

Witness of Sr. Caterina Maria Adelaide
of the Little Friars and Little Nuns of Jesus and Mary

*"To be the Spouse of Christ is the most sublime vocation which has been given, and whoever sees this way open before her will yearn for no other way."*¹ These words of St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross echo the same yearning that has burned within my own heart ever since I can remember. Here is the story of how a simple girl named Allison became Sr. Caterina – a Spouse of Christ...

My Third Favorite

Although we were actively involved at our local church, I wouldn't say we were a family particularly fervent in our Faith. However, my mom and dad testify that even when I was very little, they were baffled by the strange "God things" I would say. My excitement for religion certainly did not come from them. For example: My mom used to play a little game where she would tell me I was her favorite girl in the whole world, and I would tell her that she was my favorite girl in the whole world. I must have been in about third grade when I broke the tradition one day. Instead of saying that she was my favorite, I declared that she was now my *third* favorite! Understandably distressed at this proclamation from her own young daughter, she asked who was now first on the list. I answered: Mary. "Okay – that's fair enough," she mused. "But, wait! Who is your second favorite?!" I matter-of-factly quipped, "Sr. Anna Lee [my religion teacher] and all the nuns who give their life for Jesus." With a sigh of resignation, my mother accepted her demotion. At the time, I did not realize it, but the Lord was already preparing my soul to love Him above all, as He says: "Whoever loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt 10:37).

Nun Camp

By the time I was around the age of twelve, my fascination for religious life had grown exceedingly. I began to attend a certain "nun camp" every summer with a community of religious, where young girls would spend a week in living the life of a nun. One year in particular, I desired a sure confirmation from the Lord that I was on the right track in my discernment. Did He truly want me to be His bride, or was this fascination merely frivolous? Mother Superior that year had in her possession a little bag of holy medals – all of them typical medals with the exception of one which contained a second-class relic of a nun on the road to canonization who Mother Superior knew personally. She instructed all of us "nun campers" to one-by-one reach into the bag and choose a medal at random. Seizing the opportunity, I made a quick but fervent prayer: "Lord, I am *almost* certain that You want me to become a nun, but I

¹ Stein, Edith. "The Separate Vocations of Man and Woman According to Nature and Grace." *Essays on Woman*. 2nd ed. Translated by Freda Mary Oben, edited by Lucy Gelber and Romaeus Leuven, ICS, 2017, p. 84.

want no doubts at all! If it is truly Your will that I become a nun, I want the relic!" Mother Superior approached. My fingers slid into the bag, grasped a medal and began to draw it out when it slipped and fell back into the pile! "That must not have been the right one..." I speculated as I hastily chose another. My heart raced as I beheld the answer from my Lord: there, pinched between my two fingers, was the relic! No longer would I have any reason to doubt my calling!

Around this time, I asked my parents if I could quit school and join the convent, citing St. Therese of Lisieux as an example of someone who joined young. They wholeheartedly disapproved, citing St. Therese back to me – she was fifteen, I was twelve: I had to go to high school first, to my great dismay.

Meeting the Little Friars and Little Nuns of Jesus and Mary

It was soon after I had turned fifteen – during the summer of 2010 – when Friar Antonio of the Little Friars and Little Nuns of Jesus and Mary first stepped foot on American soil. My local bishop at that time (His Excellency Sam Jacobs) had invited him to visit the diocese and see if it was a good match to establish an English-speaking branch of the community there. While I had been searching for my vocation across the country, the Lord ordained that I should discover it in my own home parish: I happened to encounter Friar Antonio at Mass one Sunday during his visit. He was obviously not from any religious community I had met before; the "crown" haircut, the tan color of the habit, the Australian-Italian accent were all foreign to me and to our little diocese in the swamps of Louisiana. Baffled yet intrigued by this visiting religious, I rushed to introduce myself after Mass and declare my intention of becoming a nun. To my excitement, I discovered that his community did in fact have both brothers and sisters; I would not meet the nuns until years later, but my heart was already lit with a fire for their charism of hitchhiking and radical poverty. Friar Antonio was only able to stay for a short while in America before returning to Italy, but later on, he returned with Friar Volantino (the founder of their community). My family even invited them to pray at our house (making us the first house to host a meditated rosary with Friar Volantino in the United States)!

