

Under His Mercy



Newsletter of the Franciscan Sisters, T.O.R.

January 2010

21 years old and 30 mothers strong!

On August 15th, 2009, our community turned 21 years old. Turning 21 means a lot in our American culture. I remember my 21st birthday and awaiting 12:01AM to have my first “legal drink.” Of course, celebrating our “21st birthday” as a community was a very different experience.

As women religious, we do not normally drink alcoholic beverages. We do make an exception on high holy days (Easter Sunday, Christmas, and the Solemnity of St. Francis) when beer and wine are available at our vigil party. Upon entering community, we never again will taste liquor (or ever taste it at all for those who never have). For a lot of sisters this is not a big deal. They wouldn't even consider it a sacrifice. They don't like alcoholic beverages, or they have never even tasted them. For me, this took some time getting used to. Wine was a common beverage served at a meal in my family home and it wasn't normal to watch an FSU football game without a beer to go with the array of delicious appetizers. I did not drink beer or wine too frequently but having the option available was something I didn't really appreciate until it was gone. For some reason when you can't have something it becomes more desirable!

A few months before I entered community, I received a list of things that I can bring with me to the monastery as well as a list of our policies, etc. My roommate at the time was discerning marriage, and she and I were looking at this list together. She began to “canonize” me as she stared in awe at the paper and all that I would be giving up. I thought I was pretty holy myself and accepted the canonization graciously with what I thought at the time was humility. There were three things that I specifically remember her “canonizing” me for. The first was that she couldn't get over the fact that I had to wake up at 5AM every morning (We both were addicted to

sleep!). That was quite heroic and worthy of a martyr's crown! She also mentioned to me how hard it would be to not have the freedom to just hop into a car and go wherever I wanted (a prisoner for Jesus!). Lastly she came to the realization that I would lose the freedom of winding down at dinner with a glass of wine or drinking a beer while watching football. (Of course, there would be no football to watch in the monastery either.) Under the pretense of humility I listened, nodding my head and saying to myself, “I really *am* a martyr ... bring on the canonization!”

Four or five years later, my old roommate and I were talking on the phone during one of my home visits. She had gotten married and had two or more children at that time (now she has 5 and probably one on the way!). We were mutually sharing the joys and struggles of our vocations. She began to recall the conversation we had had before I entered community. She laughingly began to take back her words of “canonization” as she said, “Do you realize that I now wake up not just at 5 AM, but at midnight, at 2AM, and at 4AM? I never get a full night's sleep since I have had children.” She went on, “And I never get to leave my house, because I have three little ones that I have to dress and bring with me. There are days when my patience won't allow it.” She

topped it all off by saying, “And do you realize that I haven't had a glass of wine since my honeymoon, because I have either been nursing or pregnant?”

Oh, the beauty of motherhood! What we both had in common was our motherhood, and it deeply impacted me. I had always wondered why most men's religious communities had more freedoms than women's. Many are allowed access to alcoholic beverages much more than three times a year, and they very



This is Sr. Therese Marie holding her niece, Mary Catherine, with her twin sister, Cathy. In the picture Cathy was pregnant with her third. She is now pregnant with her fourth!

often sleep later than we do. Men are not mothers. They are fathers. Their fatherhood requires different sacrifices. I had a striking realization. Every time I wake up early, it is to nurse spiritual life into the souls He has given me. Every time I feel the sacrifice of not getting to hop into the car and go where I want to go whenever I want, I am making a home for my spiritual children. Every time I feel the pinch of not having a glass of wine at dinner, I need to remind myself that I am pregnant with my spiritual children or am “nursing” them. That conversation called me on in our life of penance and sacrifice to be the spiritual mother I am called to be and not neglect my spiritual children. I recognized in a deeper way how the penances we voluntarily take on are intrinsically linked to our call to spiritual motherhood. St. Thérèse understood this part of her vocation very well. She said,

“While in the world I used on waking to think of all the pleasant or unpleasant things which might happen throughout the day, and if I foresaw nothing but worries I got up with a heavy heart. Now it is the other way around. I think of the pains and the sufferings awaiting me, and I rise, feeling all the more courageous in proportion to the opportunities I foresee of proving my love for the Lord, and of gaining, mother of souls as I am, my children’s livelihood.”

