



**On Sunday, November 10, 2019, we continue highlighting November as Black Catholic History Month. The OLQP parish theme is: In Total Praise! Rejoice in the Lord Always! (Phil. 4:4).** We celebrate this month with a series of articles in the parish bulletins written by Black Catholic leaders, as well as with the 22nd Annual Minkisi Mini-Retreat that was held on November 10, 2019. In this article we will learn about Sr. Desire' Finlay's faith story as she took her final vows with the Felician Sisters this summer. May Sr. Desire' s reflection help us to remember that we can all share the abundance of God's grace and love in all that we do. Let us pray for vocations.

**"The End of Doubt" - Sr. Desiré Finlay, CSSF.** After nine years of prayer, formation and formal discernment, I made my final vows with the Felician Sisters on August 15, 2019. Those years flew by like clouds on a windy day, but they were meaningful and packed to the brim with experiences and people who helped to shape me. Even after those very full nine years, I still couldn't be 100% sure that I was ready to say "yes" forever. I was about 90% sure, however, that I didn't want to say "no". I had been living this religious life for nine years and I couldn't imagine myself doing or being anything different.

In preparation for the big day, we spent several weeks throughout the year in prayer and conversation. It was a year of reflection, but even the day before *the day* I thought to myself, "This final vow ceremony is pretty much just a formality. I've been living the vows for six years already, and nothing changes after this. I'll still be doing what I've been doing and living where I've been living. It's no big deal." Oh, but it was a big deal.

When we processed into the chapel at the start of Mass, joy flooded my heart with wave after wave of smiling faces. Parents, siblings, family from miles away, friends, sisters from other congregations, sisters from my own congregation, people from my Pomona family - they were all there, and they were there to support and encourage me as they had all along the way. I was

so excited I couldn't even cry, but I'm crying now just recalling that moment. All these eyes connected with mine, but our hearts had been intertwined long ago. Almost 100 people came to celebrate, and Jesus was certainly in our midst. Not just another body in the crowd, He was the pulse of it - the branch connecting all the vines with mutual love and excitement.

I don't remember much else, but I do remember that I wholeheartedly enjoyed the music. I'm a dancer by nature, but I fervently sang along to songs that had been a part of my journey from the beginning and songs that had connected me with my sisters over time. Basically I was just enjoying a rather fancy and personalized Mass; but then came the reception of the ring. I stood at the front of the chapel while the priest held up a simple silver ring. I'm sure he said something very profound and I probably responded with "Amen" but all I really know is that as soon as the ring made its way onto my finger, a sudden and slow explosion began to go off in my mind.

About 50 different thoughts came at me as soon as I received that ring. For one, I realized that I had been subconsciously keeping myself aware of all the options still available to me prior to that very day. Up until that moment, I had subconsciously been saying to myself, "This isn't forever yet. I can still choose to pursue anything. I could travel, get married, have kids, anything." However, as I watched that little silver ring slide onto my finger something else became apparent: out of all the options out there, I chose this one. I could have chosen anything else, but I didn't.

As I continue to reflect on that moment, I realize that I was not only living with an awareness of other options, I was living as if I might choose one of them instead. I loved my community from the beginning, and felt all along that God had been inviting me here, but even then I hadn't fully given myself all of those years. Not only was I holding onto those other options subconsciously, but I was living them subliminally. I was not going on dates or flirting, of course, but neither was I 100% invested in my call to religious life. I was living it knowing that it could potentially be temporary, halfheartedly showing up to prayers and never giving a thought to how it affected others. That ring changed everything.

It makes me think of the Catholic Church's firm stance on couples not living together before they get married. I always knew it was important, but I never really paid attention to why it mattered so much. With this new understanding of commitment, I'm finally "getting it". When two people live together before marriage, they know in the back of their minds that the person they're with is still just one option out of many. They may not say that out loud, but it's subconscious, and so at some level they will live that way, too. It may not come in the form of physical betrayal, but it's hard to invest oneself fully in a commitment when it still just remains an option. At the same time, the other person knows that they remain simply one option out of many. Thus, marriage becomes a way for a couple to say to one another, "Out of all the options out there, I choose you. I choose to give myself fully to you and to nothing and no one else."

My little ring has become a symbol of just that. On August 15th I said to God, "Out of all the options out there, I choose you. I choose to give myself fully to you and to nothing and no one else." So here I am, committed to no one and everyone all at once, serving through the charism of my beloved congregation. Where will it lead me? I have no idea, but I am content in knowing that "I have found the One whom my soul loves" (Song of Solomon 3:4).

*(This article was taken from an Oct. 3, 2019 blog of the Felician Vocation Team.)*

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