

New Carmelite Sister inspired by St Therese

by NZ CATHOLIC staff

An argument among children overheard by 15-year-old Sisi'uhila Kiu was to eventually bring her from her village in Lapaha, Tonga, to a final commitment in Christchurch as Carmelite Sister Anne Mary of the Assumption.

When she was 15, the young Sisi'uhila overheard children arguing about who was the youngest nun to become a saint. Sisi had never even heard of St Therese. But she thought, I could do that.

In fact, she felt that she wanted to compete with St Therese in this regard.

"I didn't even know she was a Carmelite. But when I entered Carmel and understood how holy she was, I no longer wanted to compete with her!"

Sr Anne Mary made her Solemn Profession on August 15, the Solemnity of the Assumption of Our Lady.

She grew up in Tonga in a Catholic family, and there was daily Mass and rosary. But her mother died when Sisi'uhila was only one year old. But God compensated, she believes, by letting his mother Mary take over that role.

"God has also blessed me", Sr Anne Mary said, with "a cheerful nature and a very strong will, and that has helped me to continue on through many difficulties, including leaving my family and my country".

Before she entered Carmel, a turning point in Sr Anne Mary's life came when she was considering which religious order to join. One day, when she was praying, a light breeze flipped the pages of a calendar in her room. She saw a picture of Our Lady of Mt Carmel, and she interpreted this as God pointing the way for her.

"After that, I had peace and calm and contacted the Carmelites."

The ten years of formation also had some tough moments, she said.

But her profession day was "the best day of my life. I never felt so free and so happy in my life as on my profession day".

Sr Anne Mary said she loves the silence at Carmel, "even though it's against my nature".

"In fact, it's something of a miracle that I can stop talking some of the time! I love community life among the sisters. In Carmel, I've learned to love having a prayer life. I'm not so good about sharing about God, but I love pondering about him."

At the Mass at the Carmelite Monastery in Hoon Hay on August 15, Fr Rick Loughnan substituted for Archbishop Paul Martin, SM, who was rededicating New Zealand to Our Lady in Wellington.

The principal concelebrants were Fr Line Folaumoeloa from Auckland, and Msgr Brendan Daly. In his homily, Msgr Daly spoke of the witness of



Carmelite Sister Anne Mary of the Assumption after her Solemn Profession

commitment, and also of Pope Francis' call for religious to be persons of prayer, poverty and patience.

Hundreds of supporters and well-wishers packed the Chapel and marquee outside. The border closures meant that Sr Anne Mary's family and friends in Tonga could not travel to the ceremony, but they, along with Carmelite nuns around the region, watched the Mass and ceremony via livestream. Sr Anne Mary's great aunt and other New Zealand-based family members were able to be present.

A Tongan choir sang a capella to lead the music, and Tongan Youth were heavily involved. The livestream is available on the Carmelite Monastery website, and the sisters hope to make a highlights video soon.

There were fervent prayers sent up leading to the ceremony as there was concern regarding lockdowns. The timing was perfect, the sisters believe, as two days later the whole country was once again in lockdown. All at Carmel are very grateful that the Mass could take place.