

Testimony

Background: I was raised a practicing Catholic but drifted away when I left home after high school. After trying other expressions of faith, I returned to the Catholic Church unable to deny its 2,000 years of history and its universality. In 2006 I started attending mass almost daily, a practice that I continue to this day. In 2011, looking for the next step on my spiritual quest I discovered the Carmel.

Discovery of Silent prayer: It seems that I have always sought refuge in God. In the early nineties, long before knowing it was prayer, I used to go to sleep at night by leaving the world behind. In my imagination, I would cross the great divide separating the world from the 'door'. When I knocked on the door an angel would answer and invite me in. It was a small room where I would change into a long white robe before being allowed to go through the second door to an ethereal place where Jesus was sitting under a tree waiting for me. I would sit down next to him and we would talk.

In 2005, I discovered Listening Prayer. What I took away from the teaching was that if I listened I could hear that still small voice. This practice brought me much consolation especially since I was able to go back and re-read the journal entries.

What drew me to Carmel was the discovery that it was the mystical arm of the Church. Mystical to me at the time meant knowing God personally. I found this idea was irresistible. In March 2011, I began secular Carmelite formation trusting that I would learn how to connect with God. Five years in, and although I had started to practice the required daily half hour of silent prayer, my prayer life was stuck. I still wasn't sure how to find God. I hadn't received any formal training in St. Teresa's way of silent prayer and just assumed that her way of prayer was *Lectio Divinia*, an ancient way of prayerfully reading the Bible. In April 2015, I began a quest to find God within which led me to the school of silent prayer in France taught by Carmelite friars. I was greatly helped in learning silent prayer by a little book called, *Teresian Prayer* written by two Carmelite friars along with St. Teresa's *The Way of Perfection*.

How I practice prayer: My work as a clinic nurse allows me to practice prayer when the clinic is quiet which it often is in the late afternoon. On weekends and holidays I pray at home or in church in front of the tabernacle. For a longtime, as Teresa suggests, I used a picture of Christ that I liked to help me enter into prayer. Now, I start by calling on the Holy Spirit to come and invite all spirits not of God to leave and to go straight to the feet of Jesus. Following Teresa's formula, I make the sign of the cross, do an examination of conscience and pray the *Confiteor*. I represent the Christ as close to me (W 26, 1-3) and simply allow him to look at me and I look at him with the eyes of my soul. If I feel led to speak I do so but mostly I just remain silently in his presence. It is his presence and his gaze upon my soul that heals me.

Prayer Corner: At home I like to be in my living room which looks out onto a peaceful view. I like to light a candle in front of a crucifix. I prefer to have my time of prayer in the early morning after praying the morning office. I have come to relish the silence and the simplicity of this practice.

Distractions: Distractions are a part of prayer. Teresa encourages us not to pay any more attention to a noisy imagination than to a fly buzzing around. When I realize that I have drifted away from Christ I simply come back to him as often as it takes. I can also look at Christ's picture to refocus myself on him or I can put myself in a Bible scene such as the Samaritan woman where Christ is alone. I keep him company there.

The Impact of Silent Prayer on my life: I have truly come to relish this special time with the Lord, listening in the deep silence for that still small voice. I believe in faith that once I invite him to join me I am no longer alone. The Lord is there with me, he has been waiting for me to join him and keep him company. At one point early on, I felt strongly that I was wasting my time sitting there in silence. But I now understand that silent prayer, or friendship with the Lord, is a legitimate path to follow him. It is the path that leads to the purification

of my soul and to union with God. This time set aside for the Lord has become an essential part of my day. In fact it is the most important part of my day. All other activities revolve around it.

Dryness, Aridity: Dryness and aridity are simply part of the spiritual path. All the saints have experienced these difficult times. It is during these moments that you can feel like you want to give up, that you aren't making any progress, that the distractions are just unbearable. At times like these when I can't wait for the time to be up, I like to remember the butterfly; without a struggle coming out of his cocoon, the butterfly's wings would never be strong enough to allow him to fly and he would die. It is in these times that the Lord is making me stronger.

Complaints: The most common feedback I hear is the busy mind or the lack of time. Perhaps a busy life is nothing more than a need to establish priorities? Now that my relationship with Christ is a priority, other non-essential activities have fallen by the wayside. My priorities have changed.

Fruits of Prayer: I have an awareness of the person I want to become. It is important for me today to be a person of virtue... a person striving to embody humility and charity. This friendship with the Lord has made me acutely aware of the person I don't want to be, the 'old man'. When these old behaviors pop up I tell the Lord that this isn't the person I want to be today and ask him to help me to change. At night I offer myself up for spiritual surgery, I 'sign the consent form' giving God permission to make me into the person he would want me to be as I sleep. As much as I know how, I surrender myself to his care on a daily basis and thank him for making me over in his image, in other words for making me a person worthy of union with him.

Dawn, 2019