

In the name of the Lord, Peace and good!

Let me tell you briefly how much my life has improved since I met the community of the *Little Friars and Nuns of Jesus and Mary*, and the spiritual fruit of this encounter.

MY NAME... is Sr. Effatà Maria Teresa. This is the religious name that (in some way) I received from the Lord (cf. Is 62:2), a name which always invites me (and others) to *be open* to God's grace: "*Effatà*" (in the NAB "*Ephphatha*") means, in Hebrew, "*be opened*," as we read in the Gospel of Mark when Jesus put his fingers into the ears of a deaf and dumb man and "*gazing heavenward...said Ephphatha*" (cf. Mark 7:31-37) – whereupon the man was able to listen to the Word of God and began to speak.

My given name is Mirijam Christiane Volter. I was born after a few hours of difficult labor pains (in which I see a symbol of the *difficult spiritual labor pains* that I would have to undergo before I reached the True Birth to a New Life in the Catholic Church) in the German town of Filderstadt, close to Stuttgart, on the 24th of October 1979. *Difficult spiritual labor pains* indeed; until the 23rd of June 2004 (the date of my Confirmation in the Catholic Church), I had always been a Lutheran!

Before entering the community, I went to high school then studied graphic arts and media design. I also planned on studying fine arts at the Germany Academy in Hamburg, and was admitted – but by then I had already decided to have an experience with the community.

I WAS A LOST SHEEP... When I was about thirteen years old, I sank into a pit of depression and fear where thoughts of suicide overcame me and several times I even tried to kill myself. In the worst of these attempts, I ended up in the hospital.

I was anorexic, but at a certain point it turned 360 degrees and I put on a lot of weight; I turned my back on my friends and almost didn't speak to anyone, not even my parents. I often stayed in my room, behind closed doors in the darkness, and dreamt of being someone else because I could not stand myself! My mother took me to see a counselor, and I also took medicine (because at a certain period of my life I suffered from insomnia; I was not, however, mentally ill).

I then became friends with some people who took drugs, and so I also started smoking strange substances and began to drink a lot of alcohol. I had 3 piercings: on the lip, in the eyebrow, and in the nose. When I was sixteen years old I had my first boyfriend, who was abusive. I ran away from home to Berlin, where I wanted to live on the street, but after a short period of time I returned home. My Grandpa said I was crazy!

Spiritually speaking, *I was dead in my sins* (cf. Eph 2:5). I was so lost that when I needed to at least feel a new sensation, I would cut the skin of my arms. I then met other boyfriends – one who was an alcohol addict, another who betrayed me, and another who was more normal (wanting to marry me and have children – though I didn't).

HOW MY CONVERSION STARTED... When I was 4 years old I had an accident in which half of my right leg was amputated; since then, I've had a prosthetic leg. In a certain way that was a "special grace," because now, finally, after many questions about the meaning of suffering (and especially regarding this problem of mine), I have understood that I was so taken up by the things of the world that I would probably never have searched for God and his Divine Will if it hadn't been for that suffering! – I owe this answer especially to my spiritual director Friar Volantino Verde, because he guided me like the Good Shepherd (cf. Ps 22/ cf. John 10:16) through the Word of God and the healthy Catholic Doctrine to the point of recognizing this very luminous Truth!!! – (Because God is always able to transform evil into good, even the utmost good – if we listen to Him). I was struck when I read in the Gospel: "*If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter into life maimed or crippled than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into eternal fire.*" (Matt 18:8)¹

Though I used to complain a lot before my conversion, I thank the Lord now that he permitted the right things to help me walk along the Way of Eternal Life and be detached from my passions (which made me 'protest' against the Truth and follow a dark path toward the place one enters and never leaves). These sufferings helped me mature enough to lift my eyes towards heaven and ask for God's help.

As a child I loved the Psalm of the Good Shepherd, but I have to say that I never recognized Him in any of the Lutheran pastors who were close to my family. Eventually I lost faith that God really existed; in my eyes the church was something boring and hypocritical! When I saw the Pope on television, he, in my Ecclesial ignorance, was just a rich old man who couldn't speak any more!

¹ I say this regarding my own personal case, without any offense meant to anyone with the same handicap!

But after a few years, driven by a friend's suggestions and also by curiosity, I started to read the Bible again and I often felt the need to take refuge under a crucifix planted in front of a barn outside the city. I read a little of the life of St. Francis, which touched me very much with its simplicity, poverty and spontaneity. I wanted to be spontaneous and live in poverty like he did. Contemplating nature, I wondered who created it. The cause was obvious to me: God created it, because it couldn't have been made by men! And so I found my faith in God again – also through the Word of God, above all, which I often read and then found to come true.

MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH THE COMMUNITY... happened in December 2002 in Spain, on the Way of Saint James. I was walking "the Camino" on foot with a backpack – about 500 miles to Santiago – carrying the Bible in my backpack. I wanted to understand what the Lord wanted from me and to be free, because I had no peace or joy; I was not satisfied with the things I was doing before. During the pilgrimage my legs and my shoulders were often sore from the 15-17 pound backpack that I carried with me. I often read that Jesus sent his disciples on the road carrying nothing with them, but I didn't have the courage to do so; indeed, I thought that I couldn't live without money!

But then, as I continued my journey, I met two brothers of this community, and I saw that one can still live the Gospel to 100%: they told me, "We came here from Sicily, walking and hitchhiking without anything (no money, nor bread, nor water, nor bag, etc.), just as Jesus says!" (cf. Matt 10:9-10). The friar also told me that the founder of the community – Friar Corrado (today Friar Volantino Verde) – had sent them on this journey because he felt in his heart (enlightened by the Holy Spirit) that they would meet at least one soul with a special calling.

MY EXPERIENCE IN THE COMMUNITY... After about a year and a half I decided to have an experience in the community. To get in touch with them, I learned a few words in Italian. I rode my bike to Italy and when I arrived in Sicily I felt welcomed from the first moment! Speaking with one of them, I learnt the basic truths of the Catholic Faith, because he always based his speech on the Word of God (letting me read it from an English Bible) and the Doctrine of the Catholic Church. The Lord confirmed for me that what he said was true through many signs, and through the "keys of interpretation" that he had received from Friar Volantino, he truly opened my ears to be able to listen! I learned, for example, that *Jesus founded his Church on St. Peter (cf. Matt 16:16)* and therefore *the full Blessing of Jesus was always in the Catholic Church, from Generation to Generation, that is, Pope after Pope, right up to the Pope of today (cf. Eph 3:21)*. Those who had departed from this Apostolic Blessing (as Luther did) didn't stay in full obedience to Jesus! Indeed, it is written: "*They went out from us, but they were not really of our number; * if they had been, they would have remained with us...*" (1 John 2:19). I was also struck that in Heaven we won't only have a soul, but we'll also have a body on the last day. On the basis of the Word of God, this friar demonstrated things such as Jesus having an immortal Body (cf. Luke 24:39) and the [true presence of Christ in the] Eucharist. In regards to the Eucharist, at that point I still doubted whether it was truly the Body of Jesus...but after having it explained to me, I dreamt that night (or rather had an *Interior Perception* – to use Pope Benedict XVI's terminology in *Magisterium* 294) about *a red sun with many very fine rays jumping towards some railway tracks. The sun was alive and very endearing, as though it were playing a game for little children; it touched my heart, looking at me as if it were an eye. It made me understand that I should follow it, and I did!* After waking up that morning, I asked myself what all of this might mean. In the evening we went to Mass in the Mother Church of Marsala (Sicily) and, still asking myself what the meaning might be of what I'd seen, I opened the Bible and found an image of the Blessed Sacrament which had the very same shape as that red sun that I had seen. So, after recounting everything that had happened, and also reflecting about the Eucharistic Miracle of Lanciano (where the host transformed into true flesh, which is alive even today), *I understood that Jesus is alive in the Eucharist and he wanted me to follow him, just as his disciples did! (cf. Matt 9: 9)* [or as the children of Fatima did, who together with 70,000 others saw a vision of the sun spinning around in the sky] – to follow him *right up to the "sun" of the Eucharist*, on the railway track of the Word of God and the parallel track of the Teaching of the Catholic Church, which was pointed out to me by a friar who wore a "V" outlined in red over his heart: namely, Friar Volantino (through another friar whom he had left behind, telling him, "*I'm leaving on a pilgrimage. When this girl comes from Germany, the first thing that you need to explain and show her is that the fullness of truth is in the Catholic Eucharist; otherwise she cannot have this experience in our community!*" – which was something that Saint Francis of Assisi would also say). I said "Yes" to following that red Eucharistic Sun that had shed so much blood also for my sins. And that sun, which was also like an eye, I finally recognized also in the eyes of Friar Volantino. After about three months, I received Confirmation in the Catholic Church – thanks to Jesus and Mary, and to Friar Volantino who asked that I might have the grace to have my Confirmation immediately (usually it takes 2 years!). He had seen my great desire to become Catholic and to receive the true and certain Sacraments which, in my Holy Perseverance, will help me enter immediately into Heaven after death, even avoiding Purgatory.