The penance and poverty of not having a physical husband and children is one of the most beautiful gifts we give to the Lord and very often one of the most “felt” sacrifices. Our physical infertility becomes the impetus for a powerful spiritual fecundity in the Kingdom of God. As His brides, He called us from the beginning of time to cooperate

with Him in giving birth to spiritual life in the souls of His children. We are giving birth to that which will last for all eternity.

Edith Stein says that “it is the destiny of every woman to be bride and mother,” whether that be manifested physically or spiritually. Our culture today does not esteem motherhood precisely because it requires selflessness. It requires putting someone else’s needs before our own. It is *hard!* What culture esteems today as the model woman is the seductive woman. Seduction is the opposite of motherhood. It is putting oneself at the center. Seduction can dangerously suck the life out of motherhood and lead to its destruction. Contraception was born out of a self-centered ideology and a seductive culture. As a woman religious, I have come to realize that selfishness is a type of spiritual contraception. When I put my needs before others in a disordered way, I am blocking the gift of myself from being fully given. When I am not embracing the penances I have voluntarily taken on, I am saying no to the most beautiful gift God has given me in my femininity: my motherhood.

So in this 21st year, pray for us as we drink our Franciscan tea (hot water) after dinner, knowing that our life of penance is united to all physical mothers and that through it we are conceiving eternal life for the world and pumping His Blood into the children He has entrusted to us. Thank you, physical mothers, for your witness and your *yes* that calls us on in our own vocation!

Sr. Thérèse Marie Iglesias, TOR

My Life as a Formator: an experience of Spiritual Motherhood

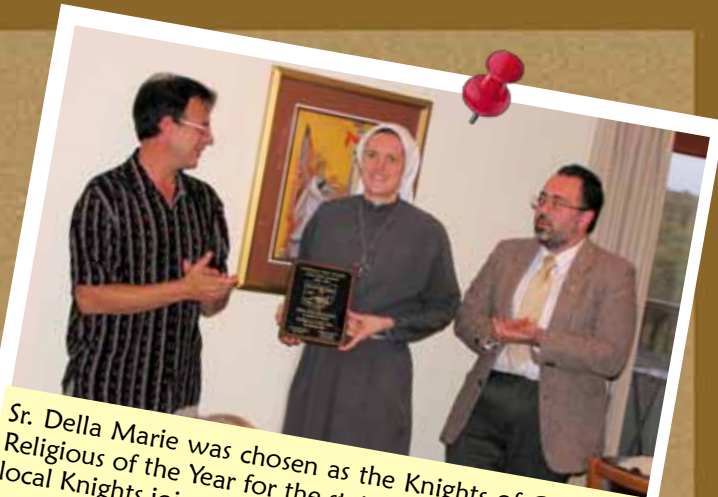
When I entered our community 13 years ago, I just had a vague sense about who St. Francis was in the Church and in the world, and even less experience with him personally. During my years in initial formation I learned a great deal about St. Francis, his life and spirituality, his impact on the Church and the world, and the kind of group I was joining in becoming part of the Franciscan family, but I still did not have any real personal experience with St. Francis himself. I felt like other saints (like St. Clare) walked with me daily, helping me to better live my vocation as a Christian and as a consecrated woman, but St. Francis remained a bit of an enigma. Even though I had learned much about him, I desired deeply to know him, and I prayed often for this grace. After 8 years in initial formation, I professed perpetual vows and continued to pray for a relationship with St. Francis. I was assigned to be the Sister Servant of Juniors – the temporarily professed sisters - and was responsible for their formation classes and for guiding them in discerning our way of life. Even though I had been ministering in the area of Vocations for a few years previously, I sensed that this new role would allow me to exercise spiritual motherhood in a new and probably more demanding way. I was right. I entered into this formation role with much fear and trepidation, knowing how inadequate I was to the task, but also being aware (at least theoretically) that with the position comes the grace. The first class I was to teach was the history of the First and Second Order Franciscan families. I love our Franciscan tradition, but I tend to be lazy when it comes to study, so teaching any class seemed a little daunting, and frankly, I avoided the preparations with a great deal of gusto. But, as I finally delved into reading about the life of St. Francis again, an amaz-

