



## Hidden with Christ

The Call to Enclosure

# Here I am Lord, Where Do You Want Me?

BY SR. VERONICA OF THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY, O.CARM.

When I was 8 years old, my beloved great-grandmother suddenly died. My mother was surprised that I wanted to miss school to go to the funeral, because ordinarily I would not miss school for anything in the world. All I remember about that day is that, as we were driving away from the cemetery, my mother was crying and inviting my brother and me to join her in waving and saying, “Goodbye G.G.!” Soon after that, my great-grandmother’s will was read. She had left to me her Miraculous Medal. It became my most treasured possession even though I did not understand what it was. I thought my G.G. was a saint because I had never heard anyone say anything bad about her. I wanted to be like her. I think that this desire was the seed of my religious vocation.

I spent a happy childhood in Maryland with my loving family. I enjoyed reading, dancing, and looking after my vivacious little sister. I attended CCD but remained ignorant of the Faith in many ways. Often, I would imagine to myself that I was a pioneer on the frontier. Looking back, I think that for me the vast horizon of the prairie symbolized absolute Truth. Little did I know that God had in mind to fulfill my dream someday by bringing me to live on the prairie of North Dakota.

When I was in eighth grade, I felt lonely and full of unanswered ques-

tions about my own existence. At that time, I was reading a secular novel which had a nun as one of the characters. I wondered whether there were nuns in the world anymore so I did some research on the Internet. The information I found, though scarce and incomplete, convinced me in a short time that this life of total self gift was exactly what I wanted. I spent the rest of my teenage years daydreaming about becoming a missionary.

My first contact with Carmel was at age 17 when I came across Saint Teresa’s *Interior Castle*. The journey into Love and Truth that she described resonated with my desires.

During the Great Jubilee Year of 2000, I graduated from public high school and moved on to the University of Maryland. I got involved right away at the Catholic Student Center, but it still took time to find my place on such a huge campus. Moreover, it became clear to me during my first semester that I was not called to the missions after all. I felt lost and no longer knew what God wanted of me. I continued searching and visiting religious communities.

So far, the thought of being a cloistered nun had never entered my mind, but during the fall of 2001 I began to read quotations from the writings of the Carmelite saints and was profoundly attracted to them all. The following January, I spent



a weekend at the Carmel of Port Tobacco in southern Maryland. One night, I went outdoors in the dark and cold and knelt before a large Crucifix. I whispered, “Lord, here I am. Where do you want me?”

The answer came a few weeks later when I discovered the website of the Carmelite Nuns of the Ancient Observance in rural North Dakota, an IRL affiliate. As soon as I saw it, I knew that I had found my home. It would be impossible to describe the immense joy that I experienced that day. My certainty was confirmed the following summer during an eight day visit to the monastery. I wanted to enter right away, but my parents had asked me to finish college first. On the last evening of my visit, I saw a rainbow. It represented Our Lord’s promise to me, and mine to Him,

that I would return to this place to stay. Over the next two years of waiting, I would write to my future novice mistress every month, recounting my adventures and asking for counsel and encouragement.

I spent my junior year abroad in Nice, France. There I spent hours wandering the streets alone and feeling very small. I met beautiful people from all over the world. I went to Mass daily at the home of the Little Sisters of the Poor, where I was known as *la petite américaine*. Like the olive trees growing all around me, I soaked in the Mediterranean sunshine, the warm colors of the buildings and landscapes, and the sound of French spoken in a melodious southern accent. And yet, deep



down I was homesick for the simplicity of the North Dakota prairie, where there would be enough silence to hear the voice of the Living God, and enough darkness to see the Light of Christ.

During my final year of college, I was less studious than usual because I made it a priority to spend extra time with my family, and to be present to the Catholic Student Community. In particular, I participated in retreat ministry and women's Bible study. Still, I managed to find the time to complete the required senior thesis for my history major. I wrote it

on Blessed Jan van Ruusbroec, a late medieval mystical writer. This was very providential because it allowed me to read about contemplation while doing my homework! Amidst everything, I was striving to live the Carmelite charism interiorly as much as I possibly could.

At long last, on All Saints Day 2004, the golden jubilee of the foundation of the Carmel of Mary, I entered the enclosure. I am not exaggerating when I say that, every single day since I crossed the threshold of this place, I have had a superabundance of spiritual joy. Each moment is a miracle and a gift. For me, chanting the psalms in the liturgy is a perfect expression of my perpetual joy!

On the feast of the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple 2011, I made my solemn profession in the Order of Carmel. I believe that Our Lady chose this date because she wanted to offer me to God herself, just as she had offered the Infant Jesus. February 2 dawned breathlessly cold and crystal clear. The snow glittered merrily. About 100 people ventured out in the winter weather to attend the ceremony, including our Bishop Samuel Aquila, who celebrated the Mass. In the chapel, there were many red roses, the color of warm Christmas Love, the color of the Blood of the Sacrificial Lamb, to Whom I am united forever. The happiest part of the day was at the end of Holy Mass when I re-entered the cloister and embraced my sisters. Each one was glowing with gladness as we sang together in Latin, "How good and how pleasant it is when brothers live in unity!"



The Carmel of Mary was founded as a tribute to Our Blessed Mother in the Diocese of Fargo, North Dakota, in the Marian Year of 1954, branching out from the Carmel of the Little Flower in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and to Our Blessed Mother are the two "pillars" within which the cloistered community lives its Carmelite charism of "contemplative prayer, in Community, in the service of the Church, lived in intimate familiarity with the Most Holy Virgin and the spirit of Elijah the Prophet" (*Ratio*).

Candidates to the Carmel have been drawn by their love for Our Lady and continue to grow in the two great loves of the life: the Eucharist and Our Blessed Mother. These are constantly nurtured by the celebration of the Divine Office in Gregorian chant and in personal prayer.

Candidates are received between the ages of 20–32. A desire to give oneself totally to Our Lord, a well-balanced personality, and a willingness to sacrifice ALL for Christ may indicate a call to Carmel. If you are drawn to a cloistered community, you can learn more by viewing their website: [www.DioceseofFargo.org/Vocations/CarmelofMary](http://www.DioceseofFargo.org/Vocations/CarmelofMary).