

# Aspirant

A publication of The Laboure Society

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## Alicia Torres Shares Steps to Religious Life

*Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum. Benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Jesus.*



It is only through God's Divine Mercy and the constant care of Mama Mary that I am able to share my story with you. I've finally been quiet enough to hear what God has been whispering in my heart for years, and now that I have experienced that Joy that only comes from God, I know there

is nothing else that could complete me other than giving myself fully to my Beloved.

So many Little Chapels and so much Mercy! A vocation truly grows in silence. *There is no silence richer than that silence spent with Jesus Himself.* I remember as a very small child visiting our neighborhood church nearly every day with my mom, brother and sister. I would always carefully remember to pray both before the statue of Mama Mary and that of St. Joseph--I didn't want either to feel ignored! I knew Jesus was in the Tabernacle, and I sincerely longed for the day when I could receive Him in Holy Communion. Joyfully, the day to receive Jesus finally came in 1993.



With seminarian friends from Mundelein Seminary waiting for Papa Benedict at the Youth Gathering at St. Joseph Seminary in Dunwoodie, NY, April 2008

I always anticipated Sunday Mass and spending time at the parish. My siblings and I were home schooled and St. Benedict's Chapel was literally the center of our family's activities outside our home. Every morning our mom would lead us in a prayer for vocations...which I remember to this day. Although we had pictures books with religious sisters, I never really knew any as a child. But, Fr. Damian, our parish priest, had a great influence on my life. He would often come to visit our house on Sundays. He would tell stories about his time in the Seminary, and taught us how to make the famous St. Vincent Abbey bread. Fr. Damian even came with us to Six Flags and rode the roller coasters with me! He was such an example of holiness and joy.

I do remember asking him once if I could take St. Francis of Assisi as my patron for confirmation...he said I'd have to choose a girl saint, which made me a little sad, but St. Francis would still come back to play a role in my life.

As I grew older, my mom began to have a devotion to the Divine Mercy, and so naturally, I did too. I began to attend Immaculate Heart of Mary School in 8th grade, and asked if we could pray the Mercy Chaplet on Fridays in our little chapel. The Sisters were supportive, but it was always so hard to get my peers to come pray. Yet, I was consoled by the 1st and 5th graders, who were ever faithful, as was my classmate, now Sr. Magdalen Marie, who entered religious life the year after we graduated high school.

Among the sisters, Sr. Marie-Jean had a particularly strong influence on me. She was constantly encouraging, and particularly supported me in my pro-life efforts. We would regularly go to pray in front of a Boston Area abortion clinic, and prayed daily at school for the end of abortion. Sr. Marie-Jean had such a motherly spirit, and truly cared for us students. Ever joyful, she shared the light of Christ with us, and was a tremendous mentor for me during my high school years...always, always she focused on Jesus!

After learning I was not accepted by the Naval Academy, I had to reevaluate the 'plans' I had made for my future, and finally ended up in Chicago at Loyola University. I was not a quiet student, and became very active in Catholic activities and the pro-life club. I was a favorite on campus and I was trusted, too. My Junior year I was awarded the Arnold Damen Award, presented to students who exemplified the Jesuit values of services to others and being men and women of extraordinary character.

Yet, something else happened Junior year that was even more important. After many years of thinking about it, and seeing

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# Thoughts from the Executive Director

Happy Easter!

Why this greeting in May?

As we know, not always consciously, the Easter Season continues to Pentecost (which means fiftieth day); actually for Easter People, Easter is forever.

Easter People live rich, full, at times difficult lives: "through Him, with Him, in Him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor are yours Almighty God Father;" we 'dance' with God in his Holy Will!

The following recently appeared in my Serra Club's newsletter "On Eagles Wings" (author unknown):

## Guidance or ... Dancing With God?

*This morning when I meditated on the word Guidance, I kept seeing "dance" at the end of the word. I remembered reading that doing God's will is a lot like dancing. When two people try to lead, nothing feels right. The movement doesn't flow with the music. And everything is quite uncomfortable and jerky. When one person realizes that, and lets the other lead, both bodies begin to flow with the music.*

*One gives gentle cues, perhaps with a nudge to the back or by pressing lightly in one direction or another. It's as if two*



*become one body, moving beautifully. The dance takes surrender, willingness, and attentiveness from one person and gentle guidance and skill from the other.*

*My eyes drew back to the word "Guidance" the "G" made me think of God, followed by "u" and "I" and then dance" --- God, you and I dance.*

*As I lowered my head, I became willing to trust that I would get guidance about my life. Once again, I became willing to let God lead. My prayer for you today is that God's blessings and mercies are upon you on this day and everyday.*

*May you abide in God, as God abides in you. Dance together with God, trusting God to lead and to guide you through each season of your life."*

I think this is a very appropriate piece for an issue of the *Aspirant!* All members of the Society participate in a beautiful way through: our prayers, works, financial support, and our solidarity providing some of the 'music' for our aspirants to continue their 'dance' with God.



