



Hidden with Christ

The Call to Enclosure

No Longer Dead But Alive!

BY SR. MARIE ELIZABETH, O.S.C.

I seemed to be content with my life. For eight years, I enjoyed a very good job as a certified hand therapist in private practice in St. Cloud, Minnesota. I loved to run—in fact, it was a god for me. When I wasn't working, I was running. It was nothing for me to get up at 3:00 A.M. to run eighteen miles before going to work. The marathon of 26.2 miles was the distance for me, and I ran eight of them in five years. I lived on my own, traveled, dated, had plenty of friends—everything the world says is important but God.

Although I had grown up in a family that was definitely Catholic, and despite my attendance at the College of St. Catherine, around the age of 20. I found myself abandoning my faith. I came to a spiritual standstill, not going to Sunday Mass regularly, and confession was out of the picture altogether for the next fourteen years.

After college, I became more and more self-conscious of my looks, and I came to the conclusion that I was altogether too heavy, and needed to exercise more. Exercise and watching my food intake became an obsession, yet I couldn't face up to the reality of what I was doing to myself. Internal bleeding, pelvic stress fracture and asthma developed, and I blamed God for all of my health problems.

I did have some inclinations though toward considering life as a missionary—a lay missionary in my thinking—so when I was asked in 1994 to join a medical mission group going to Guatemala, I couldn't resist the opportunity. What I discovered there became a turning point in my life. I knew that the people of Guatemala were very poor; what I had not expected was their infectious joy. How could they be so happy? It soon became apparent where the answer lay. They had found all their joy in their deeply-rooted faith. This struck me very hard.

There was another volunteer on the trip who confronted me one day about my exercise obsession, the first one ever to do so. I realized then that I could not continue on the path I was going without self-destructing.

Although hesitant at first, I finally sought out a counselor. It would be another year before I felt I had any real control over my life. But along the way, the Lord opened little avenues of spiritual aid to comfort and guide me. In June of 1994, I attended a summer class entitled, "Getting to Know Your Catholic Faith," only to find that I couldn't get enough of it. I became completely convinced that no Catholic would ever leave their faith if they truly understood it and all the richness it has to offer.



Any Catholic who is growing in his or her spiritual life will probably attest to a similar phenomenon: as one draws closer to the Lord, one also discovers a closeness to Our Lady. Mary had always been a part of my life, but now the Lord chose to put her center stage in my life. I participated in a Marian conference held in the Twin Cities that fall. A deep healing seemed to wash over me. I consecrated myself to Mary, and ever since she has been very much a part of my life's direction.

The Blessed Mother also played a role in my social life. I had a boyfriend at the time who did not share my reticence toward intimacy before marriage. In two specific incidences, Mary came to my rescue and pre-

served my virginity. By the end of 1994, we broke off our relationship. Although I knew it was for the best, I was devastated. I started going to daily Mass and spending time in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament.

I decided to try to talk to a priest about the matter. After explaining to him my experiences with Our Lady, he questioned whether the Lord might not be calling me to a life of virginity. I reacted with an impulsive, emphatic, “NO!” His response was kind but disturbing. “I didn’t want to be a priest at first either, but if it is God’s will, He will change your heart.” This was definitely *not* what I wanted to hear!

My uncle had piqued my interest in a place called Medjugorje where allegedly the Blessed Virgin Mary was appearing to six young people and bringing many people back to the Faith. In October of 1996, I joined a group going there on a pilgrimage. There, at the feet of a very holy priest, I made the most awesome confession of my life. After telling him my sins, he had me grasp onto a crucifix with him and recite a prayer. It was so powerful that I felt something from my innermost being come up and out of me! I left the confessional knowing that I was a different person. The next day at Holy Mass, everything was clear and alive for me. I was no longer dead but alive!

After returning home, I found myself attending daily Mass, daily Adoration, and reciting a daily Rosary (all fifteen decades). I got involved with a charismatic prayer group, a prayer cenacle for priests, and Communion and Liberation, a group that witnesses to living out their Catholic faith. I couldn’t get enough of God and the only time I

felt peace was at Mass, Adoration or praying the Rosary.

On the first day of the New Year, 1997, I left for a skiing trip. I took along a book which my parents had given me for my birthday the year before: *The Divine Mercy*, the diary of St. Faustina Kowalska. Once I picked it up, I found that I didn’t want to put it down. While I was reading the diary on the last night of the trip, I broke down crying. I said, “God, You know what I have always wanted is to be a wife and mother, but in my heart I sense that this is not what You want for me. I don’t want to be single for the rest of my life. I would like to be married to You, but...if that is to be, it has to be a very strict Order and one that is faithful to Rome. Sister’s Faustina’s religious community sounds nice, or [out of the blue I found myself saying] the Poor Clares.” At that time, I knew nothing about the Poor Clares.

January 25, 1997, is a day which will be impressed in my memory forever. That morning while I was praying, I asked God that whoever heard my confession that day would be a priest who was very honest and truthful, and who would give me some sense of what God’s will was for me. After confessing my sins, I told the priest that I thought I was going crazy because I couldn’t get enough of God, and the only time I felt any sense of peace was during the Mass, in the Adoration chapel, or while praying the Rosary. He said that I “should make a date with Jesus,” by which he meant that I should accompany him to visit the Poor Clares in Sauk Rapids, Minnesota, where he had formerly been chaplain. He offered to take me there himself, if I would be interested. I was stunned!

There was that name again—Poor Clares—a cryptic answer to my prayer of that morning. I then asked this priest how he knew that he was called the priesthood. The experience he went on to explain was very similar (frightfully similar!) to my own. I admit, I left the confessional with mixed emotions, but for the first time I knew a sense of peace that God wanted me for Himself.

Four days later, this priest accompanied me to the monastery, where we met with the abbess. To my amazement, Mother told me how she had been living in the enclosure for fifty years! I reasoned that the good Lord must be crazy to consider *me* for such a life, I who loved to travel and to be out-of-doors. It would take a good five to ten years, I figured, before He would prepare me sufficiently to enter a cloister!

But the Lord is a God of surprises. When He knocks on the door of your heart, He admits of no dilly-dallying. Less than six months later, papers filled out and recommendations returned, I was accepted into the postulancy of the Poor Clares.

I now belong totally and completely to my Beloved. I was espoused to Him in Solemn Profession on June 15, 2003. Every day is a new adventure and He is always challenging and stretching me beyond what I think are my limits. In the eyes of the world, my life is considered a waste, but now that I have God, I am richly fulfilled. He has called me not to physical motherhood but to a spiritual motherhood. I only want to please Him. 

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