



Faith Like a Mustard Seed

By Sr. Clare Matthiass, CFR

Rest stops on road trips usually are not noteworthy or memorable, but there are exceptions. A mother and her young daughter couldn't help noticing the two Franciscan Sisters in the restroom with them, not to mention the four sisters hovering around the van and the one at the cash register. "Why's that lady gotta rope 'round her dress Mama?" came a clear little voice from the stall. "That's for the Faith darlin'," came the mother's confident and correct reply.

Yes, the religious habit is "for the Faith." Indeed, the whole life of a consecrated person is offered "for the Faith." In this *Year of Faith* it seems a worthwhile reflection to consider how the gift of faith figures in a call to Consecrated Life.

When we speak of the faith we could mean many different things. The Faith refers to the whole deposit of Divine Revelation – everything we believe as Catholics. This is summarized in the Creed. Man's response to God's revelation is also called faith. It is interesting that the same word is used to describe God's gift to us, and our response to God. Faith is God's gift to us and faith is our gift back to God.

The life of a consecrated person illuminates and affirms, even magnifies the tenets of our Catholic Faith in a unique way. In this article in our *Year of Faith* series I would like to reflect on ways that a sister's life illuminates the Faith. The whole life of a religious cries out to the world, "I believe!"

To begin setting out on a journey of discernment, faith is certainly required. Like Abraham who was called by God into a strange land to accomplish a mission beyond anything he thought himself capable of, a young woman seeking to follow God's will exhibits her faith in a good and loving God who created her and has a purpose and a mission for her life. By her stepping out in faith, every young woman in the process of discernment becomes a witness to our belief in a loving God who creates every unique, unrepeatable human being with a good purpose in mind. Our Lord said through Jeremiah, "For I know the plans I have for you, for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (*Jer. 29:11*).

Once a young woman comes to her own "Annunciation" and offers her personal "yes" to the call of the Lord, she enters a community and submits to formation. In taking such a step she is exhibiting her faith in God's election, in His ability to see the ends that she cannot. As a young sister in our community put it "God saw something in me that I couldn't see in myself." Even our Lady was not granted the knowledge of how it would all come to pass, yet, she believed. Saint Elizabeth exclaimed, "Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled" (*Luke 1:45*). Blessed too is the sister who takes the leap of faith and witnesses to the world that our God is trustworthy and there are still those who wish to follow Him.

In the profession of vows, the threefold "yes" of the sister is like three "Amens!" to the all-ness of God. By the vow of poverty, the religious sister exercises her faith in Divine Providence: that our

good and loving God will provide for her every need. By her life she says, “God’s word is good! When He says, ‘Do not worry about your life and what you will eat, or about your body and what you will wear.’ He means it!” Through the vow of chastity the sister proclaims to the Word has for me!” (*1 John 4:16*) and with this love, what else could be needed? The vow of chastity also magnifies our faith in eternal life where “they are neither married nor given in marriage...” (*Mark. 12:25*) and “everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times more, and will inherit eternal life” (*Matt. 19:29*). Likewise, by the vow of obedience, and the sacrifice of her own will, the sister exercises faith that only in God’s will is our peace and true happiness. “Still happier those who hear the word of God and keep it,” said Jesus in Luke 11:28. Certainly faith is needed to profess and live the evangelical counsels, and when lived, the life of a religious shines the light of faith in the world like a lamp that “gives light to everyone in the house” (*Matt. 5:15*).

Yes, the life of a religious sister says to the world “I believe!” and it says, “You can believe too!” The seed of faith then, given first in baptism, like the mustard seed our Lord spoke of, grows as it is nourished by friendship with Christ and, in the life of a faithful religious, grows into “a large tree for the birds of the air to take shelter in its branches” (*Luke 13:19*).

Let us pray that in this *Year of Faith* our faith will grow and many will come to take shelter in the branches.