



In the Name of the Lord
and with the Grace of God,

Peace and good to all of you who – out of spiritual thirst, interest, or mere curiosity – are reading my witness! My name is Sr. Veronica M.D. (legally, Emanuela Fittante).

In these few pages I have attempted to include several key points from my calling, hoping that they can help others understand in practical terms how a vocation can be revealed. Speaking for myself, at least, before I became a *Little Nun* I sometimes used to ask myself how someone could come to hear the so-called “calling,” but all I could summon up was a fleeting image of something abstract, without a real answer. Now that I am a nun, and have lived first-hand the experience of a vocation, I understand all the more fully – thanks also to the precious teachings and witness of my spiritual father – how important it is to equip souls who are searching (or who simply want to understand) with concrete tools, facts of faith and reason, and witnesses with which to compare their own experience, as the Catechism also says: *“God...never ceases to call every man to seek him, so as to find life and happiness. But this search for God demands of man every effort of intellect, a sound will, ‘an upright heart,’ as well as the witness of others who teach him to seek God.”¹*

Thus, without further ado, I will now present the testimony of my vocation. For convenience and greater clarity, I have divided this witness into some basic points:

- *Who was Sr. Veronica before...*
- *Meeting the Community of the “Little Friars and Little Nuns of Jesus and Mary” – a beautiful Marian grace*
- *The first conversation with Friar Volantino, which revolutionized everything in me...*
- *The first experiences in community...*
- *Conclusion...*

WHO WAS SR. VERONICA BEFORE? ...

According to many, I was the “model child,” the daughter who perhaps all parents would have liked to have. I didn’t go to nightclubs or come home late, I didn’t smoke or hang out with the wrong crowd, I went to Mass on Sundays, I got excellent grades in high school and continually earned scholarships both at the University where I was studying to become a great and famous (and rich) notary, and in Dance where I danced and taught – there, I was admired more than all the other girls for my skills and artistic qualities not only as a dancer but also as a costume designer, set designer, etc. What more could one want?

Yep! What more could I want? But there, under the mask of a self-confident girl who looked to the future certain of what she wanted, my poor heart was incredibly unhappy and dissatisfied. I

¹ CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, n. 30.

carried within me a secret connected to a promise I made to God when I was sixteen years old, during a very dark period of my life, out of which I came clinging only to prayer and the Sacraments and with the need and desire to understand the Will of God in my life – because I thought that whatever I did, even if it was beautiful and noble, it would only make me unhappy if it were not what the Lord had chosen for me. At the time, I did not know that this thought of mine was written in the Word of God, in a Psalm that says: *“In Your will [O Lord] is my joy!” (Ps 119:16).*

From the moment I promised God that I would search for Him and his Divine Will with all my heart, with all my mind, and with all my soul (*cf. Deut 6:5; Jer 29:13*), my life began to suddenly change. At the age of 16, in the prime of youth, when one normally begins to open up to the world and its entertainments, I began to go against the flow and avoid situations or places that could tear me away from my intention to search for the Will of God. Instead, I would often retreat to my home in a dim, quiet room and pray the Holy Rosary (which I did not know how to pray in the right way; I prayed it mechanically, completely ignoring the Mysteries); I would reflect about what my future would be like and pray that the Lord would help me understand his divine plan for me as soon as possible.

In this way, 5 long years passed, at the end of which I was completely worn out, both physically (because of the frequent and strange diets I used to keep up my fitness in dance) and spiritually, because the fire of my suffering (of waiting for an answer) had already brought the “water” of my soul to boiling point (to borrow an example from the founder of our community). Inside of me, my spirit was divided: on one hand, I was searching incessantly for the will of God, with such prayers and sacrifices as I thought best, and on the other hand, without realizing it, was the humanity that led me to focus on my own plans, imagining that perhaps the Will of God would be for me to perform on stages around the world. For this reason, I subjected myself to very intense training, up to 6 hours a day from Monday to Friday, not counting the extra practice, which could be any day or time. Dance was becoming a great temptation for me! In my excess, these activities took time away for God and others, given that I didn’t have time for practically anyone. The Lord, who, as it is written, *“disciplines the sons that he loves” (cf. Heb 12:6)*, helped me understand this in a powerful and clear way one night through my earthly father, who, exasperated by my schedule, told me: *“Dance is your God!”* I won’t tell you how I reacted! I went on a rampage, but after the moment of anger passed, those just words at the right time made a hole in my soul and my conscience, as St. Gregory the Great says: *“A rebuke is like a key, which in fact opens the conscience to see the fault that often is ignored by the one who committed it.”*² They made me reflect on the fact that, though with my words I said that God was in the first place for me, my actions clearly demonstrated that dance had really taken precedence. Thankfully, in this whole picture of general confusion, Our Lady intervened to prepare the meeting that would finally mark the turning point in my sad life.

