

Renée's Story

by Renée Burvant

I would like to begin by giving thanks to God for giving me the grace to respond to His call; to the Blessed Virgin, who has nurtured and protected my vocation throughout my life by her example and motherly care; and my family, who have been the rock and foundation from which my vocation was able to be freely explored and discovered. I also would like to thank my parish family at St. Peter's for all the support, prayers and friendships I have developed over the past years. What a treasure and source of strength this community has been for me.

I grew up in a normal Catholic family with two loving parents and three brothers: Trey, Bres, and Joel. My exposure to any religious nuns or brothers was minimal. The only consistent contact I have with any religious or clergy was my parish priest. Though as a child I remember having an admiration for the saints and a desire to please God, I never associated with this the possibility of having a religious vocation. In fact, I spent most of my time dreaming of getting married and having children.

In high school I was the average teenager: a curious, mischievous and naïve girl who wanted to do it all. I fell into a lot of peer pressures that teens face these days and I was definitely not focused on Christ. I always believed in God but I usually only went to Him when I had a problem or needed a favor. I was always looking for that full life. God truly blessed me with gifts, talents and wonderful experiences that to some, would seem more than ideal. Although I am thankful for these things, I wondered in the back of my mind if there was something more. My heart was restless.

I attended Florida State University where I realized a childhood dream of becoming a college cheerleader. For two and a half years I had the thrill of cheering in front of 80,000 screaming Seminole fans. I thought that cheerleading would fulfill me and complete my college experience. But still, my heart was restless.

At the end of basketball season I injured my knee doing a stunt. The doctor said I would be out for nine months to a year. As you will see, what I thought to be a tragedy turned out to be one of the greatest blessings ever in my life. It was after this injury that I had a lot of time on my hands and started to think about my life and question where it was going.

On Easter Sunday, a few days after I had reconstructive surgery on my knee, I remember looking up at the crucifix after Mass and telling God that I was tired, tired of trying to live up to the so-called ideal college life. I simply said, "Lord, take my life, it's all yours," ... And boy, what a few little words can do! That's all I needed to say for God to jump in and take over. From that point on I slowly started to include God in every part of my life; from relationships, school, cheerleading, to everyday decisions. Before, God was someone I went to just to fix my problems or to give me something, and now, He was my companion, someone I shared my thoughts, feelings and dreams with. The peace I experienced with Him kept drawing me closer and closer.

Still up until this point the thought never crossed my mind about being a nun. It was not until February of my sophomore year that I experienced the first invitation to be a nun. I was driving home to Louisiana one night and praying to God for some direction in my life. Then the thought of a nun came to my mind, like a whisper or gentle breeze in my heart. I remember thinking it was just a silly idea and did not take it seriously. As time went on this thought always seemed to keep coming up, but I continued to dismiss it as a silly thought.

I was now in my junior year of college. I was in nursing school, still cheerleading, and in a relationship. God was waiting for me very patiently until He decided it was time to make another move. It was one morning while I was going on my daily run that I experienced the same thought about being a nun. Only this time God completed the sentence by saying in my heart, "Renée, this isn't just a thought. It's Me, and I would like for you to think about it." This was a big step into the unknown, but one thing that kept me persevering in this direction was the peace I experienced and the guidance of a spiritual director. Truly, this was all I had telling me to stay on this path because everything else in the world was telling me it was crazy, outdated, and not "normal".

God had to tear down all the misconceptions I had about being a nun and create anew. Gradually, I started to see the beauty and heart of the life. The essence of the life was slowly being unveiled to me. I discovered that I was not being called to something but to SOMEONE ... Jesus! HE was asking me to be His bride. I realized that it wasn't about wearing black all day, being so serious, and growing old alone, but discovered the opposite. I saw that God wasn't taking away the gift of motherhood or to be a spouse but instead, He was fulfilling these gifts in a new and supernatural way. The perceptions and feelings I had were being transformed. My fears were turning into joy and the unattractiveness into something attractive and truly beautiful. God saw that this life would fulfill my heart way before I did. In the beginning I didn't understand why God would call me to do this. It was only after the layers of distraction and sin were being stripped away from my heart that I came to find what my heart truly desired. That all along, God was in the center core of my heart, waiting for me patiently.

On January 21, 2000 I will be entering a Franciscan missionary order in Tampa, Florida. The name of the order is Family of Jesus Healer. It combines the life of St. Francis and Mother Teresa of Calcutta. It is a new order founded by a priest, Fr. Philip Scott. Daily adoration and prayer is the heart of the life. The apostolate is responding to the Holy Father's call for a new evangelization by ministering to the poor, non-Catholics, and the Hispanic community in Tampa, and also, AIDS patients. The community consists of priests, brothers, and sisters. In God's time, we will eventually be in other parts of the world, such as Latin America and South America, spreading the Gospel.

For information about the Family of Jesus Healer, contact:

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