



Hidden with Christ

The Call to Enclosure

Following in Our Lord's Footsteps

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The Lord calls each one of us by name—to know Him, to know Him intimately. His call is a personal one, a Person-to-person call.

I cannot remember the exact time when the longing to follow Our Lord Jesus' footsteps as a religious began. But I recall when I was in college, I felt an emptiness that nothing and no one could fill. I thought I had it all—good family, good friends, good school.... I believed in God and went to Church, yet, still, why this feeling of emptiness?

A spiritual crisis emerged. "Why am I here? Why do I exist? What is my place in this world? What do I believe in? Where am I going? How am I going to get there?"

At the time, fundamentalist Christian missionaries were so active on campus that a day would not pass by without being asked, "Are you saved?" And so eventually I began questioning the state of my soul. If my soul is doomed my life would be pointless.

The Lord was calling me to know Him. This was the first of His series of calls to me. When I responded positively, the emptiness that I felt began to dissipate. Not fully because of His unfathomable greatness, but enough to quench that thirst. I began getting to know Him through the testimonies given by people whom God had touched, and mostly through the Sacred Scriptures.

The question that I then faced was: "Should I leave the Catholic Church and join the fundamentalists?" But before leaving I had to know what the Church stood for. So I began to read books on its history and teachings, the Church Fathers and the mystics. Soon all my questions were answered fully.

To know God is to love Him. I can't help it, because then I came to know how much He loves me, a love that is so personal. Not a detached love of an artist to his creations but a love which I can only compare to a parent's love. And that's what He wants for me to know, that He loves me and that He wants me to have all that is best for me, much greater than anything I can ever wish or pray for. Knowing this, I can't help but love Him. I love Him because He first loved me. And because of this love God gave His only begotten Son to save us from our sins.

This is what God wants for us, to be saved from sin and to receive fully His grace and blessings that we may enter into His Kingdom. So I responded "Yes!" I want to be saved and be a part of God's Kingdom.

Yet here again is Saint John reminding me, "If someone says he loves God, but hates his brother, he is a liar. For he cannot love God, whom he has not seen, if he does not love his brother, whom he has seen."



Then, He gave me another call, a call to follow—to serve. I exist not because I am but because *there are*. I should be responsible for others also. This is a stage that is hard for me, to follow the Lord in a straight yet narrow path. I found it hard to be good, to be perfect as the Father in Heaven is perfect. I thought that what is easy and comfortable is the way to be. I found out that it is not always the case. We are called to follow and yet so many rules to obey!

And then I remembered the Lord Jesus gave us two: "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind. The second is like to this: thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*" (Mt 22:37-39).

This embodies all good teachings; if I follow this I'll be on the right track. To love God and to love one another as Christ loved us. This love is an active love. This kind of love helps me to do what is right, because

I am only following the directives and urgings of the Spirit that dwells in my heart.

Then another call came to me, to follow the Lord as a consecrated religious. I do not know when this particular kind of call came to me. I just realized one day that it was staring me in the face. I just woke up and there was this longing to follow Jesus as a religious!

I did not entertain this call seriously, thinking it was just a phase in my life. I was studying then at a very prominent state university that prides itself on being political and on being detached from anything religious, and yet the call grew stronger.

I could not begin to believe that anything of this kind could be appealing to me because it would be so different from the kind of life I wanted—a family, a job, a house to call my own—not the dark, gloomy recess of the religious life. How wrong I was.

For five years I tried to run away from this call. I studied martial arts, got a good job but everything seemed to be pointing toward one direction. As the intensity of my call began to increase, my restlessness increased with it. I half-heartedly prayed for enlightenment.

Then the day came when my work supervisor told me I was up for promotion. I was torn between following the call or stay on the job. I told her about my predicament and she was very understanding and encouraging. My supervisor even told me that she once was an aspirant to the religious life but later discerned that it was not for her. She gave me the best advice at that time. She told me that I'll never know until I tried. And she told me my job would be waiting if I found out that the religious life was not for me.

So, without thinking, I tried the first community that replied favorably to my inquiries. It was an active religious community and I stayed there for almost two years and I loved it, but there was a feeling that it was just not me. Just like the kind of shirt that you liked in the store but they don't have your size. I liked it, even loved it, but it didn't fit. My superiors and my spiritual director thought I was more called to the contemplative life. All along I thought this was it, so what happened? I left the community a little confused as to what to do next.

I believe the Lord prepares us, all the time, for the next chapter in our lives. Whatever God has planned for me is much more great, more beautiful, more satisfying and fulfilling than anything I could ever wish, hope or pray for. All I have to do is to surrender to His will.

I got to know of the existence of the Brigittine Monks through their sister counterparts and they described to me the life that these few monks lived. I thought that I'd try it out, but I wasn't very keen on living in faraway Oregon. Most probably I will only be there for a week and hate it. For a year I encountered so many obstacles that would have discouraged me had they happened to me earlier in my vocation journey. I was in contact with other religious communities but the all roads seems to be pointing towards the Brigittines even if they were bumpy. I came, I saw and I stayed. I'm not saying that it is the perfect community; I came without expectations. Okay, Lord, whatever you want.

And the fit was just right.

The battle of wills was over and He won, yet I did not lose. Only



when I surrender can there be peace. I am triumphant with Him. He never forced my will, He only showed me that His way is better than mine, for He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life and He is the Light of that Way. I can only thank Him for not tiring in calling me. If today you hear His voice, harden not your heart.

To know and to believe in Him is to love Him, to love Him is to follow Him and to follow Him is to put our trust in Him.

If I put my trust in Him, I can say, as Mary, our Blessed Mother said, "Let it be done to me according to Your word." That is: Do unto me as You will. Like the potter unto his clay, let me be what You will. Let me do Your Will.

And when I surrender—when I say YES to all of these, then—only then—would I begin to know Him more, to love Him more, to follow Him more and to trust Him more. 🙏

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