

Young Woman Jade Banks on Becoming a Nun...



My first memory of meeting an actual nun (as opposed to watching *The Flying Nun*, played by Sally Field, on TV) was when I was nine years old.

My mom and I were in the New York City Port Authority Bus Terminal and she bought me this awesome doll, which I named Janine. (Mind you, this is before “V” came out, otherwise the doll for sure would have been named Julie.)

So my mom had her wallet out and sitting by the entrance to the building were two nuns. They were handing out pamphlets. My mom said to me, “Let’s make a donation” and she let me put some money into the box.

Fast forward to today.

Jade Banks, 23-1/2 years old, will be entering the Discalced Carmelites on November 30th of this year (2017). I finally had a chance to find out what goes on inside the mind of a young woman who wants to become a nun.

Did you always want to be a nun?

Absolutely not! First of all, I thought nuns were some sort of mythical creatures. Even though I was Catholic from the cradle. I only saw them in movies, which didn’t portray them well at all (*Sound of Music* and *a Nun’s Story* with Audrey Hepburn). I often thought of the grumpy old nuns with rulers in Catholic schools. So obviously, that way of life did not sound appealing. I always prayed to Jesus - “Don’t make me do that.”

What was the defining moment you realized this was your calling?

I attended a Catholic conference and heard a talk on the lives of the saints given by a beautiful and YOUNG Sister of Life. The saint she mentioned was Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity. At age seven Elizabeth knew she was being set aside for Christ. The only thing on my mind at age seven was Cheetos. But, Elizabeth's mother would not allow her daughter to be a nun and as she got older, sent her to several military balls to try and get her married. The profound statement I am about to mention next is when I instantly knew that I was being called. All the men at the military ball one evening told Elizabeth's mother: "We can't marry her, look at her face...she is already taken." I realized being called to the life of virginity is for one reason and one reason alone, to console the Beloved Jesus, to be His spouse. To "lay down my life for my friends", for my Jesus.

What's the most asked question you get with this decision?

Two questions I am ALWAYS asked, is "What will you do all day?" and "Do you not want a husband or children?" I usually mentally roll my eyes at those questions, but I also realized that I must be patient with others. Because, I too used to ask those same questions. Only through grace was I shown the beauty of this life. The very life that most resembles Jesus, Mary and Joseph. I wrote a blog called "Celibacy, the Misunderstood Calling", which tackles all of these questions through my own personal experiences. Check it out.

What order are you joining?

Watch my short Imovie - A Call to Carmel. I'm entering the Discalced Carmelites.

What's your name, and will your name be changing once you enter the Discalced Carmelites?

My name is Jade Breanne Banks! This time next year if I am still in the process of formation, my Mother superior (Mother Stella Marie of Jesus) will pray to the Holy Spirit and choose a new name for me. Based on our devotions, observation and prayer - she chooses. Just like Jesus changing Simon's name to Peter when he became a disciple and his life changed forever. "You are rock."

Having your whole life ahead of you, what if in the future you decide to do something else?

I think Jesus planned it this way, but before discerning this way of life I was an animal science major at Colorado State University. I wanted to be a veterinarian, I pursued that since I was a junior in high-school. I remember thinking that was the only career in the world I could see myself doing. But, you know what's funny? Even in high school when I was volunteering at a veterinary hospital, I used to come home at night and pray to God, saying:

"I like this, but I'm still not satisfied. I want more!" I couldn't see myself living a "normal" life with a simple career forever. My heart knew better, but my brain had no clue at the time. As much as we need engineers, lawyers and veterinarians... the sad truth is we have WAY more engineers, lawyers and veterinarians than prayer warriors. We need laborers!

"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few". (Matt 9:37)

Will you be allowed to use modern technology to communicate such as cell phones, internet/ email, listen to music?

No technology. No cell phone. No email. No music, not the worldly type (I'll explain). Only snail mail! I can only write one letter a month (total) to my family. No letter writing during lent and advent! Once I am a fully professed nun (God willing) then I can respond to friends. Onto the music! Music is very much apart of the Carmelite lifestyle. Just like the angels singing at Christ's feet, we sing all of our prayers for our Divine Office and The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in Latin. It's a Gregorian chant style, it's the most beautiful style of music I have ever heard. It's supernatural. I imagine more of a chant style of music in heaven over Jay-Z and those Highway to Hell jams. HA! I don't see angels rapping, no offense to the world!

The type of life you've chosen is one of dedication. Did you have any struggle at all knowing you're going to be leaving your current life to start a different path?

That's a great question! Absolutely I struggled. Carmel is called the "garden" of Jesus and Mary's precious flowers. I look back and am finally able to see what type of flower I am...the wild flower! Jesus had to do a LOT of pruning and pulling of weeds to show my rebellious heart what He made me for. Jesus, more than once, in scripture told the disciples that the world is NOT our friend. The world persecuted Him, it will persecute us. This day in age is all about success. But I'll leave this question with the wise words of Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta: "I am called to be faithful, not successful."

On a day-to-day basis, are there routine things?

Many people ask "What do will you do all day?!" Many cloistered nuns say "One doesn't even know HOW much a Carmelite gets done in 24 hours." We have a set routine everyday. But, what sets us apart from other orders that serve Jesus through teaching, preaching and serving the poor? Carmelites are called to serve Jesus directly. Sitting at His feet like Mary Magdalene. The world calls it a waste, but Jesus calls it the "better portion." Our whole day and life is a prayer. Prayer for salvation of souls, prayer for priests and serving the Poorest of the poor- Jesus Christ Himself. We eat three "hardy" meals a day, I say hardy because we can't eat in between if we all of the sudden get a Cheeto craving. We also observe a meatless diet as a sacrifice! (Going to miss bacon, but I can "offer" that up!). I'm so excited because we live off what we have in our garden and have cows, sheep, cats and dogs! It's basically a ranch style convent and that was my major in college! So exercise won't be a problem, Jesus wouldn't let His little spouses starve. Carmel is a place where Jesus can rest and take delight in His creation. That's only fitting!

How does medical work?

All the nuns are covered medically! Dental, etc. and I don't mean through insurance. Every order is different, some orders have insurance, but we depend strictly on Divine Providence. Vows are taken of poverty, chastity and obedience. Poverty teaches us to allow Jesus to work through chosen souls to provide for us in ways of food, medical care and clothing. Thankfully, the nuns wear the traditional habit, so clothing isn't an issue. The only time we are able to leave the convent is for moving to a new convent (which we are doing in the spring), dental or medical care, fun fact!

Do you get a paycheck?

No paycheck! With our vow of poverty, we dedicate our lives to Christ and souls of the world free of charge. Love should be freely given, that's my desire :)

What advice do you have for other women who are thinking about becoming a nun?

This is the most important question of all. Because, the only reason I wanted this published is for them. First of all... I love you all very much! Be not afraid to choose a radical and unworldly way to follow Jesus. The world we live in today teaches us to forget that we are "temporary travelers". When we die, Jesus will not ask you what degree you got, how much experience you had, how many friends you had or how good your hair looked. He will ask... Did you LOVE? Ask yourself, "How can I best do that?" Not a worldly love, but a supernatural love. The last commandment Jesus left us was to LOVE one another, even our enemies. Take courage, and remember where you are weak, He is strong. With God ALL things are possible as Saint Gabriel told Mary when She was told that She was to be the Mother of God. Ave Maria, God bless you my dear sisters in Christ! And who cares what the world thinks, laugh at it! "I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

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