear and doubt crept in. ‘*Will it be yet another beautiful but closed door for me?*’ ‘*How would I be capable of living out their charism, especially with my speech impediment?*’ The Lord responded to my fears through a dream<sup>2</sup> where I saw myself working in a cave with St. Francis of Assisi, who read me a written experience of a religious sister to calm my fears and then sent me out on a mission. Later, when discussing the dream with Fr. Antonio, I was struck by the confirmations: that this community has the Franciscan charism; that the Founder wrote the rule in a cave in Italy; and that, after I received and read the testimony of Sr. Effata, my fears disappeared just like in the dream! Fr. Antonio also mentioned to me that – in a way – I sounded like Moses, reminding me that Moses had a speech impediment as well, and that he too had fears when the Lord called him from the burning bush.

## DISCERNMENT VISIT WITH THE LITTLE NUNS OF JESUS & MARY...

During Christmas break of 2015, my heart skipped a beat as it rejoiced at the opportunity to finally fly down to Louisiana for a discernment visit with the Little Nuns of Jesus and Mary. How beautiful and clear the signs and confirmations were that the Lord gave to me and the community – beginning with my first step into the convent, when I experienced the “deep/indescribable sensation that I was home!”

The first confirmation, though, came on the day before my visit. I had gone to the Sunday Mass with my family and the Gospel reading just so happened to be the Visitation! I don’t believe I caught the “coincidence” at that point. The next day, Monday, on the way down to my visit with the community, I had a layover in Chicago airport. I had some time there and so I sought out the Chapel. It felt like a treasure-hunt! When I finally found it, I saw a note on the door that the Mass would be celebrated at a certain time... I looked down at my watch, made calculations, and thought, ‘*Perfect! I have enough time to attend the Mass before catching my flight to New Orleans!*’ Yet again, the Gospel reading was the Visitation! After landing in New Orleans, LA, I met up with Fr. Antonio and Sr. Effata. That evening with the community, I went to Mass with them at the St. Francis Chapel of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Church. For the 3<sup>rd</sup> time, I heard the Gospel reading of the Visitation. Just a 3-time coincidence? Not only that, but throughout Mass I kept looking at the priest who was celebrating the Mass with Fr. Antonio and thought, ‘How do I know him?’ ...Sometime after the Mass, I made the realization that I recognized the priest from a dream I had had ten years before!

With all the excitement of the confirmations that God was pouring over me during this time, I didn’t completely open my heart, for I feared reliving past disappointments. Close to Christmas day, though, I spoke with Fr. Antonio and mentioned to him the main part of the dream that I had had a year before on September 8, 2014. I saw, in my dream, that I was with some Little Friars and Little Nuns and I heard the announcement that I had been accepted into the community! By Christmas night, I couldn’t hold back any longer, resonating with Ps. 45:11-12 – *Listen, my daughter, and understand; pay me careful heed. Forget your people and your father’s house, that the king might desire your beauty.* I believed that the Lord was answering my prayer as to where He was calling me to be, and that the time was now. That night, I asked to be accepted for entrance and my dream came true! I was accepted with wide open arms. The dream had taken place on the feast of Our Lady’s birth; now, in reality, I had given birth to my vocation on the feast of Christ’s birth – Christmas night 2015! The following year, I entered into the Aspirancy (which in the community we call the ‘6 Month Experience,’ drawing from the message of Our Lady of Fatima to ‘*Come here for 6 consecutive months and I will tell you who I am and what I want from you*’).

## CONCLUSION...

Upon entrance into the Novitiate, I received the religious name Sr. Jacinta Maria Little Lamb during the Sunday Youth Mass at the Cathedral of St. Francis de Sales. June 3, 2021 I had my 1<sup>st</sup> Temporary Profession of Religious vows.

I pray, and also ask for your prayers, for my continual, holy perseverance – that I may accomplish the mission that the Lord has called me to as a Little Nun of Jesus and Mary. It is truly amazing to reflect on how the Lord has accompanied me all along and gifted me with many signs, confirmations, and graces! How awesome it is to be able to continually make the connections in my own life and see how the Lord has brought me from the depths to this high lifestyle of consecrated life that prefigures the coming Kingdom of God.<sup>3</sup> How can I keep from citing Our Mother's words, '*The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name!*' (Lk 1:47-49)?

As I mentioned my disabilities in the beginning of this testimony, I now conclude with how, in this community, I'm learning ever more fully to transform what used to be a source of shame into a means of making known the glory of God. To this day, with the help of God's grace and my good will, I *persevere in running the race* and overcoming obstacles, keeping my gaze set on my Beloved (cf. Heb 12:1).



Sr. Jacinta M.L.L.  
7.31.2020

<sup>1</sup> ST. ANDREW OF CRETE, *Off. of Read., Sept. 8, Feast of the Birth of the Virgin Mary*

<sup>2</sup> (Job 33: 14-15); CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *The Message of Fatima. Theological Commentary*

<sup>3</sup> (cf. Mt. 22:30); POPE PIUS XII, *Sacra Virginitas*, n. 2