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“Be strong and of good courage, be not frightened neither be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” ~ Joshua 1:9

I was and still am “Taking a risk of love.” That is what it was as I followed this interior drawing to enter religious life as a Carmelite. “All is for love,” for truly God is love and with Him all is love.

To discover one’s calling is often a gradual unfolding and it involves peeling back some layers of our hearts and even completely uprooting some areas. Our Lord has slowly revealed to me all the ways He has been calling me to Himself first. I received all my Sacraments when I was eight years old, so I remember and see even more clearly now the beauty and grace that occurred. One specific memory shows how even at such a young age I experienced the love of God and my desire for Him. It was the first time I attended mass after having received my first Holy Communion, I was the first one ready for mass and waited outside skipping and dancing around because I was so excited to go and receive Jesus. This He revealed was me responding to His grace.

As I grew up, however, I began to weaken in my response to these promptings of the Holy Spirit because I wanted to fit in to society. But God never leaves us. “The Lord your God is with you wherever you go,” and he certainly was for me.

I knew nothing about religious sisters other than I had heard of nuns. When I was about 12 years old, I met the Regnum Christi consecrated lay women, and they explained how we all have a vocation; some to marriage and others to Religious Life. In their case, they were married to God. Having been already lured by the world, I immediately thought “No way God not me!” The thought of this terrified me, because I knew people would think I was weird and I didn’t want that. So I closed the door right away.

By the time I was in high school and heading to college I was living a double life. On the one hand, I attended mass every Sunday and participated in parish activities, for I had always loved the Catholic Church, while at the same time I was embarrassed of what others thought and followed along with their ways. But as our Lord says, “You cannot serve both God and mammon.” It was clear which path I had chosen and from that point on I had closed the door to God. Still He never left me. He remained outside the door of my heart and knocked. Truthfully, I was searching and thirsty for the Love of God. When I went to college, God provided me with a special grace; the gift of a dear friend who was His instrument in bringing back this lost sheep. Cassy was a non-Catholic Christian, and she helped me to look at my life and my faith more deeply. I wanted to be able to explain our different views, and I remember thinking, “I’ve been Catholic my whole life, but do I really even know my faith?” As time went on, I remained searching for the meaning of my life in different activities, people, and places. I was defining myself by what I did, not who I was. I was soon confronted with trials with friends and relationships that led me to seek God deeper and pray. I learned from Cassy to have a relationship with Our Lord. I realized that prior to this I was living my faith as a set of rules without a relationship of love. So I sought spiritual books; one with particular influence was Rediscovering Catholicism by Matthew Kelly. It sparked a flame in my heart, and was a light leading me. However, I also took two steps forward and one step back, so it was a slow process. I still remained in the typical college way of life, with it only leaving me empty. Difficult relationships and circumstances continued to arise. Our Lord was trying to get my attention; so I sought Him ever more. I was desperate for guidance and I began to make visits with my friend Cassy to our University Chapel at night. I was shepherded by my cousin in Seminary who invited me to attend Vigil Praise services which consisted of adoration and confession, and I loved it. I found much peace when I was there. Every moment in front of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament has power to transform us and that is what He was doing to me. The Sacrament of Reconciliation too was setting me free, and the desire to encounter our Lord only grew. I was thirsting

for Him more and more. I also found a perpetual adoration chapel just down the street from my college campus, and I made visits there as well. I was falling in love. Through all this, I also sought Our Lord in conversation, wanting to speak of the faith and learn from my dad, my cousin, and Cassy. I received spiritual talks on tape from my dad, and was growing in knowledge of myself and God. Soon it was graduation time, and I began to ask what was next?" Oh course, a job and marriage because that's what everyone does. However, I was now wanting to do God's will, and through my encounters with Our Lord the thought came to me; "What if God is calling me to be a nun?" I knew no sisters, and no one spoke to me of this, so it truly came from a higher source. I simply recalled the time I first learned about consecrated life and immediately said "No way." So, I said "Lord I didn't even give you a chance. I am sure you are not calling me to that, but I will at least be open to it." Once I spoke these words and opened the door to Him, Wow, did He sweep through and completely turn my life upside down.

Yearning for more and wanting to live a Gospel life, I decided to go on a medical mission to Peru after graduation. I had begun my life of prayer, starting my day with meditation. Although I didn't want to admit it, there was a desire for Religious Life forming inside me. I came to realize that was the 'pearl of great price' already there just beginning to be found. Yet, there were still attachments that I was holding on to, and strings that I needed to cut. I left for Peru on October 1st the Feast of St. Therese, our great Carmelite Saint. Being where I was at in my spiritual life, I was incredibly fascinated learning about her. From that point she really became my friend and started to lead me to Carmel.

My experience in Peru was one of great trial and difficulty. Our Lord allowed me to hit rock bottom, so that He could build me back up with a foundation of Trust in Him rather than in myself and my own abilities. I was learning through experience, the "Little Way" of Saint Therese, complete Trust in Divine Providence. Our Lord also allowed me to experience suffering, and as odd as this may seem this suffering was a gift. For Christ desires to be so close to us that He will allow us to experience some of what He went through in His Passion; and this was a grace. Through my time of trial, I experienced the support of the Body of Christ, the Church, in a very real way, and little by little I was restored again.

