

Molly:

Habits are who we are and we get to choose every day who that is. What's remarkable about these women is that their habits are changing the world. Hi, and welcome to habits, the good, the bad, and the Holy. I'm Molly and I'm sitting down every week with the Adorers of the blood of Christ, religious sisters, to hear their stories and learn how habits have become more than a symbol for their vocation. They become the means to which they change lives. Hi. Hey everyone. Welcome back today. We're sitting down with sister Mary Kevin Rooney.

New Speaker:

Thank you so much for being here.

Mary Kevin:

Thank you. This is going to be fun. I'm

Molly:

Really excited. Uh, so the first thing I want to touch on because a lot of our listeners, uh, did not grow up knowing, uh, religious vocation very well. They may find your name, a little odd, Mary Kevin. Uh, can you explain why your name is the way it is?

Mary Kevin:

Yes, because I entered in the olden days, 1896 or something like that. It was the custom then to symbolize the total gift of yourself. And you would do it by letting go of your name by covering your whole self up. The only thing you could see in the original habit was your face and your hands. So it was a way of letting go of everything except the goal of God.

Molly:

Right? So, uh, a lot of sisters, uh, are Mary Kevin, Mary Allen. And why is it a male name? Second.

Mary Kevin:

Whenever we were given a male Saint as our patron, then we always put Mary with her. So Mary Kevin married, John Mary,

Molly:

Mary Peter. I'll correct. So, uh, nowadays we don't do that. You can keep your name at your formation. We, um, have, you know, changed with the times quicker, more modern. And you mentioned, uh, back in 1896, uh, habits where the traditional vestments of sisters, but today the AFCs don't wear them. Traditionally. Obviously there are still some sisters who choose to wear veils or, um, abbreviated habits, but you were around when the decision was made to move from habits to more cultural, modern clothing. What was that like? Because it really was a personal decision for every order on what to do.

Mary Kevin:

That's true. That's true. Well, at first I, I kept the veil and the idea was that is how people would recognize that I'm a sister and I'm available if they need me. And then as time went on, I would wear the, when I went out in public and then not worked when I got home. And I thought it's, if people know

me only by the veil, w what's what's the witness there, if they don't know something has happened to me without the veil, uh, we're missing the boy and the point. Yeah.

Molly:

Uh, so nowadays you can still tell every ASC sister by a certain, uh, thing you wear, what is that? That's our heart and cross your heart and cross every ASC sister wears a heart and cross on a silver chain. Um, but I did hear a rumor that these used to be gold,

Mary Kevin:

A gold plated, gold plated. Why the change? Well, I understand that in Italy, um, people thought it was real gold and folks would go by on Honda's and snatch the gold. And sometimes the sisters stayed attached to the gold. So we said, why should our symbol be a source of temptation for people that's ridiculous. Right. So we chose something that we went from the gold plated to a wooden heart, and the symbolism just doesn't fit heart and wood, but it was beautiful. I love the simplicity of it, but even that was not good, a good symbol for everybody in the congregation because we're on every continent. Yeah. So then we chose silver plated because that's, that's kind of, that's not a temptation for folks. Right?

Molly:

Thank you. You, um, are always, uh, a source of history and information for me. I know we've talked previously about a lot of history of the adores and history here in Wichita. Um, and you are kind of the go-to gal for our chapel here in Wichita, which was just recently redone with some spectacular stained glass. Can you kind of give an overview of why the chapel was redesigned and what the stain glass there means?

Mary Kevin:

I that's one of my favorite topics, as you know, back in 58, you know, back in we built the convent or present convent in 58, I believe. And, uh, in 98, between 58 and 98, we had that he can to, everybody knows about Vatican too.

Molly:

I do want to say for our listeners who are not Catholic Vatican two was, it came from the Pope. Um, it was a document that talked about, um, moving the church into a more modern world. So there were a of changes that came down. Um, can you talk about some of those changes

Mary Kevin:

Just before I do that Vatican to happened because there was a Vatican one. Yes. And that was 400 years ago. So it was, we needed an update. You got it, you got it. That's precisely. And in all areas in many ways we still need updating, but it was, there was also a document on the liturgy that came out in those documents where all the bishops of the world came together and talked about the changes that would be helpful to people of today. The document on the liturgy liturgy just means the celebration, the work of the people and the, um, documents spoke about how it might be possible to update the liturgy. So for example, father would offer the mass with his back to us. Okay. So we turning the alter around.

Molly:

So now if you walk into a Catholic service, um, the priest faces the people that are actually there.

Mary Kevin:

Exactly. And also he speaks in our language.

Molly:

Yes. Because, uh, before Vatican two masses were in Latin, correct?

Mary Kevin:

Correct. So in 1998, sister, Charlotte or roar, Bob was our provincial our leader. And she said, it's time to try to bring our beautiful chapel up to norms. Right. And so that's what we did. And we named the chapel woman of the new covenant and because we're sisters who are dedicated to the mystery of Jesus, especially in his self gift, his unconditional love express through his life and his death and his new life in resurrection. Um, that was inappropriate name woman of the new covenant, who is Mary. Right? So everything in the chapel speaks to our particular way of living the gospel. Uh, so we had a woman from, uh, Dallas, Texas who came and she works in art, um, and especially stained glass. So she did the windows for us and she spoke of first. She asked us, you know, I never heard of your community.

