

My Vocation through the Eyes of Theology of the Body

What do I want to be when I grow up? This question pops into nearly everyone's minds at least once in their childhood. Many kids dream of becoming an astronaut, fire fighter, dancer, police officer, doctor, or maybe, if they are really ambitious, President of the United States. My plans for the future were a little different. Ever since I was six or seven, I was sure I was going to become a religious sister. I had a few doubts along the way, but for the most part my decision remained firm. I even knew the religious order to which I wanted to belong. However, even though my mind was made up about my vocation, I wasn't extremely excited about the idea. I simply accepted this as God's will. Later, when I was about 14 or 15, I found it much harder to accept this as my vocation, because I wanted to get married and have my own kids. And then I was introduced to the Theology of the Body for Teens (TOB). This program opened my eyes to the beauty of a religious vocation, the reason it is so counter-cultural, and the type of love that it requires.

This transformation began when I watched a video of the program discussing the chapter "Celibacy and the Religious Life." In this video, the authors mentioned an incident that really touched me. There was a religious sister who was giving some seminarians a tour of the seminary. During the tour, she told them, "If you do not want to be a husband or father, goodbye. We don't need you here." This statement left a huge impression on me. At that moment it hit me: my desire for marriage and kids did not mean I was not called to the religious life or that I would be miserable as a sister. On the contrary, these desires would actually help me become a holy religious sister. These desires would help me because the religious life is in fact a calling to marriage and motherhood, just in a different way than what I thought I wanted. Once I started seeing the religious life as a marriage, everything else seemed to fall into place.

This view of the religious life that TOB gave me has helped me grow in my understanding of this beautiful calling. This program helped me realize that if I enter the religious life, Jesus is actually giving me what I wanted when I dreamed about marriage. Instead of giving me an earthly husband, Jesus is going to give me Himself. I won't just marry any man. I will marry THE Man. I think every girl, deep down inside, dreams of a man who will love her unconditionally for who she is and who is ready to lay down his life for her. My Husband will definitely fulfill these dreams more than I can even imagine. This love between my Spouse and me can't help but bear fruit. That's when spiritual motherhood becomes a reality. For example, Mother Teresa of Calcutta beautifully exemplified what it means to be a spiritual mother. Even though she never physically had any children, her love for her Spouse bore such fruit that millions called her "mother." I too have the opportunity to become the "mother of thousands," like one of my mom's friends once told me. TOB helped bring home to me these beautiful aspects of the religious life.

Despite these beautiful aspects of the religious life, the idea of being celibate as a religious sister is so counter-cultural! Since I am a junior in high school, the question, “What do you want to study after high school?” comes up a lot. My response has caused many different reactions in people. When I answer that I want to become a religious sister, some are ready to canonize me on the spot. Others are shocked. Why is that? Why are people so afraid of celibacy? I think it has a lot to do with today’s society. Our society portrays sexual intercourse as necessary to happiness. This idea is everywhere: movies, the media, and music. And yet, however much our society glorifies sex, it fails to point out its sacredness. Consequently, many people fail to understand the true purpose of sex in its proper light. Sexual intercourse within the context of marriage is beautiful and life giving. However, as beautiful and sacred as sexual intercourse within this context is, it is not, as society portrays it, necessary to happiness. It *is* possible to be happy while living a celibate life. One simply has to meet a holy priest, sister, or consecrated celibate to realize this fact. However, it is a little difficult to explain this to people who are curious as to why I would want to become a religious sister. But now, after TOB, I can confidently explain to these people that I am exchanging marriage with a human being to marriage with Christ Himself and what could be more awesome than that!

While TOB highlights the beautiful aspects of religious life, I think it has also prepared me to face the challenges that will come with this vocation. I have learned that I do not have to repress my sexual desires in order to remain celibate. I simply have to redirect them. When I see a cute guy, for example, I do not have to think to myself, “Oh, he’s ugly,” in order to remain pure. I can recognize his attractiveness while still seeing him as a person made in the image and likeness of God. I can redirect my sexual energy, so to speak, by serving Christ as His bride with all my heart. TOB gives a formula for authentic love, so that I can do just that. This formula is loving freely, totally, faithfully, and fruitfully. Mother Teresa of Calcutta is a beautiful example of how a religious sister can carry this way of life out. She freely chose to leave her family behind and travel to India in order to become a religious sister. She totally gave of herself every day, serving the poorest of the poor. She remained faithful to her calling until death. Her life was so fruitful that, as mentioned earlier, millions called her mother. She is also an example of another aspect of love that TOB talks about. That is, love is more than just feelings. It is a choice. Mother Teresa remarkably exemplified this because during the time that she was serving others so faithfully and joyfully, she was experiencing a dark night of the soul. That is, she did not feel God’s love at all. Yet she remained faithful. In the same way, as a religious sister, there might be days when I won’t feel on fire and in love with Jesus. However, the lack of those feelings does not mean I love Jesus any less. On the contrary, those days when I feel least in love with Jesus might actually be the days when I am most in love with him if I follow Mother Teresa’s example and remain faithful. This faithfulness to Jesus, day in and day out, when I feel like it and when I don’t, is probably the biggest challenge of the religious life. But if I love Jesus and others authentically, it is possible and the rewards for this faithfulness are endless.

Thanks to TOB, I have come to realize how beautiful the religious life is and the love that I am called to give in this vocation. With this knowledge, I can go against the

current, and embrace celibacy even if the rest of the world thinks I'm crazy. I am completely open to this life if that is indeed God's plan for me. While there still are times that I am embarrassed about openly saying that I want to be a sister, I think TOB has helped me proudly explain my desire to others, despite the fact that this life is totally against what culture says will make me happy. Sometimes people get it, sometimes they don't. But even if they don't really understand why I want to enter the religious life, perhaps my desire makes them think about their own future and vocation and what God wants of their life. So I think in this way TOB has not only affected my life, but has perhaps helped me touch the lives of others. Perhaps most importantly, TOB has showed me what it means to truly love another. With this in mind, I can freely, totally, faithfully, and fruitfully love THE Other.