

Missionary in the Cloister

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A missionary is usually a person on the move, but that is not always the case. In the missionary month, we will look at the missionary vocation lived in the cloister. The Sister-Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration, popularly known as the “Pink Sisters”, are missionaries on their knees. One of them is Sister Mária Terezka Vlasáková, who is living in Mount Grace Convent, Saint Louis, Missouri, in the United States, for almost a year.

The young nun comes from Stará Turá, Slovakia, and until recently was a member of the community of the Holy Trinity Convent in Nitra, Slovakia. The interview was prepared by Jozef Bartkovjak SJ.

Sister Maria Terezka, you are a member of the contemplative branch of the missionary family of the Divine Word Missionaries and Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit, founded by St. Arnold Janssen. How would you describe the charism of the Pink Sisters?



• Our whole life, everything we are and do, is focused on the glorification of the Triune God. Our life in strict cloister allows us to penetrate more and more deeply into the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, to know and love God and to grow into a stronger and more intimate relationship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And from a heart thus gifted, somehow automatically arises the desire that others also experience a deeper relationship with God, to know Him more, to love Him, and thus achieve the salvation of their souls. This is our missionary aspect, for we are a contemplative-missionary Congregation. We realize our charism through a contemplative life in permanent cloister, constant adoration, praying the Liturgy of the Hours, praying and

offering for priests, especially those who work in the missions, and we also pray for all the intentions that people confide in us. To better experience God's presence, we pray every 15 minutes individually or together, the so-called Quarter-Hour Prayer, which is the spiritual heritage of our Founder.

Is every day the same in the convent? What are the fixed points of prayer and community life?

- The rhythm of each day is set by the common celebration of Holy Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours, which we pray together as a community seven times a day. There are also specific times for common meals and common recreation. The rest of the time is filled with personal prayer, study and work, and each sister has one hour of personal free time, usually in the afternoon. The Sister Superior distributes the tasks when each sister has adoration, so that we fill the whole day with adoration. We can spend our time of personal prayer in the chapel, in our room or go to pray in the garden, which I especially use.

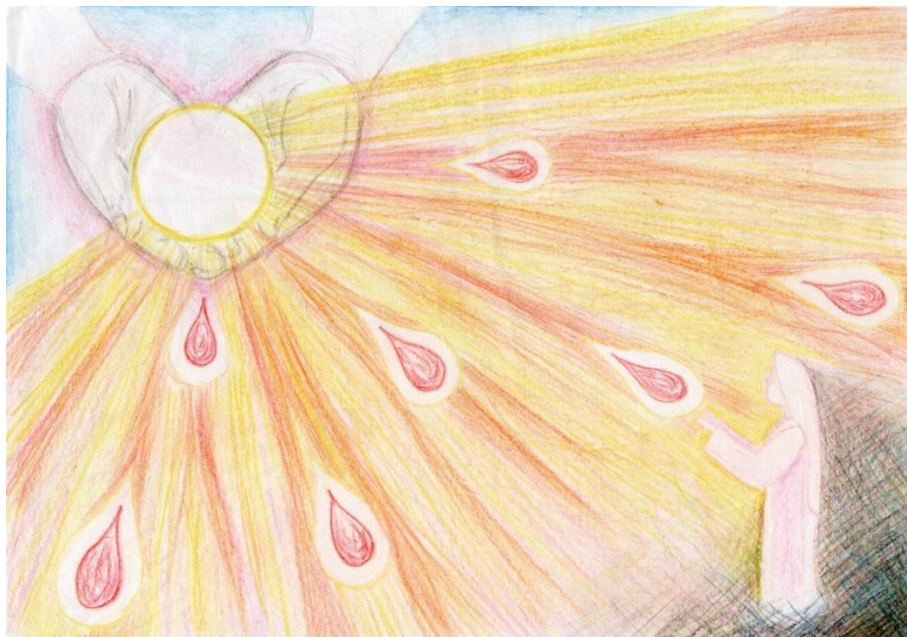


Community of the Pink Sisters in Nitra, Slovakia.
Perpetual vows of Sister Mária Terezka.

What was your journey to religious consecration? Why did you choose the name Terezka?

- God had been calling me to a deeper relationship with him since childhood. I loved silence and solitary prayer. I longed to dedicate my entire life to prayer and sacrifice for priests. However, the way to do it started to take shape shortly before graduation, when I came across the website of our religious order while googling. I was interested, although I was immediately surprised that the sisters presented themselves as a contemplative-missionary congregation, and missions meant nothing to me. Although I occasionally read “Voices from Home and from the Missions”, which is the Slovak SVD magazine, it didn't appeal to me.

However, a year after graduating, I nevertheless entered this congregation. I took this step guided by an inner intuition that this is the place where God wants me to be. However, it took about three and a half years before the "missions" began to make sense to me. It was due to the testimony of one Divine Word Missionary and the grace of God that used this event as a turning point when many things became clear to me, especially the question: "Am I right here?" After two years of postulancy in Nitra, Slovakia, and two years of novitiate in Nysa, Poland, I made my first vows on May 21, 2018.