Some time after Friar Volantino's brief visit, Friar Antonio returned to my diocese once again, but this time with two sisters! As always, I saw them at Mass, and one of them happened to be an extraordinary minister of the Eucharist. I was immediately enchanted by their strange but beautiful veils and the sincere reverence with which the sister gave me Communion. Driving home from Mass that day, I shared with my mom that I was in love with this religious community – an attraction I had never experienced with any other order. I was sure this would be the one for me.

As much as I still yearned to drop everything and fulfill my vocation, my parents requested that I finish high school then go to college for a while first. Being an 18 year-old high school graduate, I didn't have to do what they said anymore, but I also understood that – unfortunately for my aching soul – perhaps college was, in fact, the will of God for me.

Spiritual Bump in the Road

Submissive to the project of God, I trudged through studies of psychology at a local university to get a Bachelor's degree in three years instead of four – so I could join the Community sooner. However, in those years, I hit – you could say – a little spiritual bump in the road. I discovered another religious community online that – on paper – seemed absolutely perfect for me. As my parents were still anxious about me joining a religious community that hitchhikes in radical poverty, they suggested I visit them in person. Taking their advice, I arranged to fly out to visit for a week, and upon my arrival, I understood that yes, it was as marvelous as I imagined! The singing (a talent of mine). The silence. The isolation from the world. Sewing liturgical vestments (my dream hobby). The gorgeous black habits. Everything except one crucial detail – my spiritual turmoil. By my second night there, my heart was writhing in anguish for lack of peace! For the rest of my discernment visit, I found the Lord giving me strong indications every day that I belonged elsewhere – specifically, back in Louisiana with the Little Friars and Nuns.

Upon my return home, I immediately made an appointment with the Little Nuns to share my experience and ask for advice. Together, we marveled at how the Lord made His will clear to me during my visit with the other nuns; however, I still felt a certain hesitation when considering that He would call me to be a Little Nun: I have severe allergies, and I need to use specific types of soap, detergents, medicine, etc. How could a religious community who cannot accept money and who hitchhikes around the world, sustaining themselves solely on the providence of God, take care of someone like me?

The servant superior at the time, Sr. Effata, shared her own experience with me: She has a prosthetic leg, yet she manages to live this lifestyle! Once, while hitchhiking with some friars here in America, her prosthetic leg desperately needed repair. They were given a ride by a doctor who had a prosthetist friend who sometimes would help the poor for free. Upon their return to the convent, this prosthetist drove in from out of state to have her fitted for a new leg! All for free! This story greatly consoled me but remained somewhat hesitant to trust God so profoundly. So, the sisters thought for a moment and remembered that just the other day, someone had given them a bottle of the specific soap that I mentioned I am not allergic to. Not knowing what to do with it, they simply put it in the guest bathroom for girls in discernment! I couldn't help but laugh as they handed me the bottle!

That final episode took place in January of 2016. I graduated with my degree in May of that year, and after consultation with my spiritual director, I entered the community of the Little Friars and Little Nuns of Jesus and Mary on September 15, 2016 at the age of 21.

Conclusion

I PRAISE GOD for calling me to such a beautiful and radical vocation with the Little Friars and Little Nuns of Jesus and Mary. When people ask me how I'm doing as a nun, I answer: "I am literally living my dream! I can't see myself doing anything else! I experience a kind of peace on a daily basis that I never thought I could experience in this lifetime." But the journey to fulfilling my aching desire to become a Bride of Christ has been filled with listening, patience, and trust: listening to understand what He wants of me;

patience to allow God's plan to unfold in His timing; and trust to have the confidence that He will provide for me, as long as I continue to say yes! All of this is worth it, though, for (as we say in our community) *the greater glory of God and the salvation of the most souls possible!*

Sr. Caterina M. Adelaide

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