² GREGORY THE GREAT, *Pastoral Rule*, 2, 4, in PL 77, 30-31.

MEETING THE COMMUNITY OF THE “LITTLE FRIARS AND LITTLE NUNS OF JESUS AND MARY” – A BEAUTIFUL MARIAN GRACE

One evening in May, a Rosary was organized in the neighborhood where I lived with my family, and the parish priest suggested that some friars who recently arrived in the city should be invited. I remember the emotion I felt that evening when we saw them arrive; it was striking for everyone, and for me in particular! Besides the classic image that common opinion has of friars and nuns, these consecrated members of the Community of the "Little Friars and Little Nuns of Jesus and Mary" were striking to me for three specific reasons which really made the difference for me:

- 1) They were all young, more or less my peers;
- 2) They were all beautiful and intelligent, and no one could think they had chosen the Lord as a backup plan or because they could not have anything else in life; listening to them, I found that a high and spiritual wisdom emerged from what they said, nothing like the learned and rhetorical lectures at the university.
- 3) They had a joy and a smile that was not of this world...and I asked myself where they got this joy, given that they were poor, without money, without the human certainties that everyone else was searching for. And what about me? With all that I had and all the future could offer me with an academic career, or a professional career, or whatever...I did not have that smile. Why?

These were the thoughts that went through my mind that evening and the following days, while I asked myself: "Who knows if I will meet them again?" Fortunately, I believe Our Lady heard this prayer: not only did I "happen" to see them again, but they even came frequently to my house! In fact, my parents, and in a special way my father, were so struck by this community of the "*Little friars and nuns*" that they not only began their own conversions (once again returning to frequenting the Sacraments), but after a little while they also decided to form an *adp-vv*³ Marian group of prayer at their house, in which I also joined as an "ally" [or group member]. This is how I started to keep up with the community, going every Saturday to their catechesis⁴ in the little church of St. Rocco and listening to Friar Volantino (the founder of the community): uniting the simplicity of his explanations (*cf. Matt 19:16*) with the acuteness of his reflections (*cf. Job 39:27,29b*), he would lift us up with his spiritual meditations – founded on Sacred Scripture and the interpretation given by the Magisterium⁵ – only to immediately bring us back down to the concrete practical things of life, helping us understand how to help ourselves and others "*to make the very most*" – as he loves to say – "*of the brief test of this life,*" in which we are all only pilgrims

³ Term for the: *Alleati Dei Piccoli* (*Allies of the Little Ones*) – *Volantini Verdi*; these groups of prayer gather to pray the Holy Rosary by meditating on the mysteries in light of Scripture and the Teachings of the Church.

⁴ Every Saturday evening, by invitation of our Bishop, their community held catecheses on various interesting topics, like (for example) the mystery of suffering, the importance of faith, of the Sacred Scriptures, of the Church, of the Sacraments (above all, Confession and the Eucharist), or going into detail about other topics related to the mysteries of the Rosary, etc.

⁵ Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogm. Const. *Dei Verbum*, 18 Nov. 1965, n. 10.

passing through: in order to enter (in our holy perseverance) into the Blessed Eternal Life, the life without end, where everyone, as St. Paul says, “will reap what he has sown” (Gal 6:7).

THE FIRST CONVERSATION WITH FRIAR VOLANTINO, WHICH REVOLUTIONIZED EVERYTHING IN ME...

After my first encounter with the community, about six months passed before I received the first “signs” which helped me understand that the *Little Friars and Nuns* were really, in some way, the living answer to the prayer I had made to God: *Lord, what do you want from me?* 6 months: a bit as the Announcement of the Angel to Mary came in the sixth month (cf. Luke 1:26), the “angel” entered my life 6 months after that evening in May, when, one October morning (and blessed be that day), Friar Volantino himself came to my parents’ home together with two brothers (including Friar Picchignito, who was still having a vocational experience at that time). That day, for the first time, I had the opportunity to speak with Friar Volantino – something I had never done before, given my shyness when it came to personal matters. But that time was different, and without even knowing how (everything happened so suddenly!), I found myself at table with them sharing some events from my past. One of these was a dream I had had when I was 8 years old, where I saw my grandfather as if he had come back to life; he came towards me saying “Follow me,” and then, as I walked along behind him along a path that went downwards and then suddenly upwards, I was led to a high and brilliant place where everyone was dressed in white. He indicated to me that that place – for the moment – was not yet the place for me, but that he had shown me the way that I would be able take to get there.

