



Hidden with Christ

The Call to Enclosure

In Search of the “Perfect Catholic Gentleman”

BY SR. JOHN MARY, C.P.

What child would be happy about being stranded at school during a snowstorm? I sure was! I was going to spend the night with the sisters in the convent next to the school. This is my earliest recollection of finding joy in the thought of being a religious.

Unfortunately, by the time I was heading into junior high I realized it wasn't too “cool” to want to be a religious sister. Having “fun” became my priority—parties, sports, dating and just hanging out with friends. I was elected football homecoming queen and prom queen. God and family became less important. At the same time, in the deepest part of my being I was convicted of my sin and selfishness, yet I did not know how to turn my life around, nor did I really want to, at least not yet.

During my senior year, a friend who was serving with The National Evangelization Teams (NET Ministries) wrote and shared with me of God's love, mercy and plan for my life. At first, I just laughed at him. But when he returned home and continued to share with

me about Jesus and the Catholic Church, my heart began to melt. By the time I started attending the University of Southern Indiana, I was going to charismatic prayer meetings with him one night and a big party on campus the next. I wanted both worlds. There came a point in the midst of this confusion when I sensed that I had to make a choice between Light and Darkness. God allowed me to realize that the decision I made would set the course for the rest of my life.

That fall I visited the Franciscan University of Steubenville. What an eye-opening experience that was... a campus of young adults on fire with the love of Jesus Christ and His Church! About a month after this experience I went on a pilgrimage to EWTN. I encountered Jesus as a living person who died for me and I knew I had to live for Him. When I returned home I was ready to embrace the life of the Church. This choice very quickly transformed my entire life...my wardrobe, music, speech, friends, everything! Soon I began to attend Mass during the week and to pray the Rosary without being told. I am sure my parents were about to faint for joy.

What about becoming a religious sister? I had not thought about that since grade school! After being at Mass with the Poor Clare Nuns at EWTN, my child-



hood desire to be a religious began to be rekindled.

I took two years off from college to serve with NET Ministries. What graced years those were and a good preparation for monastic life! The NET staff encouraged us to be open to God's call in our lives. While in North Dakota some teammates and I visited a Carmelite Monastery. I didn't want to leave. Yet, I thought, “I could never live this life!” After NET, I returned home and resumed my studies at USI. I went on a few dates hoping “Mr. Perfect Catholic Gentleman” would come along and sweep me off my feet. Yet, after each date I felt dissatisfied.



Quickly I began to struggle with college. I was getting good grades yet I dreaded class. I had a constant head cold. I cannot explain the lack of peace within me. I felt I was just wasting time. I had no desire for a career. Yet, what would my family and friends think if I did not finish? Was I going to school because it was God's will, or because it was a societal expectation?



I spent much time before the Blessed Sacrament, seeking to have a spirit of trust and confidence in His guidance. Proverbs 3:5-6 became my constant prayer. I made the decision to quit school. What peace flooded into my soul! Yet, my decision was not easy for my loved ones. At this time I found my consolation in the Passion of Christ. He looked like such a failure in the eyes of all. I also came upon this quote from the founder of the Passionist Congregatio, St. Paul of the Cross: "When a soul tries its best to be united to God and on the other hand finds no peace in the tasks and in the place where it is, it is a sign that His Divine Majesty desires something else of it." Now, if God would just tell me what the "something else" was!

During this time I would plead with our Blessed Mother for her guidance—"Please find me a holy monastery or a holy husband." She soon answered my plea—I was

invited by the Passionist Nuns of Whitesville, Kentucky, for a week long live-in at the monastery. I absolutely loved it, which was a great surprise because I had never imagined God would call me to be a cloistered nun! I felt at home with the sisters and they with me. I encountered Christ in the Mass and Liturgy of the Hours, prayer and work, silence and recreation. Although my contact with family would be limited, for the sake of a deep prayer life, familial bonds were important and there were visits throughout the year. I had visited various convents over the years but when I came for that live-in everything began to click.

Upon returning home I shared this news with friends and relatives. Some were supportive; others thought I was taking this religion thing a bit too far. A dear elderly



priest-friend of mine discouraged my entering a community that was cloistered. But for me there was no turning back. I had found that "Perfect Catholic Gentleman": Jesus Christ.

As time passed, my desire to return to the Passionist Monastery increased; yet, I did not know if I would be able to embrace the silence of the cloister. I enjoyed trav-



eling, eating out, visits with family and friends, and on and on. How could I give this up? But one of the sisters told me, "Don't worry about whether or not you can live the life; rather continue asking God if this is His plan for you. If the answer is yes, He will give you the grace to live the life."

It was painful to leave my family, yet thrilling to walk into the cloister on August 27th, the eve of the Feast of St. Augustine. Once I entered the monastery I encountered new joys AND new purifications. I had found Him whom I loved with all my heart! Yet, I was finding myself as well; I realized I was not the saint I had thought myself to be. In the beginning I found the silence and solitude to be difficult. I had to become teachable, receiving help and correction from others. This was tough! Also, I was very homesick. These needed purifications were strengthening me to embrace a hidden life of pure faith.

Since the very day I entered this "School of Jesus Crucified" (a school of LOVE!) the peace I was searching for has never left my soul. I am so grateful He has called me to be a cloistered Passionist Nun. 🙏

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