Our Lord next led me to a Religious Community "The Community of the Beatitudes" in Denver where I was able to find rest and be immersed and continue to live this life of prayer and closeness to the Sacraments which I was clinging onto. For it was the gift of faith that kept me going. I knew I could only be saved by our Lord, and He was all I wanted. After some time of healing Our Lord lead me back out into the world, with the help of the Beatitudes whom taught me to find God's presence all around me, as well as within me. I still feared, but God granted me the courage to move forward in the midst of fear. One day after daily mass, I turned to leave and was struck by the image of Divine Mercy with the inscription, "Jesus I trust in you." This became my strength and I repeated it over and over again.

I eventually moved to Colorado Springs and began my first hospital job as an RN with my brother. I had a firm foundation now upon which our Lord could rebuild me. Thus, through God's grace, my life blossomed in Colorado Springs, and so did my desire to live for Christ and His will. I developed a fervent prayer life and attended daily mass and Holy Hours. All of this was the work of the Holy Spirit drawing me. I was introduced to a great Catholic friend in Colorado Springs, who got me involved with Catholic Young adult groups and she too was discerning her vocation. My life was truly beautiful. I had a good job, family close by, was strong in my faith with great Catholic friends and I could have married one of the nice young men from our group. However, there was a longing for something more. I was at the point where I was desiring to live for Jesus and Him alone.

The flame grew into a burning desire to give everything to Our Lord. However, I was still scared. I had not yet seen the fruits of my Peru experience and looked upon it as something I didn't plan or think through well enough. I wanted to be 100% certain God was calling me to Religious life before I took any steps. I finally realized I couldn't do this on my own. I returned to the community of the Beatitudes to join their discernment group. It was a blessing that God ordained. We met once a month reading and reflected on discernment, were recommended to find a Spiritual director, and we took part

in events and little missions together. Although this community was very dear to me; it was clear God was not calling me there. However, they really lived and helped me learn Therese's little way of trust and love and how to maintain peace. This little Saint was once again guiding me.

In order for God to work, we must be willing to respond to His grace and once I finally did, He made it clearer and clearer where He wanted me to go. Still I petitioned our Lord often. Please just tell me what my vocation is and I will follow. If you want marriage, I will, and if you want religious life I will; just show me.

Shortly after joining the discernment group I was visiting my friend Cassy and we decided to go to the circus that was in town. As we were walking in, we saw some Sisters wearing a brown and white habit. I burst out with excitement, "Cassy look at those nuns, ooh my goodness, what community do you think they are from, should I go talk to them?" She looked at me strangely and said, "I don't know who they are." I said "I'm going to ask" and ran over to them. They said, "We are Carmelites!!" And after a moment of conversation, they gave me a card and said feel free to come visit anytime. I put it in my wallet and the rest of the evening was overflowing with joy.

One day I was reading about St. Therese and then it dawned on me. She is a Carmelite, I met some Carmelites. "Lord maybe I should look into them." So I went home and looked at their webpage. I saw they had a Come and See retreat coming up in Denver that weekend. Later that night I went to a friend's house and before I was about to leave another friend pulls out a flyer of the Come and See retreat with the same Carmelite sisters and gives it to me. I was in shock and said nothing. I left that night and realized God was doing something and I needed to respond. So I inquired about the retreat by emailing the vocation directress. However at the last minute decided I wasn't ready yet.

I prayed and prayed hoping God would send me a sign for my vocation. I recalled sharing with my dear friend Cassy, and she said, "God is not a confusing God, He is a God of clarity. He will let you know." December of that year, a Priest had shared how it pleases God when we ask big of Him and God wants us to ask; so I asked God for a Christmas present, to show me my vocation. Soon after, the 1st of January I attended the Seek conference. While I was there I went with a friend to the vocation fair one evening. Not wanting to go into the room with all the religious sitting at tables talking to students, we stood outside. I turned around and saw a Sister in this brown and white habit that I recognized, and looking at her name tag, I realized she was the vocation directress I had emailed. She caught my eye and I went up to her and said "I think I know you," I told her my name and she said "Yes wait here a moment", she had a flock of girls around her and when they departed she said "Let's talk." We sat down and I told her my entire story and journey. I once again was filled with that same joy I experienced before, and the presence of the Holy Spirit I felt as if I could touch Him. After that conversation, I knew, and so did she. I left and went to Our Lord smiling before Him. I headed off to California to the "Come and see" retreat, to see if this was where God was calling me. Deep down in my heart I wanted nothing more than to give Jesus everything, and this desire came from Him. He is the one who plants our vocation and gives us the desire and courage to pursue it. I was still nervous what would happen and I told my Spiritual Director "I am taking a risk of love" and he said "It is better to have loved and lost than to never have loved at all."

When I came on the Come and See retreat our Lord made it very clear. It was as if I had found my heart's desires in one place. He poured His Grace and Mercy out upon me and confirmed everything I was worried about leaving behind and thought I would have to go without but was willing to for Him. The second day on the retreat, I knew. I sat in front of the Divine Mercy Image with "Jesus I trust in you" and I spoke to Him about it all. I heard Him deep in my heart say "Come" and my response was "But I'm scared" and he said "I know. You are going to have to trust me." The next day I told the vocation directress I wanted to apply.

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When you choose to follow the Lord you will most often not have a 100% certainty, it's a leap of faith. Once you do and are willing to risk all for love, then the grace will be there. Our Lord will take over and provide the clarity and certainty you need. I began Candidacy soon after and every moment since it has become more and more clear that this is the life He is calling me to and had been calling me to. He designed me for Himself. He made me a Carmelite. Jesus speaks His words of proposal and invites me everyday to be closer and more united to Him. He does this as well with you. He wants you to come to His Sacred Heart, experience His love and there you will find rest.