

Lord, you have called me to the mountain for you said you would be passing by. You were not in the wind, nor the quake, nor the fire, yet I heard you call my name, and I've never been the same. For your whispering sound in the silence I have found, is planted deep within my heart, O Lord. And I see a transformation as I accept your invitation to obey your will and your word.

-Transformation by Jaime Cortez



Sr. Celia professes her vows in the hands of Sr. Judy, Prioress

Have you ever experienced something or had an encounter that changed your life forever? Perhaps it was a happy moment like the birth of a child or a sad moment like the death of a parent or spouse. For better or worse these moments mark our lives forever. On April 29, 2007 I had one such encounter. It was Good Shepherd Sunday, the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, it was also my 30th birthday and my friends Karen Schneider, RSM and Áine O'Connor, RSM invited me to the Carmelite Monastery for Mass. I didn't know anything about the Carmelites, and I had never been to the monastery, yet when I sat down in the chapel, I knew I was home. I can remember it clearly; I've kept the program all these years. Quietly yet assuredly, in the silence God gently whispered, "Be with me, stay with me, here in this place." It certainly wasn't what I was expecting. However, from that moment on I've never been the same (and I suspect the monastery hasn't been either!).

Sometimes it's only in hindsight that we are able to see the beauty of God's plan for our lives. God brought me to the monastery, gifted me with perseverance, determined determination, a loving and supportive family, and a welcoming and caring community who patiently walked with me and helped me to overcome every obstacle that stood in the way of my entrance. In the meantime, I had the great privilege of working with a wonderful group of dental professionals and caring for some of the finest people I've ever met. My patients and colleagues will always hold a special place in my heart.

It was only fitting that my Solemn Profession would fall on May 12, 2019 – Good Shepherd Sunday, the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, and my Mom's birthday. Outside it was teeming rain, yet inside joy and love abounded as I said my "forever yes" to God, to this community, and to the church. One of the most memorable parts of the ceremony was when Sisters Connie and Colette, who have accompanied me for 12 years as my formation team, placed upon my shoulders the mantle of Mother Bernardina Matthews, the founder of our community in 1790. Wearing her mantle is the thread that weaves us ever more deeply into the tapestry of the community. As the congregation sang the Litany of the Saints, I prostrated in front of the altar, my body in the shape of the cross. I began my prayer by recalling Psalm 31, the one we sing on Good Friday, "I place my life into your hands." Here I had the profound experience of being grafted onto the crucified Christ whose love poured forth into the darkest places of the human heart and the world, not solely as an historical event 2000 years ago, but this very day. As the final petitions were being sung, I was reminded of Luke 7:22, "Go and tell what you have seen and heard."

I give thanks that the Good Shepherd has led me to this beautiful and life-giving pasture of Carmel where I have found the perfect joy that Jesus desires for each of us. And I give thanks for each and every one of you who have supported me in so many ways. In the gospel we heard Jesus say, "My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me." Following Jesus has brought me to the happiest, most joyful day of my life. And I leave you with the same question my spiritual director asked me as I began my time of initial formation, "Are you willing to follow Christ wherever he may lead you, or do you set limits on where you will go?"



relationships, the community work and our ministry to and with our people. This concentrated focus is how love for and devotion to Jesus grows and where communion with the Cosmic Christ – the One who died on the Cross and lives as the Risen One – matures.

You can't lose sight of this, Celia, or everything so easily becomes disconnected, segmented, open to doubt and question, even boredom and meaninglessness, a blind concentration on your own perceived needs and desires and perceptions, rather than a vast opening of your contemplative heart, the very capacity of your soul, to all the joys and sorrows of the people who come to us and to the magnitude of pain and suffering and dying that crucifies and wrenches life away from so many of God's precious people, squeezes life out of other species and even threatens our earth home itself with destruction. No one lives this life of ours over time whose heart has not been broken open by the shocking enormity of crucified lives – children, women, men – today in our time, in our violent city, at our southern border, in those traumatized by abuse, in Southern Sudan and Somalia and Yemen and Syria, in the migrant camps of our world, in the tornado and flood and fire destroyed towns of our country, in our school children, victims of shootings, in our sick and homeless and elderly - and on and on – those who are washing their robes in the blood of the Lamb. Communion with Jesus who was crucified situates us with him in the darkest places of human suffering and hopelessness absorbing from Jesus God's intimate compassion and unfathomable love, incarnating in our own lives, in spite of the consequences, his solidarity with rejected and despised human persons (*Copeland*), one with him in communicating across the vast currents of human consciousness that compassion, that love, the utterly faithful communion, that serves as the thickening of the grace that surrounds the victims of human sin and tragedy and strengthens them in their inner depths.

