

In Mary's Hands It Bears Much Fruit!



All I knew about Religious Life, until I was 17, came from *The Sound of Music*. Although my family went to Mass and I took part in a Church youth group and choir, my life was so centered on... me! I enjoyed all the “good things” in life—family vacations, time with friends, swimming, art projects, playing my trombone, music camps, etc! In 8th grade I decided I would be a band director “when I grew up.” My best friend also played the trombone, and the beautiful Christian witness she and some other close “band friends” gave really helped to set my moral standards, increase my desire to pray and read the Bible, and to see that *God* should be the center of my life!

In 2005 I went to the University of Michigan to major in Trombone Performance and Music Education. I got involved in the student parish and began to go to daily Mass. As the first year went by, to my own surprise, I found my desires changing. I realized that I didn't have to have my life all planned out. I didn't even have to be “successful.” As God's Love overflowed in my heart more and more, I wanted to help people, and to “give up everything” for God! But, not knowing anything about Religious Life, I did not understand the call in my heart—and my confusion was great! At times I still dreamed of my future husband and maybe ten kids (in a big house on a lake, of course!) At other times, the call was *so* strong! Now I knew: “In his mind a man plans his course, but the Lord directs his steps”—one step at a time!

My first big step came in October of my sophomore year in College. One Sunday as I was starting to feel some sort of inner battle over my vocation, the Lord came to my help by unexpectedly giving me the conviction that receiving the Eucharist daily would give me the strength I needed...”Rise, and eat, or the journey will be too long for you!” Sustained by Jesus, I made it through the week and was spending Friday evening looking for “Nun websites”, as I had done, without much success, many times before. At last I came across one that attracted me, for I saw happy young teaching Sisters in beautiful habits and read for the first time about the Vows of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience. I thought to myself, “I could do that!” Deep inside I realized, and finally *accepted*, that God was definitely calling me to be a nun! Still, unsure if this was the Community God was calling me to, I continued college life.

Around the beginning of Lent I began praying the *Flower of Carmel* prayer for my vocation. The translation I had ends with “Show yourself to be our Mother!” I only realized years later how truly Mary answered my prayer! One night I dreamed that my Mom was standing on my left and Our Lady on my right, both with arms extended toward me. But to turn to one I (seemingly) had to “turn my back” on the other. I love my Mom very much and hated to cause her any grief... but Mary is our Mother too! So I turned to Mary—what else could I do? In turning to Mary, during that time that was so painful for my parents, I entrusted them totally to her. She has guided me in my vocation and has taken better care of my parents than I ever could have.

Another time, as I was throwing away some withered flowers from a dried-up bouquet, three little roses caught my eye, and I joyfully spun around to lay them at the feet of my roommate's statue of Mary! In her goodness, Mary "hastens to make herself known to those who desire her"; so I knew that these little roses I had given to Mary, withered, dead, and worthless, in her hands had become fresh, full of *life* and *spiritual value*!! Through these little roses Our Lady began to teach me both the Little Way of St. Therese and the essence of Total Consecration to Mary. She helped me to understand with what love and joy she receives *all* we give her, and how *gladly* she *transforms* everything—making it pleasing to Jesus and fruitful for souls! This little lesson gave me a great love for and trust in Our Lady, who is truly our Merciful Mother.

Yet even this paled before Jesus in the Eucharist. In Adoration twice each week, receiving His Love so freely given, His Presence became my All in all!! During that school year and the following summer, His call became more urgent. I felt that I had come to another *big* step in life. Should I go back to school and trombone playing, or leave it all to follow God's call? I could not do both any longer! It was a very difficult decision but, I chose to quit college. And God's Providence provided well! I was able to live in the St. Catherine House of Discernment, rather recently opened by an Ann Arbor parish. The house, for 13 young women, had its own Blessed Sacrament Chapel, and other spiritual helps, including some of the Liturgy of the Hours and spiritual direction. I began working as a nanny, and in the midst of many new parish activities and great friendships, I dove into discernment!

In time, I visited several active communities. They were so beautiful! Open to anything, and wanting to do everything, but especially seeking *God's Will*, I considered teaching Sisters, missionaries, etc! But I simply felt no "call" to them. I was most drawn to the Contemplative Life. I felt called to a life of continual prayer, of simplicity, of somehow something *more*, a more *total* consecration. St. Therese attracted me to Carmel, but with its cloister and reputation for holiness, it seemed *beyond* what I could do!

I made plans to attend a Silent-Retreat for five days after Christmas at the Community of St. John, a Contemplative Community without Carmel's kind of enclosure. When I stopped home before Christmas, my parents, not wanting me to spend that precious time away from home, were really suffering because of me, yet not without fruit! On Christmas Eve my dad received a very special grace which strengthened his faith, and led him, through RCIA, into full communion with the Catholic Church that Easter!!!

At last, in March, I visited the Carmel of the Holy Cross in Iron Mountain, Michigan. This Community had remained at the top of my list the whole time! Its tiny web-page (of *one* picture and *one* paragraph!) had captivated me for more than a year, and my talk with a Sister on the phone seemed so... "right!" But during my visit, another "spiritual battle" was raging in my soul—and I was glad when the visit was over! Still, the Carmelite vocation, with its limitless apostolate of Love, remained in my thoughts and in my heart. A very short time after my visit to Carmel, I read in the Gospel of John, "The hour has come..."

Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit." These words of Jesus spoke to me of my vocation: of the "death to self" accepting it would require, of the sacrificial love animating it, of the union with Jesus and Mary which bears so much fruit!!!

It took a fresh act of faith: "It bears much fruit...It *does*! It *will*!" But *once I ACCEPTED it*, in the presence of my spiritual director, I had the *conviction* that I really knew where God was calling me. Perhaps I had known it in my heart for a while... but in finally embracing it, I knew the peace and joy of following God's Will *without any doubt*, for "The gifts and the call of God are irrevocable!"

As Carmelites, we have the joy of *belonging* totally to Mary, whose habit we wear. We are *always* hers, so even if at times we do not think of it, by her intimate cooperation with the Holy Spirit, Mary directs our actions, arranges all circumstances, transforms all we give her, and *carries* us along the path to holiness. She does far more with us than we could ever do by our own efforts! By uniting all to her Son's Redemptive death on the Cross, she gives *everything* we do that "spiritual value" which obtains more grace for souls, for the Church, for the whole world, than we could ask or imagine! Carmel is all Mary's, and our lives, in Mary's hands, bear much fruit!