I wrote the name "Terezka" /Slovak diminutive from "Therese"/ as one of three options when I asked for permission to make my first vows. And Mother General chose this one for me. Saint Therese is my model in an intimate relationship with God, in boundless trust in God, and in total surrender to God and His purposes. After five years of temporary vows, I made my perpetual vows on May 20, 2023, and as a remembrance, I drew a picture that depicts these features of St. Therese as I mentioned above.

How did your assignment from Nitra to Saint Louis come about? Was it challenging?

About five years ago, during my prayer, I began to think more about the idea: "What if I too were sent to overseas missions? Would I be able to do it?" We are missionaries, but some of the sisters have never been outside their homeland, and yet they are missionaries. And it is not customary for us sisters to apply and go out to the missions. So, I asked God why He was giving me such thoughts, what He meant by that. After a period of discernment and inner experience, I came to the conviction that I should make myself available to



The joy of the first snow on US soil.

the Mother Superior General that, if necessary, I am willing to go to overseas missions. And I did so. Two months after my final vows, Mother informed me that she was transferring me to St. Louis in the USA. And I was not surprised by Mother's decision. But it took more than a year for this to happen. At first, the waiting seemed long to me, because I was preparing interiorly for a possible departure from the moment I made myself available to the Mother. However, it was God's intention that the departure for the mission was delayed. Then finally, I left Slovakia and set foot on American soil on November 29, 2024.

What is your community like at Mount Grace Convent?

- Our community consists of sisters of six nationalities. The majority are Filipinos (14), two are Americans, and one each from Germany, the Netherlands, Puerto Rico, and Slovakia. The sisters are mostly old, the oldest is 97 years old, and several are partially or completely immobile. A few years ago, our general leadership designated the Mount Grace Convent infirmary to be the infirmary for elderly and sick sisters of our other US Convents. And since then several elderly sisters have been sent here from other American convents. Despite their advanced age and various health problems, the sisters are young in spirit, and there is a good and joyful atmosphere here. I am encouraged that the sisters, despite their physical limitations, are still involved in the life of the community and help the community as much as they can.



First impressions are often the strongest. What have you experienced there so far?

• Three days after my arrival, a fellow sister died. Less than a week after my arrival, a funeral was held – the first I had ever experienced in the convent. The funeral Mass was celebrated by Bishop Edward Rice, who grew up in our neighborhood and has ministered in our chapel since childhood. This bishop visited me in Nitra last year. But I did not expect that we would meet on American soil in such a short time. 😊

I liked our chapel from the very beginning. It was built in 1928 and is beautifully decorated.

In the garden, I was greeted by a statue of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, the first canonized Native American woman, who is my confirmation patron Saint.



Our yard was beautiful until recently. But on May 16th, we were hit by an EF3 tornado with very destructive consequences, uprooting and breaking ten large trees and our neighbor's roof landed in our garden. I saw most of the devastation, which lasted only ten minutes in total, from my bedroom window. It was terrible. But otherwise, thank God, nothing was hurt. We just had no electricity for six days.

What are you doing and what challenges do you have to deal with?

• Since my arrival, I have been trying to actively participate in the life of the community and fulfill the services and duties that my superior gradually entrusts to me.

I like to sing, and I also like to play the organ. I will make full use of it here at Holy Mass and at the Liturgy of the Hours, which we sing in its entirety. At first, however, it was quite difficult for me to sing in English. I know the Slovak text of the psalms almost by heart. However, I am still learning to sing in English. I also participate as lector and cantor during the Holy Mass.

In addition to several minor duties, I am in charge of arranging flowers for the chapel and serving in the dining room. I also help the elderly sisters during the day or occasionally accompany a sister in a wheelchair to the hospital for her check-up.

Another challenge for me is the different culture. The vast majority of our community is Filipino nationality. The kitchen is also a large extent of Filipino cuisine, as well as ways, resolution of conflicts, planning, communication, humor, establishing relationships ... I haven't had experience with that. I am the only Slovak, so I have to deal with this other culture myself. However, I appreciate that there is good will and willingness to communicate on both sides.

In this mission, I realize that the Holy Spirit is enabling me to do what I previously am convinced I could never do. Because I constantly ask the Holy Spirit to guide me, and

He inspires me what I should do and what I should ask for in prayer. So, this is His mission and His work that He is doing in me and through me. I try to be faithful to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and to be constantly “connected to His wi-fi.”

I also realize that a mission is not something you choose. A mission is something you accept. Missions are not about fulfilling travel desires. I didn't have any. But I accepted missions as a gift – a gift from God to me and a gift from me to others. I am very grateful for that.



The tornado uprooted 10 large trees in our garden.

What would you say to those in the field, “on the front lines” of missions?

- The success of your mission depends on your intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit; stay “connected to His wi-fi” at all times. And I pray for all of you that you will do well.