

**“DEEP WATERS CANNOT QUENCH LOVE,
NOR RIVERS SWEEP IT AWAY.
WERE ONE TO OFFER ALL THE WEALTH OF HIS HOUSE FOR LOVE,
HE WOULD BE UTTERLY DESPISED.”**

(Song 8:7)

IN THE NAME OF THE LORD:

Peace and good to all of you who read this testimony! My religious name is Sr. Cometa Maria Umilù: an unusual name, but one which testifies to a journey of faith (cf. *John* 1:42).

I was baptized Mariateresa Bonaccorsi, and graduated with my bachelor's degree from the Academy of Fine Arts in Catania; I have had the opportunity to give various art shows and have worked on the restoration of various works of art.

And now, at the age of thirty (a bit like Jesus!), I have in some way begun my public ministry.

I wanted to begin my testimony with this passage from the Song of Songs because, from the very first time that I read it, I have always been deeply struck by how much it resonates with what I have always wanted for my life, ever since I was little: true Love, Love with a capital “L.” This desire, at the proper time, would mature into a desire to give myself to One who is no fairy tale, but real.

Now, while mindful that there would be much to write about the way that God has worked in my life, I will try to communicate to you the essence of the marvels which the Lord, in His infinite mercy, has been pleased to work for this little daughter of His.

BEFORE MEETING THE LITTLE FRIARS AND LITTLE NUNS OF JESUS AND MARY

I was blind and deaf, spiritually speaking, until May 3rd, 2006: a date which marked the end of my second important romantic relationship. It had come about with sincerity on both sides, but, as it stood on a foundation of sand (cf. *Matt* 7:26), the first earthquake brought it crashing down.

In 2001, I had written in my personal diary, “I pray Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal which I wear around my neck...I ask Pure Love for the grace of love...”; and on the 7th of May 2006 I found myself beginning to pray the holy Rosary almost constantly. I was in a state of shipwreck; I was devoured by a kind of “black hole” that fed on a suffering which often flowered (artistically speaking) into works of art that had titles like Rx, Outcast, Pins and Needles, etc.

What was my greatest mistake? Though I wasn't totally distant from the sacraments, I had put a creature instead of the Creator in the first place in my life; “I sinned and did wrong, yet I was not punished accordingly. He delivered me from passing to the pit, and my life sees light.’ See, all these things God does, two, even three times, for a man, Bringing back his soul from the pit to the light, in the light of the living.” (*Job* 33:27-30)

Only now do I realize that He who was waiting in the silence was extracting gold from the “rotting mush”¹ of my heart, courting me with a language I was familiar with: the language of love.

¹ Personal diary, 4/27/2006

I went to Catania almost every day for my studies, and in search of a grace that only God could grant me I spent a great amount of time outside of the house, deeply restless, and more and more often I would catch the very last train that brought me from Catania back to my hometown.

I spent a lot of time in church, because it was the only place that I found peace as soon as I entered.

I started to neglect the various obligations I had, and couldn't interest myself in anything; I remember that the evening before I achieved my bachelor's degree, I found myself at my home parish talking to the priest and a Franciscan friar.

In this strange and important time period, a very dear friend, who witnessed to (and suffered) my changes, told me, more or less, "If I were you, I would go crazy. How do you manage to be so calm?" – referring to the situation that had wounded me. From that moment, thanks to her simple words, I realized that God was forming me without my being aware of it.

I went to Mass daily, and never missed a chance for Eucharistic Adoration...even if it meant skipping classes, arriving late to appointments, etc. (Not that this was the right thing to do, but I still hadn't managed to find peace.) I found myself starving for Jesus in the Eucharist, as if up to that point I had never eaten in my life. I had the feeling that God had emptied me out completely and was beginning to fill me up, and was artfully forming me in His image...

In May, I knelt before the rays of grace that flowed from the hands of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal and said, "Thy will be done" (*Matt 6:10b*); and in the month of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a guy that I had never met started coming for several days in a row to the Church of the Rediscovered Sacrament and sitting right in front of me, blocking my view of the statue of Our Lady. One day, he turned to me in a kind and innocent way and told me that he felt pushed to invite me to a youth gathering that would happen in August in Venosa (PZ) with a religious community called *Il Mandorlo* (part of the Catholic movement of the Charismatic Renewal). After a series of events, I said yes to the "announcement" (cf. *Luke 1:38*) and left with other young people from Sicily that I had never met. Of one thing, though, I was sure: I didn't have the slightest fear. On the contrary, I had great peace, and even if I had to confront many difficulties, I moved according to the inspiration of the Spirit, and everything went very well.

