



ANSWERING THE MASTER'S CALL



Loved by God

BY SR. M. MARION HUDACKOVA, FSJB

I grew up in a small village in the eastern part of Slovakia in Europe. My parents brought me up together with my older brother and sister in modest economic conditions, but in a loving family. We did not speak much about God at home but prayer was an important part of our evening routine. Going to Church for Sunday Mass was the most important event of our weekly schedule. The best dress in my closet and the best pair of shoes were kept just for Sunday Mass. Wearing them for some other occasion was almost like a sacrilege. I remember another routine: as soon as I could

hold a broom in my hands my mom sent me every Saturday to sweep the sidewalk in front of our house to make it clean for people who would walk by our house to Church for Sunday Mass. Everything in our lives revolved around and evolved from Sunday Mass.

At the beginning of my grade school I got involved in gymnastics, and I spent many weekends away from home at competitions or special training sessions in different cities of Slovakia. Going to Sunday Mass was impossible and it did not bother me much, the sport was my priority. Years went by and as I was at my highest performance I remember thinking how long I could remain on the top. The world champion in gymnastics at that time was a 12 year old Russian girl—my age. I then realized that I had run out of time and would never make it to the championship—I was simply too old to go on any further. All of a sudden everything seemed so temporary. I was devastated but determined to end my sporting career and look for something lasting in my life.

God closed one road but opened another one. I knew He would keep on showing me the way, so I started going to Mass more often, started praying

more, reading the Gospel, going for monthly Confession, and I became involved in a youth group. Having more time on the weekends, I was able to join my siblings for hiking trips to the mountains and the national parks. I was amazed at the beauty of the places they took me to and we always ended up praising God for His abundant blessings. I very much enjoyed praying the rosary in the quiet of the deep woods or on top of a mountain. I experienced God's presence in those places and felt that I should do something more—for God, and for my neighbor. I was not sure what I wanted in my life but I knew I wanted to be the best for God and live out what Jesus taught His disciples; live my life to the fullest, because I felt loved—*loved by God*.

Meanwhile my brother entered the seminary and he introduced me to a group of young religious sisters. Since this was during the communist regime, they were not allowed to wear a habit and live in convents. In spite of the unfavorable conditions, they did their best to live the Gospel. Nobody knew they were religious sisters, but everybody could feel that there was something special about them. It was God's presence radiating through them. Their happiness and peacefulness was very attractive to me—I liked them very much! However, when I was approached



by one of them and asked bluntly if I wanted to join them, I resolutely said “NO! That’s not for me, God chooses special people like you—and I am too ordinary.” But the word of invitation stayed deep in my heart and kept coming back. I could not talk about it openly because it was dangerous, and besides, I had my own plans about my life.

I finally went to talk to a priest about the possibility of entering the convent. He told me that I should not be afraid and follow the path of consecrated life. I went back and forth on this idea for a while. But meanwhile something unexpected happened: during my last year of high school the communist regime fell, and all the young religious and priests from the underground Church did not have to live in hiding any more. It was



indescribable to see all those habits in the streets. Seeing their zeal and enthusiasm for God I could not resist God’s call any longer. A few days before my prom I told my boyfriend that I was leaving for the convent. He was shocked because he was not raised in any faith and the concept of consecrated life did not make any sense to him. For him it was one crazy idea of burying myself alive. He also said that if he had ever believed in God it would be thanks to me, but now he

could not and never would. Seeing his reaction I became scared and angry with God. The night after the prom when everybody went to bed, I was the only one up crying and arguing with God, asking Him to leave me alone and let me live a “normal” life. All of a sudden, I felt God’s presence like never before and I heard Him say: “Do not be afraid, I can fulfill all the desires of your heart and give you much more.” I finally surrendered and a great peace and calm replaced the storm in my soul. Much happened from that night on, but I was sure of one thing—I could not wait anymore to enter the convent. The way I felt was similar to what Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI writes: “Wherever Christ has been present, afterward it cannot be just as if nothing had happened. There, where He has laid His hands, something new has come to be...”

In July 1990 I entered the Congregation of Daughters of St. Francis of Assisi in Bratislava, Slovakia. I was not finally professed yet, when Mother General decided to transfer me to the American Province. I was stunned and hesitant for various reasons, but God made His call very clear when five days before leaving my native land I read as a lector at Holy Mass: “The Lord said to Abram: ‘Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you...and I will bless you’” (Gen 12:1-2). And He did bless me abundantly.

The American Province was in the process of an intense spiritual renewal

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and I was excited to become part of it. During this renewal it became clear that the conversion we were striving for needed to continue but in a different way. While discerning what this way would look like, it became clear that God was calling us to leave everything again and establish a new community. This time I did not hesitate when He asked me to become one of the founding members of a newly formed community of the Franciscan Sisters of John the Baptist. It was a real challenge to start a new community, but with the blessing of the Prefect of the Congregation for Religious in Rome we were resolved to overcome any difficulty. The goal of the original renewal was to focus our lives on Christ. Now we felt that the best way to accomplish this would be to follow John the Baptist: “He must increase and I must decrease.” To realize this noble task the Lord gave us a very special charism: Trusting God in profound humility and joy. ☺

