

Bishop Rozanski accepts vows of Cumberland hermit

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Marie Laura Tellier has privately lived the life of a hermit for the last 10 years in Western Maryland – spending many hours of every day in prayer and contemplation.

In a May 23 liturgy at Ss. Peter and Paul in Cumberland, the 64-year-old Washington native publicly professed vows of chastity, poverty and obedience before Auxiliary Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski as she formally committed herself to live as a “canonical hermit” – a consecrated, diocesan hermit who is under the direction of the local bishop.

Bishop Rozanski accepted the vows in the name of Archbishop Edwin F. O’Brien.

Tellier took the religious name of Sister Marie Teresa of the Child Jesus and Mother of the Eucharist. She wears a white prayer veil as a symbol of her special commitment to God, along with simple, floor-length dresses she sews herself.

Sister Marie Teresa said she has long been attracted to a life removed from the world and given totally to God. Before living as a private hermit, she spent several months with the Carmelite Sisters in Santa Fe, N.M., and the Contemplative Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Illinois. But she discerned that she was more suited to the prayer life of a hermit than a religious sister. Hermits are not members of religious institutes.

“I love the silence and solitude that comes with living the life of a hermit,” Sister Marie Teresa said, crediting Passionist Father Silvan Rouse for providing spiritual guidance and for encouraging her to consider becoming a canonical hermit.

“It’s exhilarating to live a life so close to Jesus,” she said. “I feel the closeness of God.”

When she isn’t working part time at the Western Maryland Business Center, Sister Marie Teresa leads a very regimented prayer life. Living in a partially enclosed Cumberland hermitage, she wakes at 5 a.m. every day for an hour of mental prayer that is followed by the Angelus and lauds. She then attends the 7:30 a.m. Mass at Ss. Peter and Paul before praying again at 11 a.m. and at the noon Angelus.

She prays the Chaplet of Divine Mercy and rosary at 3 p.m., vespers at 5 p.m. and Angelus at 6 p.m. Spiritual reading begins at 7 p.m., with compline prayers and mental prayer at 9 p.m.

Much of her prayer life is dedicated to asking God’s blessings on priests. Sister Marie Teresa prays for every seminarian in the Archdiocese of Baltimore by name, she said.

“My deepest call is the sanctification of the church and its royal priesthood,” she said. “I’ve been praying for priests since 1995.”

Sister Marie Teresa also finds great comfort in natural beauty. As a young woman, she spent much time alone in the woods contemplating the beauty of creation. She painted landscapes and continues her artistic expression by writing icons and working on portraits of Archbishop O’Brien and Bishop Rozanski.

A registered nurse who has worked with American Indian children in New Mexico, Sister Marie Teresa said she has “always loved hands-on care.”

“Being a hermit is self-giving in another way,” she said.

Hermits were very common in the early centuries of Christianity, developing out of the tradition of the desert church fathers and mothers, according to Sister Constance Gilder, a Sister of St. Joseph and the archbishop’s delegate to religious. Interest in the hermitic life was renewed with the revision of the Code of Canon Law in 1983, which recognized the vocation as a way for Christians to “devote their life to the praise of God and salvation of the world through a stricter separation from the world, the silence of solitude and assiduous prayer and penance.”

“The revival of this ancient form of consecrated life speaks to the rich diversity of our church and underscores the myriad ways God calls each of us to live out our baptismal call to holiness,” Archbishop O’Brien said.