From this experience, a new woman was born on the 3rd of August, 2006 (cf. *Rom 6:6*), and I experienced that – as Friar Volantino says – "the devil is a fly"²...and that my soul, like Mary's, exulted with joy (cf. *Luke 1:46-47*). I was no longer suffering, but at the same time I was glad to have passed through such sufferings because now God had returned to the throne of my heart.

About a year later, the Spirit – through events and people who, like angels, guided me on my journey – brought me to frequently experience the presence of Jesus in my life; above all, I felt the need to be a living member of the Church (cf. *Eph 4:16*), and started to involve myself in my home parish (Holy Mary of the Rosary).

VOCATION AND ENCOUNTER WITH THE LITTLE FRIARS AND LITTLE NUNS OF JESUS AND MARY

Step by step a strange intuition was gaining ground in my heart; at first I suppressed it, but then I realized that God was calling me to do something great.

For the umpteenth time, I was overwhelmed by an inner revolution and a very precise question burst forth: "*Lord, what do you want from me? Help me understand with certainty!*"

² Cf. Friar Volantino V. of Jesus and Mary – *Passeggiando in Paradiso* – Music: Fr. P.M.V.F. – Arrangement: A. Perri

In this state of mind, I had the opportunity to depart again with the *Mandorlo* community for a Marian pilgrimage, where, on 07/07/2007, the last day before going home (and after we had prayed the Holy Rosary together), the friar who was leading us laid his hands for moment on each person, one by one. When he extended his hands over me, a girl – without knowing what my intentions were – took a biblical passage “at random,” and it was Isaiah 42:1:

“Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased. Upon him I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations.” Even more surprising was the footnote in the Bible that said, “the election of the servant is accompanied by an outpouring of the Spirit.” But the journey was not over; now that I had decided to say yes, I had to understand which religious family God was calling me to join. Pausing on the question, “where is my home?,” and feeling a growing love for the community that I was frequenting, I found myself (after prayer) choosing a little paper tied to a rosary, which had Jeremiah 1:5 written on it:

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you.” I recognized that the passage could, in some way, be tied to the *Mandorlo* community, and through successive signs and discernment, God permitted me to continue to frequent their meetings, though He never allowed me to join them.

On October 2, 2007 – the day of the Guardian Angels – I found myself spending the triduum for the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi in Butera (CL), where some members of the *Mandorlo* community had been invited for the occasion. That day, against my every hope, I received news that definitively destroyed any possibility of beginning a vocational journey with them; and my heart broke again, as if my fiancé had broken up with me. In that moment, from the deepest part of my soul, I cried out bitterly to God: “what is it that you want?! What, you don’t want to marry me anymore? You repented of Your decision??” That day, in tears before the relic of St. Francis of Assisi, I asked with all my heart for a religious “home.”

From that day on, though I knew I would still have to wait, I started to seriously consider looking at other communities, and started searching the internet and sending emails to various communities...including the ***Little Friars and Little Nuns of Jesus and Mary*** (my spiritual father had spoken to me of them some time back, though I had never taken them into consideration). I had only seen the photos of a Marian mission they had offered in Catania, and I knew about their Rosary booklet and “Sacred Passport of the Christian” which the priest had lent me.

On February 20, 2009 (the feast of Blessed Jacinta Marto), thanks to an invitation from friends and my spiritual father, I met some of the members of the community in the Church of Holy Mary of the Rosary in Catania: namely, Sr. Victoria, Sr. Letizia, and brother Pietrino.

With incredible signs which helped espouse my mind with my heart, and thanks to discernment and prayer, I left on March 12, 2009, to have my first weekend of experience with this community. No sooner had I set foot in the house than I found one of the first of many clear signs for my vocation: the Bible passage of Jeremiah 1:5, cited above – “*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you*” – written in the welcome card which the sisters and lovingly prepared for me, obviously without having any idea [of what this passage meant for me].