DYING IN GOD'S WILL... Then I also prayed to understand if the Lord was calling me to stay in this community. One day I was praying in the Chapel and I fell asleep (a little like the boy Samuel in the Bible, who was sleeping in the temple next to the ark of God when the Lord called him – cf. 1Sam 3) and I heard a gentle but determined voice that

came from the tabernacle (it was the voice of Jesus) that asked me: "Whom do you have to marry?" I answered: "The ideals of Christ!" Again the voice asked: "Whom do you have to marry?" I answered the second time: "The ideals of Christ!" When I woke up, I found the first confirmation that Jesus truly wanted me to marry his ideals when my eyes rested on the image of the face of the Shroud of Turin which had been placed over the tabernacle right in front of me! And I found the second confirmation – thanks to my Spiritual Director – in the Sacred License of the Christian, in these exact words: "LICENSE B-C-D-E: is for the transportation of men and women towards Paradise. It is obtained by those who "marry" the ideals of Christ, dedicating all their life to the conversion and salvation of souls (who are heading towards eternal damnation); naturally they obtain this through the prayers and sacrifices of the apostolate, (Fatima 19th of August 1917), becoming Apostles of Jesus and Immortal princes or princesses of Paradise! (cf. Matt 19:21, 27-30)." And this was not all; he also had me read, in the rule of the community (at the very beginning of the "DNA" Internal Ruling): "THE RULE of the VOLANTINI VERDI (with the drawing of a little red heart) THE LITTLE FRIARS AND NUNS of JESUS AND MARY – These are the ideals and the conditions to become a part of this family of the Little Friars, crazy (out of Love for Jesus and Mary), simple, humble and poor"... (Prologue, Rule of the Volantini Verdi). And in the Bible: When the dream was repeated twice it means that "the Lord has decided that it shall be" (cf. Gen 41:32). By these and other facts I understood that this was His will for me! And I said, "Here I am! Yes, I want to do Your Will, Lord, in this community of Little Ones!"

WHAT ARE THE FRUITS OF THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE COMMUNITY?...

... I found peace and joy, and I feel satisfied every day seeing so many fruits of meditation, conversion and vocation since I've become Catholic and a Little Nun, following the friars on the pilgrimages as did Our Lady and the pious women who followed Jesus from town to town (cf. John 2:12; Luke 8:1-3). I also try to 'complete in my flesh what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ' in order to build up also in this way the members of the mystical Body of Christ that is the Catholic Church (cf. 1Tm 3:15; Col 1:24), instead of accusing and destroying it as I did before! Now I understand the meaning of my life (thanks to Friar Volantino who explained it to me through the Word of God!), which, to put it simply, is this: "to believe in and to gradually do God's will; all the rest is worms, ashes and vanity!" It is enough to take a look at the reality as it is; I'm neither depressed nor sad! I don't take any drugs or alcohol or medicine; now I get "high" on Jesus and Mary, and I'm feeling so much better. I'm no longer a prisoner of my thoughts and fears, etc., and I'm even maturing in getting over my timidity. I have the certainty that (in my holy perseverance) in Heaven I will have a beautiful and perfect body, forever young and without handicap (and this is not a fairy tale but a great mystery)! I have found the most beautiful Bridegroom of all (cf. Ps 45:3) in this Gospel lifestyle, totally (by the grace of God) marrying the ideals of Jesus. I have also found the most truthful and noble work that exists, the work of Evangelization – "Gospel at hand, with the Anchor of the Apostolic Tradition", as Pope Benedict XVI said (and above all as Jesus says – cf. Luke 10:1-7)! I have also entered upon the most beautiful of studies, given that we study above all how to leave the "box of death" and become Saints (in addition to the formation internal to the community which helps us study and meditate on the Sacred Scripture profoundly, broadly, and at great heights, with our deeds and in the truth...together with studying the life of the Saints and an almost systematic reading of the Teaching of the Catholic Church). As to the skills that the Lord has given me (translations in different languages, drawing, playing music and so on...), I can make them bear the most fruit now "for His greater glory and the salvation of the most of souls possible, for this is the aim and the eternal crown of our faith. Amen!" And in regards to saving souls, there has also been fruit in my earthly family: my older brother got married in the Catholic Church, and my parents are now happy that I have found my calling (whereas before they were upset!)...and so on...

I WISH YOU A HOLY SPIRITUAL PILGRIMAGE
TO SAINTHOOD AND BLESSED IMMORTALITY!!

Yours faithfully,
Sr. Effatà Maria Teresa



I started to write this testimony on the 2nd of June 2008, the feast day of Saint Marcellus and Peter, martyrs – "Jesus laid down his life for us: let us then also give it...for those who should be edified by our martyrdom" (cf. Off. of Read. June 2)

In the reading of Evening Prayer there was also this: "That you may be filled with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to live in a manner worthy of the Lord, so as to be fully pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work ..." (Col 1:9b-11) And in the intercessions of Evening Prayer we read: "Gather in unity all who bear the name of Christian, so that the world may believe in Christ whom you have sent" (Intercession, Evening Prayer Mon. Week 1)

I finished on the 3rd of June 2008, the day of Saint Charles Lwanga and companions, Martyrs; one had his feet cut off ...and another, a saint whose name was Morando, was a German who made a long pilgrimage to the tomb of St. James of Compostela when he was very young. (cf. Mille Santi del giorno, ediz. Vallecchi)