

**IN THE NAME OF THE LORD,  
PEACE AND GOOD TO ALL YOU DEAR MEN AND WOMEN,  
YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS – OR RATHER, BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST  
WHO, WITH THE CURIOSITY OF CHILDREN (cf. *Luke 18:17*),  
ARE ABOUT TO READ THIS TESTIMONY OF MY LIFE  
WHICH I HOPE WILL HELP YOU UNDERSTAND HOW GOD WORKS IN EACH OF OUR LIVES,  
TRANSFORMING AND RENEWING... (cf. *Eph 4:23*)**

***From 0 to 40...***

I was born at Mazara del Vallo on February 11, 1963 (the feast day of the apparition of Our Lady of Lourdes); I was born prematurely, as my mother was only about six months pregnant. I was baptized at birth, since I weighed less than two pounds and my life was in serious danger; I was incubated (still at risk of death because of various health complications), and, miraculously, I survived. Later on, I would understand the divine message behind this premature birth (as I will explain later in this witness).

Ever since I was little, I was educated in the Catholic faith both by my practicing mother and by the various social and religious opportunities in which I participated as a child: daycare with the nuns, catechism class at the parish, and (as I grew up) various other groups like the [Catholic] Scouts, youth groups, the diocesan and parish choir, and Catholic Action and Charismatic Renewal groups.

I have always gone to Sunday Mass, with extremely rare exceptions.

As an adolescent, I was very timid and introverted. I was marginalized by my schoolmates and even by the members of one of the church groups that I frequented, which led to many disappointments and inner wounds. By the grace of God, I continued on my journey of faith, though I felt hurt and resentment for the ways I had been treated.

My faith was very tiny, and needed to grow and become strong.

In my adolescence, these relationship problems with my schoolmates favored the development of various secondary problems designated by some people as “psychiatric;” but in reality (given that the root word of “psychiatric” comes from the Greek “*psiùchè*,” which means not only *mind* but also *soul*) my problem was really (and purely) a spiritual one. It was a problem in my soul, not in my mind, but since there were various people who failed to interpret it accordingly (unlike Friar Volantino – of whom I will speak later – who, with medical proof in hand, would later tell me with absolute certainty that there was nothing wrong with me), I found myself at a certain point in my life making the round of psychologists, psychiatrists, and medicines. With all due respect for medical science, these “remedies” did nothing to solve my problem at its root; indeed (as I would later be told), I only needed to truly encounter the Risen Christ in my life, search for and put into practice

His full Will for me, and have frequent recourse to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the “Medicine of Immortality” that is Jesus in the Eucharist (to then be brought to life in my life). As Jesus says in the Gospel, “*Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light*” (Matt 11:28-30). Pope Benedict XVI continues, “...*Jesus Christ [is] present in the Sacrament of the Altar... [we must] receive Him as the ‘Medicine of Immortality’ which heals body and spirit*” (Benedict XVI – *Osservatore Romano*, 20/01/2008, our translation).

As a young adult (from 20 to 24 years of age), I dated; naturally, that relationship didn’t go well, as it was not God’s project for me, but the Lord permitted this experience to help me understand that there is nothing but “restlessness and despair” when we are outside His Will for us.

This period of my life is also marked by the unexpected death of my mother (of a vicious brain cancer), an experience that was destructive for my spirit and my sensitive mind. So much suffering brought me to the point of making a heartfelt prayer to God, and the Lord, in that moment, manifested Himself through the help of a priest who was the pastor of my home parish.

I broke up with my boyfriend and started to involve myself in the parish, first as a catechist and later as a promoter of Catholic Action for young people, and I began to discover (thanks also to another movement that I frequented, the Charismatic Renewal) the love of Jesus present and alive in my life. I fell ever more deeply in love with Him, and felt myself attracted towards consecrated life, but at the same time I was torn between Him and other human loves (there were other guys that attracted me here and there, for instance, though I never dated anyone else).

*...after the encounter with the community  
of the Little Friars and Little Nuns of Jesus and Mary*

As the Israelites lived in the desert for forty years, among trials, temptations (cf. *Deut 8*), and venomous serpents (cf. *Num 21:5-6*), before they reached the promised land, I, too, spent forty years on my journey through the desert of this world before meeting the community of the *Little Friars and Little Nuns of Jesus and Mary*, which offers me the possibility – through a new journey towards perfection – to reach the Paradise promised by Jesus to those who try to do His Will. Indeed, Jesus says in the Gospel: “*Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven*” (Matt 7:21).

I will try to recount what a beautiful change came about in my life thanks to my encounter with the community of the *Little Friars and Little Nuns of Jesus and Mary*, particularly my encounter with Friar Volantino, who guided me towards a full understanding of God’s project for me.

I met the community of the *Little Friars and Little Nuns of Jesus and Mary* in my hometown about five years ago, on September 14<sup>th</sup>, the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross: the day when the Lord presented me with His cross which is sweet and light (cf. *Matt 11:29-30*).

At that time, I was searching for God's full will for me. I had understood that Jesus was calling me to be His bride, the bride of *the most beautiful among the sons of men* (cf. *Ps 45:3*); I clearly felt the calling to consecrated life, but I didn't understand which community I should enter. I had had various experiences of community life which had initially set my heart on fire, giving me the illusion of having found what I was looking for, but afterwards I was never able to discover the full spiritual dimension that my soul was panting after.