Continued Easter blessings,

Cy Laurent

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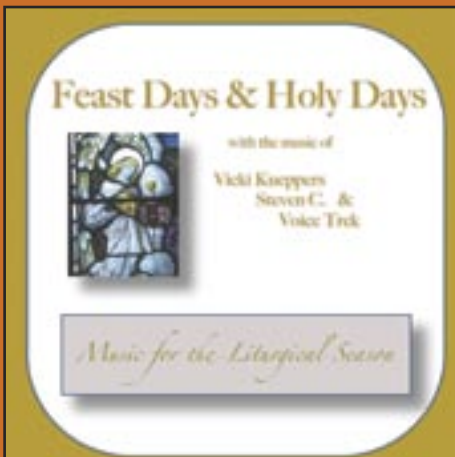
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The Laboure Society exists to provide financial assistance to individuals who must eliminate debt in order to pursue their vocation to priesthood or religious life in the Catholic Church.

Mail donations to:  
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## Alicia Torres Shares Steps to Religious Life — Continued from page 1

Sr. Marie-Jean and her community live it out, I finally made my Total Consecration to Jesus through Mary--an amazing devotion spread by St. Louise Marie DeMontforte, St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe and Papa John Paul II. The moment I made the Consecration, my life changed drastically and I began to feel tugs on my heart toward religious life.

After visiting the Sisters of Life in New York, I was convinced that Jesus was truly inviting me to be totally His. I was at peace and knew true Joy. Yet the purpose of the enemy is to take what is true, good, and beautiful and twist it. I began to doubt this grace that God was offering me..I went back and forth, committing to no real discernment process.

Yet, there came a moment when I realized that my life had entered a vicious cycle. I needed to make a choice to take Christ at His word.

On a pilgrimage to Europe I had the grace of encountering Divine Mercy at the Shrine of St. Maria Faustina in Krakow, Poland. I'd prayed the Chaplet for years, and yet when I was there it hit me so hard! I could not stop myself from sobbing, and I knew that Jesus, through St. Faustina, was speaking the truth of His love in my heart.

A few days later an even more powerful experience happened in Assisi. There, in the little chapel St. Francis built with his own hands--Our Lady of the Angels--I was embraced by God's presence, and once again began to sob. It was not out of fear, but rather being overwhelmed by the immense love God has for me.

Almost a year later, I knew I had to stop living in limbo and listen to that voice speaking in my heart. At that point I was working full-time for the Archdiocese of Chicago Respect Life Office. Coming back from a Theology of the Body presentation at the University of Illinois, I fell ill. I was at home in bed for nearly two weeks, the last two weeks of Lent.

During that time God sent me an angel, my friend Fr. Mercer. We were in the habit of corresponding through email. Being a holy priest, Fr. Mercer asked about my discernment, and encouraged me to pursue

religious life. He shared with me the wisdom of the Saints, and many wonderful Spiritual Classics. During my time of illness, I wrestled with the question, "What is God calling me to?" I would literally awaken during the middle of the night and immediately think: am I to be a sister? What do I do?? The Sacred Triduum provided an excellent space for me to come closer to Christ, and even in my weakened state of body, my spirit was becoming strong...and I realized that I must stop turning a deaf ear on God's invitation of Love.

I knew a Franciscan Priest in Chicago, Fr. Bob Lombardo, who'd been talking about a community of Franciscans here in our city. Fr. Bob invited me to the Mission of Our Lady of the Angels, and listened to my story. He confirmed that yes, indeed, with the blessing of Cardinal George, the Spirit was moving to form a Franciscan Community in Chicago. With this prayer on my heart, I traveled to New York City for Papa Benedict's visit in April 2008. As I was asking for clarity, I received a curious sign. A Jesuit priest invited me to reflect on the simplicity and joy of St. Francis while we were waiting for the Holy Father to arrive on the grounds of St. Joseph Seminary in Yonkers, New York. I'd never heard a Jesuit mention St. Francis before (and I'd been around Jesuits for years)!

When Papa Benedict began to speak at the Youth Rally that day, my heart felt as if he were speaking directly to me. His message was simple: Christ needs YOU. ALL of YOU. Do not be afraid! Finally I let Christ speak in the silence of my heart. The more I prayed, the clearer the invitation came...that Jesus wants me, all of me.

There is nothing more that could satisfy my heart. I believe we are all made for Heaven, but we must do something beautiful for Jesus before we get there. I



March for Life 031: My friend John-Paul and I at the March for Life in Washington, D.C. Jan 2009

cannot think of anything more beautiful than being fully, freely His. I know that the way God has created me to love is so big, it must be fully consecrated to Christ, so that in turn I may share that love with others, through my Beloved Jesus.

