

“Sister Anne” (Mary K.) Farran -- <https://houseofmaryomd.org>
An improved “chapter” version is in preparation for a book publication.

Good evening everyone!
Greetings to our audio listeners!

We will soon begin a series of Tuesday talks for Living a Marian life, directed to friends who have been living a prayerful life for a long time, but want to get closer to Mary. This talk will be more personal than the rest of the series. I want to share with you my own motivation for striving ever harder for a life of intimate union with God.

(Note: The audio talk departs in places from this text)

As a Freshman at Newman University (it was Kansas Newman back in those days), I was really struggling with the call to the cloister. Yes, I wanted to save souls. St. Therese was a powerful witness of the fruitfulness of the Carmelite life, but she was a saint. Her prayers were holy. What if I didn't reach that level? I might be more fruitful in the world. I had two paths tempting me. My family had been in the restaurant business for years. My father was partial owner or an investor in nine Sonics in five states. In my early teens I would work late and after we closed the restaurant I would accompany him to business meetings. I grew up among investors and entrepreneurs. It was natural that I would think of a business of my own. At eighteen I had an idea for a theme amusement park. It would be based on Camelot. In my mind I designed some rides, a logo, some costumes and even wrote a little song for a commercial. I knew people who had talent or had money to invest. This wasn't any daydream. I knew these amusement parks can potentially rake in a mint. I had plans for using this money for charities.

On the other hand, because my family was devout, I had been following Mary's prophecies since I saw *Song of Bernadette* at the age of seven. But especially it was Fatima that captured my attention from the seventh grade. I was very intrigued with Mary's concern to convert Russia. In high school I took a course on Russia. I joined a club where students met to simulate the United Nations, representing different countries. Now I was in college and I had attracted the attention of the Friends University professor in charge of the political science department. He had connections and wanted to groom me as an ambassador, where I could work for peace, and surely help people on many levels.

Would it be Carmel, business or a political career? One day during theology class while reviewing the *Summa Theologiae*, the professor remarked rather casually that St. Thomas Aquinas asserted that it was a greater work to help the good to become perfect, than to save a soul from damnation. I was utterly scandalized. I was so shocked and surprised that I didn't even open my mouth to ask the professor to elaborate. I just couldn't wrap my head around that.

St. Thomas was a Dominican. St. Dominic had found his Order to save heretics from being lost. The Albigensians had gotten involved in very sinful practices. But St. Thomas would rather let these sinners burn forever, just so a few good persons could enjoy a higher place in heaven. The more I thought about it the more confused I became. Finally, confusion gave way to feeling quite angry. This just wasn't right! He's a theologian of the Church. Well, maybe I was in the wrong Church!

I spent days trying to solve this riddle from every angle, but I always came up scandalized. Finally, as I was driving somewhere in Wichita, I asked the Lord to calm me down and help me understand the truth. I didn't normally listen to the radio, but a story came on the news. Monsoon season in India was extending too long. The rich were beginning to suffer. They had well-built houses on stilts, and piles of rice. But the extended flooding had ruined their fuel supply. They had nothing dry to burn for fuel to cook the rice. I had never reflected that humans can't digest raw grain. We are not animals. It suddenly seemed significant that Jesus used bread and wine for the Eucharist, cooked grain and fermented fruit, something animals don't prepare and don't need.

I normally went to daily Mass. It was that very day or the next day when I heard the Gospel on the parable of the sower. The good soul with good soil yielded a great harvest, thirty, sixty, and hundredfold. But what was the harvest: raw grain! A good soul was like a barn full of unmilled wheat. It was good for seed, but not for eating. We can't offer God raw grain. He can't

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consume that. Shouldn't we become a Eucharist for Him? So this is what the saints meant when they say we have to be ground, then sifted, then moistened with the Holy Spirit, then kneaded and finally purified in the oven of trials. God is willing to work with us to perfect us so that for all eternity He and that willing soul can feast on each other in a mutual outpouring of intimate love.

Yes, He's prepared to reward and entertain good souls in the heavenly bleachers, but these are the outdoor friends, who belong to the barn. There are many mansions in the kingdom of heaven. Some souls will be in the upper chambers with ready access to his inner room where they will entertain Him with their complete gift of self.

When that insight came to me, I had a total meltdown. I understood at last what St. Thomas was saying. God deserves our perfect love. A trillion souls in the bleachers is like raw grain in the barn, or on stilts during a monsoon. But baked flour is a feast for the Holy Trinity. From that moment I practically flew to the cloister. It didn't matter any more whether I would be fruitful, or even if I reached perfection. God deserved all my love. I would die trying.

But when I reached Carmel I learned the sayings of St. John of the Cross: *One perfect soul will do more good than many who are not perfect.* What is perfection? Union with the divine will. St. John was saying that the more you hand your life over to God, the more He will be free to act in you. He will use you as an instrument of grace to save many souls who might otherwise not have been saved.

I envisioned this as scooting over to the passenger side and letting God take the wheel. I know He will take me to unexpected places. His imagination and knowledge far exceed my own. A hundred times a day I can unconsciously grab the steering wheel and make a decision without Him, and then repent and try again to let Him rule my life. Eventually, I might get that down to fifty times a day, and then twenty-five. Perfection doesn't mean that angels will appear and give me directions. It means that I'll become more attuned to hearing the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. I just have to learn to relax and enjoy the ride, enjoy his company and all the work He introduces me into!

Mary is our model for saying “behold the handmaid.” “Fiat Lord!” “Let it be done to me as you will, not my will.” When we consecrate ourselves to her, we are asking her to makes us fully attentive and docile to the Holy Spirit. Did God leave her in Nazareth in a safe place, like grain stored in a barn? No, He pulls us out and makes us fruitful. Life becomes an adventure, and for that we need a guide. This is why we'll be gathering in the weeks to come to talk about Mary and learn from her.