Before, I had always considered this little dream to be nothing more than a sign that my grandfather somehow wanted to reassure me that he was fine in the place where he was now...just a beautiful memory! But now, thanks to a very precious “key of interpretation” offered to me by Friar Volantino with spiritual intelligence, I came to understand that:

- 1) The only one who has ever come back [definitively] from death is Jesus, and therefore that elderly grandfather that I had seen in the dream could be symbolic of the Elder *par excellence* (cf. Dan 7:9; Rev 1:13-15), i.e., the Lord, rather than literally my grandfather. This was furthermore confirmed by the fact that St. Paul says, “He who descended is the one who ascended above all the heavens” (Eph. 4:10), and indeed the path that I had been taking was first descending and then ascending.
- 2) The words “Follow me!” in the Gospel are always spoken by Jesus in reference to a particular vocation (cf. Matt 4:19, 19:21; Mark 2:14, John 1:43, 21:22). That day, that simple and precise stroke of the “key” given in the light of the Word⁶ and of the Magisterium of the Church⁷ opened a new horizon for me towards Heaven. To be sure, it’s not that I had already

⁶ Cf. Eph 4:10; John 3:13

⁷ Cf. J. RATZINGER, *Theological commentary*, in CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *The message of Fatima*, 26 June 2000.

understood that the Lord was calling me to completely give my life to Him, but I strongly felt in my heart that the moment had arrived which I had been waiting 5 years for, the moment to put all the puzzle pieces of my life in their proper place, in order to finally discover the Plan of the Will of God for me...and I began to have peace. Consequently, everything else, including dance (which was humanly unthinkable!) and my university exams,⁸ began to lose their importance and drift away from my thoughts, since I couldn't manage to do anything else but think about God and read His Word, especially in light of the sober and balanced explanations given in some of the documents that Friar Volantino had written; in their simplicity (*cf. Ps 8:3*), they helped me (as they still do) to understand many spiritual subtleties.

MY FIRST EXPERIENCES IN COMMUNITY

From this point onward, thanks also to the help of some members of the community who offered me their spiritual accompaniment, I began to gradually mature the desire to have a weekend of vocational experience in the community in order to understand, during this retreat of silence and in prayer, whether what I desired in my heart came only from me or was really a fire sparked by the Lord (*cf. Luke 24:32*). Unfortunately, my various commitments, upcoming exams, and dance recitals (as well as another show) led me to think about delaying the vocational experience a bit more, maybe waiting until the summer. As soon as I took this idea into consideration, however, I almost instantly lost the peace that I was finally beginning to have. Thanks to the catecheses of Friar Volantino, I had already understood that the Word of God, as well as various Saints, explain to us that when we are in the Will of God, we have peace (*cf. Jer 29:11*)...but when I thought about delaying the experience with the community, I lost peace instantly! Inwardly, I understood that I couldn't wait any longer, so I immediately went to have the vocational experience. Within the community, I really had the impression that I was at home. For my whole life, I had always felt like a fish out of water in all environments except the Church; but in the community, everything seemed natural to me, as if I had found my natural habitat. During those three days, the Lord did not remotely disappoint my expectations; on the contrary, he exceeded them all, giving me many, many "signs of benevolence" (*cf. Ps 86:17, Judg 6:17*) which helped me understand, day after day, that the Will of God for me was to give my life to the Lord within this community of men and women "madly" in love with Jesus and Mary.

⁸ Although these things have their own importance, they are certainly secondary to the Will of God. Later, however, now that I am a nun, all of my previous university studies (of civil law) have proved useful to me for the attainment of my licentiate in *utroque iuri* at the Pontifical Lateran University, where I am currently completing my research doctorate.

CONCLUSION:

What more can I say?! Many events in this witness have been left out because these few sheets of paper would not be sufficient to narrate everything, but there are still a few things that I would like to add in conclusion: ever since I embarked on my journey towards consecration in this religious family, I have never lacked for peace, serenity, and joy even in the midst of tests, misunderstandings, and tribulations! And no one can make that happen, except the Lord!

Moreover, if it was the egotistic mirage of human glory which attracted me before, now, given that it is written, *"You have made Your promise greater than every fame"* (cf. Ps 138:2), the Lord has wooed me with the light of the glory of God and of the eternal, joyful "party" of paradise, which I desire not only for myself, but for as many souls as possible. It is for this reason that I joyfully abandoned my human projects: now, I am not a ballerina on the stages of the world, but a *Little Nun of Jesus and Mary*, "dancing" the Gospel along the streets of the world to the notes of the eternal music of the Word of Jesus (cf. Matt 24:35), in order to sing along with the Psalmist:

"You have turned my mourning into dancing, removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, so that I can sing without end. Lord, my God, I will praise you forever" (Ps 30:12-13)

*Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam!*⁹

Cosenza – June 21, 2010

Liturgical Memorial of St. Louis Gonzaga

SIGNED

Suor Veronica, pfsgm

⁹ Translated: for the Greater Glory of God!