There is freedom only in love. I desire nothing more than to consecrate my life to Jesus, as his little spouse, following the Spirit of Joy lived by St. Francis. I want to be a witness to what we are all created for: Heaven. I want to be a messenger of mercy and love to the poor in our midst: those suffering from material and spiritual poverty.

I have no desire to measure the success of my life. As St. Maximilian, a faithful follower of St. Francis, said, "God is pleased even with our desire to please Him." I may not be a success in the eyes of the world, yet my soul desires to please my Beloved, and with this, I am satisfied.

As joyful as I am about where God is calling me, there is a practical matter that He and we are working on, which is my educational debt. The good news is that the Laboure Society has agreed to support me in this matter.

More than anything, I count on your prayers to help support me in my journey to Religious Life. Know of my prayers for you! May Christ, through the intercession of His Immaculate Mother, bless and keep you and those you love!

## Saint Catherine of Laboure and the Miraculous Medal

St. Catherine of Laboure was beatified 76 years ago in May, and canonized a Saint 52 years ago this July. The following is a bit of history on this beautiful saint from which the Laboure Society takes its name.

The night of July 18, 1830, was a night that changed the history of the world. It was the night that the Blessed Virgin Mary ushered in the modern Marian era. It had been almost 300 years since the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe in 1531. This night in 1830 Our Lady's apparition began a series of Marian apparitions, manifestations and ecclesial events that were to succeed one another down to our own day. We can very well see why Pope Paul VI declared, "Our era may well be called the Marian Era." (The Great Sign, #6, p.11; May 13, 1967)

That night in 1830 was a blessed night. The Holy Mother of God began her plans with a 24-year-old novice in the Motherhouse of the Sisters of Charity, on the Rue due Bac in Paris. That novice, whom we now know as St. Catherine Labouré, was sleeping in her curtained bed in the dormitory with the other novices. She was awakened by her Guardian Angel, who called her softly several times. She awoke to see her Angel as an extremely beautiful child about five years old, whose vesture was dazzlingly bright. The Angel said, "Come to chapel; the Blessed Virgin is waiting for you."

She followed the angel to the chapel, and there began her encounter with the Blessed Virgin. The Lady spoke, "My child, the good God wishes to entrust to you a mission." She told Catherine that she would have to endure trials in carrying out the mission, but she would have consolation in knowing that she was working for the glory of God. The Lord would be with her and would guide

her. "Have confidence. Do not be afraid," The mission would be revealed at a later time.

The mission was revealed to her several years later and had to do with what we now know as the Miraculous Medal. "All who wear it will receive great graces. They should wear it around the neck. Graces will abound for persons who wear it with confidence." So this was the mission entrusted to Catherine: to see to the making of this medal and to spread its use. During 1830 and 1831 this vision of November 27 was repeated some six times to encourage Catherine in fulfilling her mission. She had to suffer much for this cause; first in trying to get the medals made, and then in trying to keep herself hidden, which she did for forty-six years till she died in 1876.

Sister Catherine died on December 31, 1876. In 1895 her cause for Beatification was introduced in Rome. She was beatified on May 28, 1933. When her body was exhumed, after fifty-seven years of burial, it was found to be completely incorrupt and supple. Catherine was canonized a Saint on July 27, 1947. This approval by God and the Church was like a seal on Wonders worked through the Medal

For more information on Saint Catherine, visit: [www.marys-touch.com/Saints/medal/medal.htm](http://www.marys-touch.com/Saints/medal/medal.htm)



### More about Our Lady of the Angels



In Alicia Torres' article, she discusses the work done at the Mission of Our Lady of the Angels. This site establishes a Catholic presence in the Humboldt Park area on Chicago's west side. This area presently is one of the poorest neighborhoods in Chicago. The purpose of the Mission is to assist the poor and evangelize through an apostolate of prayer, retreat and preaching.

One of the main outreaches of the Mission is housed in the former rectory. It includes a food pantry and clothing room, as well as a chapel for prayer/adoration and fourteen bedrooms to accommodate people wishing to come for retreat or volunteer opportunities. With the skyrocketing cost of heating, families and seniors in the area do not have the necessary resources for sufficient heat and nutritious meals.

Drugs and gangs pose a constant threat to at-risk youth in the neighborhood. The former Parish Center (Kelly Hall), now almost a brand new community center is ideal for a youth outreach/ neighborhood center. The programs will include sports, computer lab, and classes such as English as a second language, etc. In addition to great programs for youth, Kelly Hall will have programs for area seniors that help them live healthy, safe, meaningful lives, in dignity.