Living in the world, I was not at peace; I suffered because I felt the call of the Lord and the life I was living was not enough for me, though (apparently) I lacked for nothing; I had two diplomas (including one in Religious Studies, which allowed me to teach in the public schools), a job, friends, involvement in the parish, a car... and even a good capital of about 1000,000 euros (in land) inherited upon the death of my parents.

My encounter with the community was the exact response to a prayer that I had made the year before to St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus (in the month of September!), in which I had asked for the grace to discover the religious family which the Lord wanted me to join. The year before, I had participated in an evening of prayer called *Petals of the Rose*, where the participants asked for a grace through St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus in the expectation that their request (if it was within God's will, of course) would be granted within the year.

I had no sooner encountered two friars from the community (and learned that there was also a sister in their community) than I expressed my desire to have an experience with them to discern my calling; I was certain that the Lord would speak to me, and it was with a fire in my heart that I began my experience with them, first for a weekend and then for six months.

The friars who had met me had spoken to me of the message given by Our Lady of Fatima to the three children (Lucia, Jacinta, and Francesco), when she said, "*Come here [in silence and prayer] for six consecutive months, and I will tell you who I am and what I want from you*" (cf. *Message of Our Lady of Fatima, 05/13/1917*). They explained to me that, spiritually speaking, this message is for all those who are spiritual "children" (that is to say, those who want to *become ever more like children* in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven – cf. *Luke 18:17*), and that, if I dedicated six months to God in a place of silence, prayer, and sacrifice (above all, the sacrifice of renouncing my own will – cf. *Ps 40:7-9*), God (through Mary's intercession) in one way or another would help me understand clearly, with no more doubts in my heart, which religious family he was calling me to in order to give my whole life to Him. This made my heart rejoice, because I was almost always indecisive when it came to making choices.

God's response was quick in coming, and accompanied by various signs which sealed my certainty that I was called to this religious community (thanks in a particular way to Friar Volantino, whom the Lord indicated to me as a spiritual guide, and who, together with the other brothers, helped me understand how the Lord was speaking to me, while leaving me free in my decision).

One of the many signs was the following: when embarking upon my first pilgrimage of total dependence on divine providence (taking nothing with us for the journey), I felt afraid at first, but I told the Lord, *Lord, if this is what You want from me, if You are calling me to this community, let Your will be done in me.* And what was the Gospel of the day? *"Take nothing with you for the journey, neither stick, nor sack, nor bread, nor money..."* (cf. *Luke 9:3-4*)!

(St. Anthony the Abbot received a similar sign from the Lord before he left everything to become a monk; walking to Mass one day, he was meditating over what had prompted the apostles to leave everything behind and follow the Lord, and on the reward that they were promised in heaven; he entered the church at the exact moment when the Gospel was being read, and the Gospel was, *"If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to [the] poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me"* (*Matt 19:21*). As if these words had been spoken straight to him, he left the church, sold his possessions, distributed the proceeds to the poor, and dedicated himself to the ascetic (or monastic) life – cf. *Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol. III, Office of Readings, 17 January.)

This was another sign: many years before meeting this religious community, I had had a dream (or "interior perception," as commented upon by the Magisterium of the Church n. 294, which speaks about how God can also speak through visions in dream; cf. *Job 33:14-18*, *Num 12:6-8*) where I had seen Jesus on the cross; he told me when he would take me to Paradise, and I held onto His feet while the cross rose into heaven with a rotating motion. I had been troubled by this dream, a bit as Mary was at the announcement of the angel.

In this community, I fully understood the meaning of the vision I had had in this dream from years before; as I already mentioned, I met the community on the day of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, and I found another sign in one of the documents written by Friar Volantino called the "Passport," which has an image of Mary holding on to the foot of Jesus' cross.

I also understood how the Lord had started giving me signs from the very moment of my birth.

For example: in the message of the apparition of Our Lady of Lourdes, Mary invites Bernadette to dig to find water: now, the Lord was inviting me, through Mary, to retreat into the "cave" of my heart for six months, far from the distractions of the world, in order to "give birth" to my "child spirit" during these six months and find that water which wells up to Eternal Life (cf. *Rev 22:17*).

Next September marks five years since I joined this religious family, and I can testify that the Lord has given me a family where true fraternal love, concord, and unity reign: something that I had never fully experienced in my biological family. I am very happy to have all this!

I have matured a great deal since entering the community, though I know that I still have much to learn; I feel strengthened in the faith and in my ability to confront the various difficulties that arise along the journey towards holiness (to which we are all called). I experience the joy of serving the Lord through this radical way of life that is founded on the Gospel and dignified in its poverty.

I conclude with the words that are written in today's readings in the *Liturgy of the Hours*: "*With age-old love I have loved you; so I have kept my mercy toward you. Again I will restore you, and you shall be rebuilt*" (Jer 31:3b-4), and again: "*I will make with them an eternal covenant, never to cease doing good to them; into their hearts I will put the fear of me, that they may never depart from me*" (Jer 32:40).

[Daytime Prayer, Friday 05/30/08, Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus]

**P.S.**

This is what is written  
in the Mass of the Day today:

*"You are a people sacred to the LORD, your God;  
he has chosen you from all the nations on the face of the earth  
to be a people peculiarly his own"* (Deut 7:6).

Maida, 05/30/08

In Faith,

*Paola Provenzano  
(Sr. Letizia Maria Vera)*