

HE IS THE "PLACE" I WAS LOOKING FOR



When I was young, a seed took root in the soil of my heart that made me yearn to live a life of prayer—a life centered wholly on God. Where did this irresistible urge come from? I think it stemmed from the longing for God expressed in the songs

my parents sang at home.... I had always loved music, and so for me it was normal that prayer was intrinsically linked to song. I don't remember many of the official prayers I learned and recited when I was a child, but the songs I heard were recorded on a "tape" hidden in the folds of my heart and nothing will ever erase them.

I was eight years old the first time I saw women soldiers and also the first time I saw women apostles. The latter were the Daughters of St. Paul. One Saturday morning, my Dad took me along with him when he went to do some work in a nearby town. As usual, we paid a visit to the local church. That was one of the happiest days of my life because my father bought two books for me from some nuns who were holding a book exhibit there. I will never forget that day! Those kind, smiling nuns said that they were Paulines from the big city of São Paulo. When my Dad and I returned home, I joyfully told everyone that I had met the "Paulistas," not connecting their name with the Apostle Paul because I had never heard of him, but with the city of São Paulo. I loved books and I read those two titles thousands of times but I did not feel any vocational pull toward the nuns and their mission. Their apostolate did not give me any "hint" as to what I might want to do with my own life. It just made me happy to know that there were nuns who sold children's books. For me, it would have been a dream come true if I were given the chance to see them once again so as to buy more books from them!

Six years later it was my older sister Rosa's turn to meet the Daughters of St. Paul, and today she too is Pauline. Rosa had heard the nuns on a radio program, inviting girls to visit them. My sister accepted the invitation and I went along with her, just to keep her company. When we reached the FSP convent, what a surprise it was for me to see the same nuns from whom my father had purchased my two treasured books! But I was still not looking at them in the light of a possible vocation for myself.

I was about fourteen years old then and in that time frame two things captured my attention

simultaneously: one was an advertisement urging young people to enlist in the Brazilian army (the military was another passion of mine!) and the other was an article I read about the Carmelite nuns in their news bulletin.

Shortly after this, my sister Rosa entered the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Paul and on her first visit home she asked me about my plans for the future. I told her I was thinking about becoming a Carmelite. Later, to my surprise, I received a letter from a Daughter of St. Paul in Rosa's community. It turned out that, while talking with my sister, the nun had asked her about her family, and when Rosa told her about me, that clever FSP decided to write to me. My parents were not pleased about this. They thought that one nun in the family was enough! Not long afterward, a Daughter of St. Paul came to visit me, and I told her in response to her question that, yes, I was thinking about becoming a nun but not a Daughter of St. Paul. The vocationist promptly replied: "Why not? Our founder, Fr. James Alberione, said that FSPs were meant to be 'contemplative in action and active in contemplation.'" I didn't understand what she meant but her words struck a chord deep within me. It took another four years for those words to bear fruit but in 2001 I followed in the footsteps of my sister and entered the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Paul. I made my first profession in 2006 and my perpetual profession in 2012.



There are those who might ask: But what about the military? What about the monastery? What about the contemplative life? The Congregation, with the patience and love of a Mother, gradually helped me realize that my hunger for God, for the interior life and for contemplation was not unique to me. St. Paul, Fr. Alberione, Thecla Merlo and numerous Daughters of St. Paul throughout the years had undertaken the same search because human beings are hungry for God!

Today, I am not a member of the military, but nevertheless I appreciate discipline—the real discipline that comes from freedom. I am not a member of a contemplative Congregation, but my interior life is a little bit "Carthusian." The Lord found me! All along, he was the "place" I had been looking for and will always look for.

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