



You, O Lord, Have Put into my Heart a Marvelous Love
Sr. Cecilia of the Cosmic Christ
(Cecilia Ashton)

With immense gratitude to God and a great love for God's people and the whole of creation, I give thanks for the gift of my Carmelite vocation. The joy and grace of my profession day continues to radiate deep within – energizing me, drawing me deeper into the love and mystery of God, and gently illuminating the path ahead. While I don't know what the vows will ask of me over a lifetime, I trust that God will continue to give me the grace to be faithful to the commitment I have made.

For me, being a Carmelite nun means being occupied with Christ – setting my eyes on Him; praising God in all I do; meditating on the law of the Lord day and night; living a life that reveals a generous and merciful God; and offering to others the peace, hope, and unconditional love of Christ. From what I have come to understand, it is transformation that lies at the heart of the contemplative life; informing and transforming my heart, my desire, and myself. This flame of love I desire both wounds and heals, it strengthens and burdens, molds and shapes. It is a continual giving over of myself in faith and love.

Through my prayer I am drawn into both an experience of the profound pain and suffering that is part of our collective consciousness, as well as the deep and abiding love of Christ that guides us toward unimaginable horizons of unity and connectedness with God and one another. In selecting “the Cosmic Christ” for my title I wanted to express this interconnectedness; an interconnectedness that in and through the living Christ leads to profound communion, and a transformation of consciousness that carries with it the possibility of true liberation for the entire cosmos. It is my deep belief that the fruit of my relationship with Christ, the transformation of my own life, and the peaceful living out of my life in community will indeed transform our world and aid in bringing forth the reign of God.

I am very enthusiastic about the future of religious life and I feel that there has never been a better time to be a Carmelite nun. I am passionately in love with God and I am humbled to be able to serve our Church through religious profession. As I continue to climb the Mountain of Carmel, I am ever grateful for your prayers, encouragement, and support. With the psalmist I rejoice, “*You, O Lord, have put into my heart a marvelous love.*”

Profession Exhortation by Sr. Colette Ackerman, ocd
for the First Vows of Sr. Cecilia
Pentecost, May 15, 2016

Two images have inspired my reflections this morning: one very conscious - the strong wind of the Spirit and the tongues of fire that settled on (touched) each disciple in that Jerusalem house; and the other, almost unconscious: a small photo of Bernini's famous sculpture of St. Teresa, her heart pierced by the angel's dart, which she felt as fire. I sat gazing at this photo in my cell while pulling together my thoughts about this mighty celebration of Pentecost and the precious day of Celia's profession of vows. I suddenly realized that along with the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, the fire and wind, Teresa in ecstasy was there on the edge of my consciousness - as the hope, the glimmer, the hint of what we long to see, to experience, even to say, on this day and on the long journey to God in contemplative, Carmelite life. These images, and the hope within them, have helped structure and inform my thoughts, my words for Celia as she embraces whole-heartedly this path to God in prayer, deeply identified in fidelity with her beloved risen Lord, lover and friend, Jesus Christ.

As a community we have come through the waters of salvation during the fifty days of the great Easter season. We have heard the stories of Jesus in his new risen appearance. And, I don't know about you, but I have wondered deeply about what this risen life might be. And then Augustine, in the Office of Readings for the Ascension, tells us: *so we too are already in heaven with him, even though what is promised us has not yet been fulfilled in our bodies.* That is astonishing! Today, however, not quite, but almost in heaven, we are gathered together in this house, this dwelling place under the *warm breast and bright wings of God's Spirit*, to fire and enflame our own desires as daughters and sons of God and disciples of Jesus Christ. Today, not only Celia, but all of us embrace and renew the grace of our Baptism, our identity in Jesus Christ. This wisdom conspires in our maturing life and growth to prepare and open up the future of our discipleship, to be servants and friends ministering in our fractured, splintered world. This is the growth of our Christ consciousness: *I am the vine and you are the branches* (Jn. 15: 1-11). The Spirit

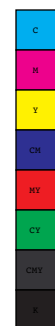
of God, our Advocate and Comforter, *falling fresh on us*, disciples and witnesses of our God, are promised this morning, and truly are, the place of God's dwelling, God's home. On this great day we know without doubt, God desires to be with us.

My father will love you, and we will come to you and make our home with you (Jn. 14: 23). And in this home, our God becomes an abiding, permanent, personal presence in friendship and relationship. It is this friendship, this mutual love, this presence, healing and affirmation that our great saints Teresa and John of the Cross spent their lives living, understanding, interpreting and writing about.

Celia knows this well. She has left her water jar, her fishing boat, her dental office. Most sadly, she has lost her mother. Celia is now on the brink of a new dwelling place, a permanent abiding, with her God and with this Carmelite community. In the continuity of her life she will cross the threshold into a new consciousness, a new love, a new identification. *I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me* (Gal. 2: 20). New wine will be poured into new wineskins. The touch, the imprint of God, the Spirit, will heal and affirm her soul.



Please join us as we celebrate the Solemnity of
Our Lady of Mt. Carmel
at our Sunday Eucharist
July, 17 at 9:00 a.m.





Celia, you are invited into the depths of this mysterious, overwhelming love, this fruition of God at home with you. John of the Cross describes it brilliantly in his commentary on The Living Flame of Love: *A reciprocal love is actually formed between God and the soul, like the marriage union and surrender, in which the goods of both (the divine essence which each possesses freely by reason of the voluntary surrender between them) are possessed by both together* (LF: 3, 79).

Sandra Schneiders calls the profession of religious vows performative language, which brings a transformation, changing the person in relation to everything. Can we not believe this is the same transformation John of the Cross speaks about? Profession is poetic and prophetic language. In Sandra’s words: *I commit my whole self, everything and forever, to the undying love that has claimed me for the transformation of the world.* She says further: *Making a life commitment, especially in our fragmented and relativistic context, requires enormous courage but also allows for the expression of love that knows no bounds* (II: 108, 114). This, Celia, is the new wisdom for your soul, your life, your prayer. And it does require courage and the greatest possible trust.

Pentecost is a blow-out feast. It makes me wonder how we could possibly call the days and weeks that follow “ordinary time.” The wind, the fire, the ecstasy of the gathered community today witness to Celia’s profession. With all our differences we are part of one another, as Paul tells us. On this day we even understand other languages! But at the end of this day, and all days, it is the language of Eucharist that remains with us, forms us and brings us together; our hunger and thirst for God is how Eucharist transfigures life in a fruitfulness that cannot be calculated. This gift is not given once and for all but is food that nourishes us over a lifetime. Celia, you have chosen to be in the *place* of relationship with Jesus in a Spirit-created world that discloses the graciousness of God. And that does not, as you know, eliminate suffering. We promise you our love and care. We pray your life and works will bear glory to God. We hope at some point your heart will be lifted in the reality and consolation of Job’s remarkable words: *I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you* (Job42:5). **Let us rejoice!**

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