You realize this mind-blowing endeavor calls not merely for planning and organization, abilities and service in which we all know you definitely excel, not solely for self-knowledge, sacrifice and Teresian determination which are so necessary, but for the willingness to respond to Jesus Christ beyond the limitations of your

own terms with "a love unmeasured, unstinting, overflowing, fearless, passionate." This is what Teresa is calling you to in the reading you have chosen from Teresa's *Way of Perfection*, this the desire you espouse on your profession card from John of the Cross' *Spiritual Canticle*.

In the inner wine cellar

I drank of my Beloved, and, when I went abroad

through all this valley

I no longer knew anything,

and lost the herd I was following (26)

"Just as Jesus' mission on behalf of the reign of God required of him something bold: that he stake his whole life and very personhood [selfhood] on their being absolutely directed toward God in love without measure," (*Copeland*) just so must it be with you, daughter of Teresa and John. This is what it takes if you are not to falter, but are to walk the entire 'way,' go the distance, wash your robe in the blood of the Lamb, as Jesus demands of his disciples. A love without measure that daily eschews every form of violence and division is what it takes to create energy fields of communion capable of influencing hearts and behavior and culture and politics - ultimately effecting the transformation of human consciousness, the emergence within a critical mass of a new stage of human evolution characterized by communion rather than the dark, dehumanizing forces of heartlessness, polarization, poverty, hatred, exclusion, abuse, violence, war.

Celia, we know that as you make your Solemn Profession, you are setting the seal on a lifelong commitment and dedicating yourself body and soul to the ongoing work of transformation – the era of communion, the reign of God, the new creation - converging in, held in, the embrace of, the Cosmic Christ. We know he will shepherd you and lead you to springs of living water. We, your sisters, promise you our support, our companionship, our fidelity, our love, our prayer, from this time onward and forever. And I know all of you joining with us today will support Celia as she continues her Carmelite life among us.

Constance FitzGerald, ocd

(*Copeland, M. Shawn. Christ Crucified. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2018*)

Please join us for our Eucharistic
Celebration of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel
on Tuesday, July 16 at 7 p.m.

*This Interpretation of Our Lady of Mount Carmel was commissioned by Baltimore
Carmel and painted by Sr. Marie Celeste Fadden, OCD, of Reno Carmel, for our
chapel in 1990, our bicentennial year.*



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BALTIMORE CARMEL News



SUMMER 2019

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*Sr. Cecilia of the Cosmic Christ
Professes Solemn Vows*

Profession Exhortation for Sr. Cecilia of the Cosmic Christ, May 12, 2019

1st Reading: *Revelation* 7:9, 14b-17

2nd Reading: *Way of Perfection* 32:9-14

Gospel: *John* 10:14-15, 27-30

We welcome you all with gratitude, warmth and love. This is a day of great joy for Sister Celia and our community, for our Carmelite brothers present here with us today, for you, her father, her sisters, her wonderful family and friends, joy for Celia's mother who, we believe, is surely with us, and for our wider community, you who gather around us in prayer each Sunday – joy for all who have witnessed Celia mature in Carmelite life among us. Even more this is a day that holds an immense hope and stretches toward the sum and summit of all conceivable fulfillment as the readings for this Third Sunday after Easter so powerfully suggest. They impel us to hover in imagination between the now and the forever, between the time of this creation and visions of the new creation in the embrace of the Cosmic Christ who is forever luring us “to God as our Absolute Future.” The readings actually provide a marvelous focus for this so-called “exhortation.”

Hearing the Book of Revelation, I can't but see a long, long line of white robed Carmelites, those we have known and loved in our lifetime and those in the far past, rejoicing with us, glorifying God with us, surrounding us and holding us this day as we accept and bless your desire, Celia, to join all those who have been carriers of the Carmelite tradition through 800 years. Today you take your place as the 137th sister to profess your final vows in our community since its foundation in 1790. When we put on your shoulders Mother Bernardina Matthew's mantle during the Litany of the Saints, we pass on to you our Teresian, Carmelite inheritance, yes, that truly – and our own communal spirit, a heritage of strong women passionate in their desire for communion with God, treasuring freedom of spirit, steady in their determination to live on in the midst of the people, carrying their joys and sorrows, always with eyes on the boundless horizon of possibility.

