

Holy brothers and sisters,

Saturday evening during the Pentecost Vigil Mass, I professed my first vows to Christ of poverty, chastity, and obedience to our Lord, and received the white habit and white scapular. The final week of these five years of preparation I spent in silence with cloistered Benedictine sisters. This abbey was at my home parish, so I had grown up peering through the barbed wires at the nuns out in the fields with the cows and tractors. The cows and tractors I was fascinated by, the nuns were just part of the scenery. No doubt, they saw me and the other little rascals and prayed for us, and now it has born fruit.

Although I opened my heart more and more to the Word of Christ since I was twelve, I hadn't even much curiosity about consecrated life. Something intuitive in me, and the family and culture that formed me had me convinced that I was made for marriage. That was correct.

As I exited high school, however, a book came into my hands called *Virginity*, by Padre Cantalamessa, and a young married man, Christopher West, came into my home and did his first recording of a teaching on the Theology of the Body. And a phone call came from Archbishop Charles challenging me to a raquetball match. Surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, my mind and heart received this epiphany: consecration is a kind of marriage. In fact, it is a step into the marriage that is the ultimate vocation of each one of us, and that is the vocation of the Church herself: to be *Sponsa Christi*, the Spouse of Christ.

The Spirit worked at my heart for the next few years, as I left Notre Dame for the diocesan seminary. There, again, they formed us toward this sense of consecration, of celibacy that is not just a discipline, but the greatest spiritual charism that the Lord can bestow in this life. Our formators called us to a life not just of ministry, but of brotherhood and a life that breathes in and out a rhythm of recollected prayer.

When I met the Beatitudes, I saw a beautiful and joyful family of prayer, full of the different gifts of married couples, priests, brothers, nuns, and the poor. I met an ambiance of prayer I had never imagined.

I left the high life of Theology and pasta in Rome and took the plunge into life "in the shire", life of being poor in spirit, of more simple work, of proclaiming Christ with so much song and dance and hospitality, of making room each day for at least an hour of intimacy with Him in adoration.

Here in Denver, our first American house has a focus on mission and ministry, as often our houses are that are "satellites" of the more contemplative and rural houses like I've been living in the last four years in Italy and Israel. The time last week with the austerity and quiet of the Benedictines rejuvenated my love for this heart of the Beatitudes vocation and any vocation: prayer, community, and the intimacy of being set aside from the ways of the world in order to belong to Him.

Dear Lord, may this new, pure, white robe be a witness to the world and also daily to me of your unfathomable and immanent love that has clothed each of us with the salvation of our baptism.

I want to invite any of you to come to Israel on pilgrimage with us. We are organizing trips for the next two summers. They will be longer than most pilgrimages: 3 weeks to 3 months. They'll be specially designed for youth who want to pray, hike, rough it, save finances, encounter Judaism and Hebrew, and to have an experience of community and religious life--living and serving each other as community as we go, and meeting our houses and various other orders. Let me know if you want

more info. See the photo from the ceremony attached.