ing thing happened – Francis became a personal friend. His life just leaped off the page at me, the scripture passages by which he came to know his own vocation became my own, and I suddenly felt as if I knew this great saint in a deeply personal way. I had almost given up hope that this could happen. All that I had learned about Francis and the Franciscan way had been like a seed within me, growing in the darkness, and awaiting the water of obedience in order to break through the surface. As I was obedient to accepting the formation assignment and all that it implied, the Lord seemed to be giving me this gift of friendship with Francis. I recognize now that my holy father Francis was beginning to teach me about spiritual motherhood in a new way, and preparing me for the most important task of formation ministry – guiding the sisters in discerning our way of life in the Franciscan tradition. Participating in formation ministry has been the most personally fulfilling and fruitful time of my life, and I believe that God, by His grace, has used me to help our younger sisters to discover their own unique call to spiritual motherhood as well. On the day I came to know Francis personally, about 5 years ago, I just dropped my books and went to the chapel to thank the Lord for such a wonderful and surprising grace. I am still so grateful to have Francis as a friend, mentor, and father, and also for the opportunity to participate in this same process with our junior sisters, hoping that they too will come to know St. Francis and to follow in the footsteps of Jesus as he did.

Sr. Catherine Lynn Forsythe, TOR



Katie, Caroline, and Annie, our candidates traveled to Loretto, PA to join with the TOR Friar Postulants in speaking to college students about their vocation stories. It is always a blessing when our sisters get to spend time with our TOR brothers!



Sr. Della Marie was chosen as the Knights of Columbus Religious of the Year for the state of Ohio. Some of the local Knights joined us for a special dinner at our Motherhouse where they presented her with a plaque.



Construction on our chapel and motherhouse is really coming along. See the Building page on our website to see slideshows of the progress.



If you are interested in finding out more about our community or visiting us, Please contact Sr. Thérèse Marie at (740) 544-6204, or vocations@torsisters.org

Vocation Discernment Retreats
January 29-31, 2010
April 9-11, 2010

Having a ball at recreation...Foosball, that is! At a recent Discernment retreat, we all had a great time playing "human foosball." At the end of the evening, I think most were more tired from laughing than from hitting the balloons!



Sharing Around the Hearth: A Time to Give Thanks
As a way of expressing out gratitude to the Lord and to our sisters, we typically gather around the fireplace and sisters have the opportunity to share with one another special graces, insights, or anything they feel inspired to share. It is always a blessing!

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Mary, Model of Spiritual Motherhood

Mary is a chosen vessel who has received the Savior of the world through the power of the Holy Spirit. As consecrated religious we model Mary's example of self sacrifice through our life of prayer and penance. As our Mother, we learn from her how to live out our spiritual motherhood through the gift of our feminine genius.

One day when I was working at Samaritan House, a clothing store for the poor, I was thinking of how the people in the downtown area suffer material poverty as well as spiritual, emotional and psychological poverty. When I'm working at the store, I'm faced with the ugliness of sin which is manifested through the lives of people who suffer with addiction, abuse and prostitution, etc. I find it important to remind myself that I am called to hate the sin and love the sinner. This is not always the easiest thing to do when you know someone has taken advantage of your kindness. Through Mary's spiritual motherhood for me, I am learning what it means to be a spiritual mother. She showed me using the example of natural motherhood. One day I was praying to our Lady to help me to love those I find it difficult to love. In my heart I heard her speak



these words, "So many of my children have lost their way. They have been abandoned by society, because they are difficult to deal with. There is no one who will show them God's merciful love. They need a mother's care so that they can grow. A natural mother does not give up on her children no matter how difficult

they are. They are her flesh and blood, a gift from God to nurture and take care of while on this earth. The poor downtown are your spiritual children. You are to do the same as a natural mother would do for her biological children - teach the truth in love, make sacrifices and pray for them. Conversion takes time, as you have experienced in your own life. Through your faithfulness in living out this spiritual motherhood, flowers will blossom as you speak the truth in

love, showing them the way to heaven. Please do not give up on these poor children of mine whom I have entrusted to your care. If you don't love the poor and despised, who will? If you don't teach them about my Son Jesus, who will?"

Sr. Carrie Ann McKeown