Edith Stein, a philosopher, our Carmelite sister, a saint, who died in the death camp of Auschwitz, believed a community like a person can be said to have a spirit, a soul. Some members become “carriers” of that communal spirit. Their personal being is so totally given to the beloved community that they are its very “core” from which its spirit or soul is shaped and which guarantees its enduring reality. The further their devotion extends the more secure are the values and outward face of the community. May we be so blessed in you, Celia.



Celia kneels in front of the altar as Sister Constance and Sister Colette place on her shoulders the mantle of Mother Bernardina Matthews, the founder of Baltimore Carmel in the year 1790.

But what does this mean for you? The heart of Carmelite life is opened before us in today's reading from John's Gospel when the evangelist uses the image of the Good Shepherd who calls his own by name to conjure up major descriptions of the authentic believer, the disciple, who “hears” Jesus, “follows” him, has “eternal life.” An unimaginable intensity of intimacy is offered here: Jesus knows his own, those who hear and follow, as the Father knows him and he knows the Father. As Jesus shares in the very communion of life (the Triune) God is, so he wants his followers not only to live in intimate,

mutual, transforming relationship with him, but to share in the very relational life of God, to dwell in that communion of Love. Everything in Carmelite life is aimed at growing in intimacy with Jesus Christ, sharing his relational identity, his consciousness, living in the embrace of his communion with the Unoriginate Source Of All and the life-giving Spirit where the insatiable hunger and thirst of our souls is satisfied, where we drink of the springs of living water St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross hold out to us. Their writings plunge us into the experience of union with God and use extravagant, passionate words to shape that experience.

Celia, you already know that preparing an environment for the development of such Christic communion is no utopian project. Being open to the often painful conversions and transformations that will gradually align your human desire and human knowing with the desire and knowing of Christ, with his consciousness, is very costly to one's egoic self. During the six years of your Carmelite formation, into which you have entered with such honesty, enthusiasm, generosity, intelligence and fullness, you have discovered that a Carmelite life is essentially about being grasped by God and having the familiar boundaries of your soul stretched and stretched so that you do become more and more capable of holding within yourself the full relational life of Jesus Christ. All the experiences of these years, all the experiences yet to come, have been and will be at the service of your becoming Christ, his identity shaping your graced identity, your becoming conscious with Christ's very consciousness, your being drawn into the mutual, dynamic, mysterious relationships that constitute Trinitarian life thereby tapping into, in some measure, the vibrant divine energy of deep relationality and communion that underpins and runs through the entire cosmos luring it toward its ultimate Consummation in God.

To the degree that you are webbed into this divine dance of life and communion, you will be united in peace to every person, every living creature, the earth itself, the entire cosmos. Better than that, the truth of this interconnectedness will pour into your soul with such power, urgency and certainty that vast energy fields of communion capable of

influencing humanity's spirit and depth of consciousness will be created. We do not, we cannot, live Carmelite life for ourselves! So just imagine a certain fullness of Cosmic Christ consciousness as a field of energized patterns drenched with divinity and communion opening up permanent capabilities for creative communion for others, many others, pointing, I suggest, to a new epoch of consciousness struggling to be born. Massive forces nationwide and world-wide militate blatantly against such an emergence of communion consciousness – strong evidence, I believe, of the strength of the new age that is already drawing us across a threshold.



If you think this sounds far-fetched, beyond your reach, I assure you this kind of cosmic Christ consciousness is seeded in the here and now, the place of our transformation, where, in the daily living of your vows, your Carmelite vocation, Celia, the old order of selfishness, greed, violence, and unfettered autonomy, yields to God's communion dream for humanity. We are given something quite specific, extremely focused and simple in contemplative life: the daily privileged sharing of Christ's presence in bread and wine, the ever recurring liturgical cycle marking Jesus' life, ministry, death, resurrection, sending of the Spirit year after year, the word of scripture read and meditated upon day after day, the psalms sung hour by hour, the precious but exacting solitude and intimacy of personal prayer so essential to the Carmelite, the leisure and discipline of spiritual reading and contemplative study, the faithfulness and demands of shared meals and personal