*How the light of my vocation shone in the darkness of COVID*

*Meredith Rubeling*

On the morning of December 28, 2019, I was filled with tremendous anxiety and apprehension. The following day was my little sister’s wedding. As horrible as it is to admit, I had dreaded her wedding day for years. She is eight years younger than me, and I had convinced myself that if she got married before I did, then I had somehow “failed” as an individual. As her older sister, I expected to have reached that vocational milestone first. I remember feeling unseen, forgotten, and overlooked by God. I had prayed that He would reveal my vocation for so many years, and now I had to endure the pain of watching someone so close to me receive something I had desperately desired. My mindset was extremely selfish, but so often in our desperation, we become so fixated on ourselves, that we can’t focus on anyone else.

In an effort to ease the anticipated pain of the day, I reached out to many close friends, and asked them to pray for me, that I might be able to experience genuine joy and happiness for my sister and her husband on their wedding day. Their wedding was so incredibly grace-filled and holy. They have such a beautiful relationship of mutual respect, trust, and purity; it reflects the love of Christ and His Church. God flooded my soul with peace and joy that day which I considered truly miraculous! I felt so genuinely happy for them. In the best way, God broke my spirit that day, and it was as if a pressure valve on my life had been released. I had seen that God really can move mountains, and allow us to overcome things that terrify us. I saw evidence of this that day. He had shifted my mindset; He allowed me not wallow in self-pity at the joys of others, but to rejoice with them! Through an outpouring of love from others, He reminded me that I am not forgotten, I am precious to Him, He sees me, and He has a plan for my life.

The weeks following their wedding offered me great opportunity for reflection; I had seen the tremendous goodness of God and how He had provided for me in a time of need. In mid-January I was reading St. John of the Cross’ *Living Flame of Love*. The saint wrote that once the soul is united with God in such a way, it becomes so “sublimely possessed by Him” and becomes beautifully conformed to His will. I was brought to tears suddenly when reading those words; I prayed with an intensity and intention unlike ever before. I pleaded with God, ‘Jesus, nothingelse matters, my soul will never be satisfied until I’m perfectly united with You.’ And then the Holy Spirit prompted me: if that really is the case, then I needed to be willing to do *whatever* God asked of me, regardless of what that was. Being open to His will meant being open to religious life.

Religious life? That thought terrified me, I haven’t seriously contemplated religious life in years. I had been so fixated on marriage that I really hadn’t given a thought to anything else. Even though that thought was so overwhelming, the Holy Spirit filled me with peace, and I decided that I should ponder what He had revealed in my heart, like Mary had done. Slowly but surely, the Lord expanded my heart, and allowed me to once again become open to the idea of a religious life.

Jesus continued to speak to my heart in the following weeks orchestrating so many things during that time. He spoke to me through other people, reminding me that I am meant for something special. Could that be religious life, I wondered? I was talking to a friend and colleague at the hospital several weeks later, and I shared what God was doing in my life. I explained that the Lord had placed the idea of religious life on my heart, and that I was scared. I blurted out reasons as to why I couldn’t pursue such a life. She rebutted by saying that it sounded like I was making up excuses, and that deeply convicted me.

That same day I went to Church and knelt in front of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, crying, telling Him that I was scared and needed clarity. Jesus so beautifully spoke to my heart, “*It’s always been Me; you couldn’t love anyone else for your whole life.”* I felt an unexplainable peace. Jesus reminded me over and over in prayer that I can trust Him and that He’s unlike any other man. In an instant, all my past failed relationships made sense: I used to think that something was intrinsically wrong with me, but He changed my perspective. He made me realize that He was saving me for Himself. I felt relief that God finally had revealed His will to me, but I asked Him, “Why did this take so long?” I will turn 30 this year. Jesus reminded me, “How old was I when I started My public ministry?” Could it be that Jesus was allowing my life to reflect His in this little way?

The months that followed were a whirlwind. In March, Coronavirus had caused a massive shutdown: quarantine was in full effect. In the midst of a fear-inducing time, Jesus allowed me to experience a peace deeper than I have ever felt. So many people were experiencing paralyzing fear, anxiety, isolation, and despair. Miraculously, I felt peaceful, hopeful, loved, and delighted in. I viewed the time of quarantine as quite a gift: I was able to discern my vocation with Jesus, free from a million opinions of those around me. So often we get fixated on others, and we have many different influences. We can easily become distracted and derailed and forget to pay attention to the person who has the most important opinion: God. As challenging as the time of quarantine has been, it provided me with a retreat away from the world so that I could hear Jesus. During those months, I treasured our time together because life’s many distractions were diminished.

Quarantine forced me to sit by myself and encounter Jesus alone. It was beautiful to have my time to listen to Him, to keep asking for clarity in my vocation during my prayer time. I was surprised by what God had placed on my heart, but that’s part of the beauty of a life with Christ; it is a crazy adventure that will take you to places that you didn’t foresee as a possibility. It was beautiful to see how Jesus held my hand and walked beside me during such a stressful time that should have led me to anxiety. Instead, I found that the Good Shepherd Himself was leading me through the storm, assuring me each step of the way. He’s reminded me over and over that He held me in the palm of His hand. Jesus and Mary have led me so gently and beautifully, and I’ve been given incredible clarity.

It’s been a gift to entrust my life completely to Him. I have resigned from my nursing job at the hospital, given up my worldly possessions. I entered postulancy with the Servants of the Lord and the Virgin of Matará in August of 2020. They are a missionary order of Sisters who seek to evangelize the culture through both active and contemplative branches. They are the female branch of the religious family of the Incarnate Word, founded in Argentina. I never would have thought that this would have been Jesus’ plan for my life, but He knows my heart better than anyone and has shown me that He can bring peace and clarity, even in the midst of a traumatic time. I am so excited to continue to discern a life as a bride of Christ. I pray that He may use my life to bring the joy and love of Christ to others; He lovingly and gently encounters us in our weakness and brokenness. When things seem dark and impossible, He can bring good out of everything, and He can shift our mindsets to something beautiful, He truly has the best things in store for us! Be open to what He has for your life, ask Him to increase your trust in Him. He will always choose the best for you, if you leave the choice up to Him.