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Sr. Anne Jones: Prayer in Action

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Sr. Anne Jones: Prayer in Action

Abstract: This paper includes part of an interview with Sr. Anne Jones, a woman religious belonging an order with a history in education. This interview includes a key moment in her discernment process and her opinions on the misunderstanding that only cloistered nuns are contemplatives.

When the word nun or phrase woman religious is uttered, an image of an old women donning a habit, holding a ruler, and standing in front of a blackboard is conjured into the minds of many. This stereotypical view of religious life skews many minds, failing to recognize the complexities of the work of women religious and the decisions made by a young woman to lead her to the religious life. While the discernment process and deciding to enter religious life is often a long and difficult choice, for Sr. Anne Jones, it was so obvious that she was making the right decision that there was only peace where any uncertainty may have previously resided. When Sr. Anne began searching for a religious community, she quickly found the right fit in a monastic order that she had encountered during her school years. Sr. Anne's particular monastic order had a rich history in education, making it no coincidence that she first encountered them as her teachers, and when she joined the order, they were running an academy. When their academy closed, causing the community to move, their work became more widespread and dynamic. For Sr. Anne, her work is primarily inside the monastery as she is the liturgist for the community of women religious.

It was not until Sr. Anne went to college that she began to feel a deep unsettlement within her from where she was both literally being at college and metaphorically as she was pursuing

furthering her education rather than religious life. She knew that being at college was not where she belonged because God was calling her to join a religious community. This created a massive internal struggle that was resolved in one, clear, life-altering moment. She clearly remembers sitting in the windowsill of her dorm room, feeling completely plagued by this idea that she should join religious life. She earnestly asked God for a sign to help her discern if she was really supposed to leave college and pursue religious life. As soon as she asked for a sign, it began to snow. Sister Mary described the snow as being composed of the biggest, most beautiful snowflakes she had ever seen. The fact that there was no snow in the forecast that day further confirmed to Sister Mary that the snowfall had been just the sign from God she was searching for. Although sometimes it can be difficult for people to discern God's voice, Sr. Anne felt very blessed to have been given such clear confirmation.

Upon entering religious life, Sr. Anne chose a community that was focused on education and working. Because of this, many would believe that Sr. Anne is not a contemplative because she is not cloistered; although she technically works within the monastery now as the liturgist, she still frequently leaves to go do work in the community. This issue of Sr. Anne's state as a contemplative is an issue of semantics and understanding of prayer; there seems to be fundamental confusion between what it means to be cloistered and what it means to be a contemplative. For example, "according to a 2007 ABC News report, 'only about 1,400 women religious in the United States are members of a contemplative community'" (138). What this study was actually measuring was the number of cloistered women religious because the number of women religious who consider themselves contemplatives is much higher. This seems to be a common mistake when writing about women religious. This assumption is that because cloistered communities live a life solely devoted to prayer, they are contemplatives. Therefore, if

a woman religious does work, they are not solely devoted to prayer, and thus are not contemplatives. This, however, is assuming an incorrect understanding of prayer. As Sr. Anne explained, one need not be silent and kneeling to be having a conversation with God. If prayer is in fact to be understood as engaging in conversation with God, then prayer can happen at any time regardless of where or what one is doing. Sr. Anne explained that even the act of being interviewed for a college student's paper is prayer in that God is always present, and the hope would be that through conversations between interviewer and interviewee, God would reveal things about His character through each individual. On a broader scale, this means that any woman religious who devotes their life to prayer and being in communion with God at all times, could be considered contemplative regardless of if they also do work outside of the confines of the monastery.

Work Cited

Jones, Sr. Anne. Personal Interview. 15 Jan. 2018.