In the following days, accompanied by many more signs, I continued my vocational journey with the community of *Little Friars and Little Nuns*, discovering ever more fully that the Lord had been speaking to me about them for a long time: for, as the Scripture says, “*God speaks in one way and in another, but we do not pay attention*” (cf. *Job 33:14*).

On the 3rd of May, 2006, a human story ended; and on the 3rd of May, 2009, I signed on paper and in my heart the official request to enter the 6 months of experience with the *Little Friars and Little Nuns*. Step by step, I discovered that the community founded by Fr.

Volantino V. had been invited to Caltanissetta by Bishop Mario Russotto (through an insistent invitation to Friar Volantino) on October 2nd, and had been established in Caltanissetta on October 4th, 2008...the feast day of St. Francis, exactly a year from the day I had made my prayer through the intercession of the saint of Assisi.

“Therefore, I will allure her now” – says the Lord; “I will lead her into the wilderness and speak persuasively to her... On that day – oracle of the Lord – You shall call me ‘My husband,’ and you shall never again call me ‘My baal’... I will betroth you to me forever: I will betroth you to me with justice and with judgement, with loyalty and with compassion; I will betroth you to me with fidelity, and you shall know the Lord” (Hosea 2:16, 18, 21-22). I opened the Bible “at random” in prayer and received this passage on the 13th of March, 2009, the day that I met Friar Volantino Verde of Jesus and Mary for the first time face to face.

I asked myself, “is it he, and his religious community, that should lead me on this path towards holiness?”

Listening to the one who, from on high (in a mysterious way) asked me, “see?!” as he showed me the works of this little friar (cf. *Matt 7:16, 20*) and those of his community (cf. *Matt 10:9-11*), and compared them as if on a pair of scales with the Life of the Gospel, I understood well that the man I had met on the 13th of March was someone who seriously tried to live in the complete imitation of Christ...so much so that he seemed at times to bring the Gospel to life! – though at the same time he himself admits, “I am and will always be a useless servant, because even if I were on the Cross I would never be indispensable for the life of the Vine. At most” (he continues), “I, like a good ‘branch,’ could be useful to bear the ‘fruit’ of other souls, helping them mature with the sap of evangelization³; as Jesus says, ‘without me, you can do nothing’ (cf. *John 15:5*).”

Since I, too, wanted to be totally consecrated to God and to live the Gospel to 100%, in order to be able to bear much fruit, out of love for the salvation of souls and in expectation of a future reward (for me and many others), “comparing” (as I would later read in a document written by this little friar) “what I was reading and what this imitator of Christ was living,” there, “my heart was automatically set on fire with an immortal hope; and I recognized in this man the voice of the Good Shepherd who, with the right words, awoke me from the sleep of distraction...and, with the ‘keys of truth,’ opened the door of my heart (cf. *Rev 5:9*) and invited me to enter ever more fully into the sheepfold of Love that is the Universal Church⁴ and to discover the right “dwelling-place” assigned to me by God from all eternity, from before I was conceived in my mother’s womb. I recognize now – with absolute certainty – that this “dwelling-place” is within the community of *Little Friars and Little Nuns of Jesus and Mary*.

At the end of this testimony, I hope with a living faith that what I have written may bear much fruit “in the earth of good hearts,”⁵ the hearts of you who read or listen to it; and I give thanks to God and Mary and the man who made himself an instrument “useless” for the life of the Vine, but very useful indeed for the little “grape” of my life, which is precious in the eyes of Mary and of the Omnipotent Lord God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen!

Caltanissetta, 07/18/2009

In joy (cf. *Ps 119:16*),
Sr. Cometa Maria Umilù
(Mariateresa Bonaccorsi)

³ Cf. Friar Volantino V. of Jesus and Mary, “Sacro” Libretto Santuario, p. 34, translated by *pfsgrm*; cf. *Luke 17:10*

⁴ Cf. Friar Volantino V. of Jesus and Mary, “Sacro” Passaporto, p. 65, translated by *pfsgrm*

⁵ Cf. Friar Volantino V. of Jesus and Mary, “Sacro” Libretto di Circolazione, p. 311, translated by *pfsgrm*