Mary Kevin:

Tell me about you. So little group of us got around her and she took notes on what we said. And she asked about our spirituality and how everything that would help her. Then she went home to her pastor and said, father, tell me everything you know about covenant. So we must have used the word or the meaning of covenant in our sharing. Right. And then she went to the main covenants of God with his people in the scripture. And what are those main covenants? The first one was the gift of life, right? It was a unilateral covenant. God gave himself herself, themselves. And we've kind of stuck on words here, but, um, and we didn't know how to love back. How do you thank God for the such a gift? Right. So the second covenant was the covenant he made with Noah after the terrible flood. Yeah.

Molly:

Noah, the arc, for those who, uh, remember their, their a children's Bible

Mary Kevin:

That's right. And the flood. And then the promise of, I will never destroy the earth again. And the sign of that covenant is the rainbow, right? And because the windows are stain glass, they pick up all the colors in the little raindrops that are in the window.

Molly:

You want a visual on the chapel. We do have, um, a great tour that Mary Kevin narrates on our YouTube channels to go check that out. We'll have the link in the show notes.

Mary Kevin:

And then the next covenant was with Abraham and the obedience of Abraham and the promise then of God, to make Abraham, the father of a great nation. And Abraham is the father of all the people of the book, right? The Muslim peoples Christian people, the Jewish people, they were all people of the book. Right. And then the next covenant was with most glorious Moses, the 10 words that show us how to live

and how to respond to God's covenant, the 10 commandments. Then the next covenant was the Christ self gift, right. In total gift in incarnation. And that's symbolized on the main, um, panel of the window, which is Mary, the mother of Jesus, whose yes. Facilitated the great gift of the word instead of 10 words, the word of God.

Molly:

Um, and you have a favorite little imperfection in the chapel. Can you tell us about that?

Mary Kevin:

I can. I think it's probably only mine. Yeah,

Molly:

No, I think it's a pretty, a pretty cool thing too.

Mary Kevin:

In the chapel, we have a section, a little room called our covenant renewal room is where we celebrate the Eucharist, the reconciliation. Right.

Molly:

Right. And for those of you who aren't Catholic reconciliation is when you go and sit and meet with a priest, um, and talk about, um, reconciling the sins, your life, uh, through prayer and reflection, um, you can also Google it.

Mary Kevin:

And in that little room, everything that is his living, green plants, the sign of the life that comes with living the covenant and the window at the bottom somehow is cracked. And it's a wonderful thing because at the bottom of this window, which Claire wing the artists did, she has captured not at the bottom, but at the top, the winds of Kansas, when the winds blow the same direction is beautiful. All the wheat and all the greens and all the grasses go the same way. But down at the bottom, she put weeds as symbols of, I don't wanna serve, I don't want to do this. Forget it. And this crack in the window. And it's huge. Yes, it's perfect. Because in a very real way, we are all cracked. Isn't it? Leonard Cohen who says the crack is there to let the light, let the light in. Yes, I think it's so beautiful.

Molly:

Hey, everyone, Molly here. So sister Mary Kevin was right when she said that it was Leonard Cohen, but I do want to give the exact quote, um, because it is his words, not ours. The quote comes from the song Anthem off his 1992 album in the future. And the line is ring the bells that still can ring, forget your perfect offering. There is a crack, a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in. Okay. Now back to the interview, uh, so you are not just a stained glass aficionado. You also worked for many years, uh, on missions and have acquired a great love of language. How many languages do you speak?

Mary Kevin:

Well, I try very hard to speak the language of love. Right? I know we tell you well enough. I could help myself very much with Spanish. If you drop me in Paris, after I got over what happened to Notre Dame's cathedral, I could help myself. If you wait for me and I could probably help myself in Germany.

Molly:

So that's five languages and then, uh, English as well as we're speaking it right now, did you always have a love of language or was this something that is, um, simply a result of your mission work through the doors? So results of my mission or so you obviously gained these languages missioning, um, across the world. Tell us about your missions. Yeah.

Mary Kevin:

How much time do we have [inaudible] okay. The first foreign mission experience was, uh, 81 to 83 was invited to long to learn Italian and to study our original documents as the doors in Italian, we were founded by any Italian woman, Maria de Mathias, and then to come home and share that with my sisters. So that's the Italian. That was the first one, then a two week experience in Nicaragua where I went for a witness repeat. Okay. And, um, after that came, well, lots of mission here, but you just want the foreign missions. Okay. Then I went to, uh, Tunisia, which was a desert experience. And the dream of the priest who invited us to live this mission was to be a loving Christian presence among the Muslims. And his dream was if three adores from three different cultures could live together in peace and harmony, maybe Muslims and Christians could begin dialoguing with each other. And as funny as it sounds, that's harder than you think. Yeah. Because obviously you think the way you do things is the way, well, I happened to tell you, there are many ways to do the same thing.

Molly:

How long were you in Tunisia? Two, three years. Three years. And you managed not to lose your mind, obviously, as you sit before me. Um, so you did manage to live peacefully with these other women.

Mary Kevin:

I think you could compare it to a marriage, a good marriage. There will be areas where you have to dialogue. There will be areas where it's better to keep silence.

Molly:

Yes, you can be right and quiet at the same time. Exactly. Uh, so then where did you go

Mary Kevin:

After Tunisia? Then I came back to go back to Rome for five years. And the assignment there was to be a core member of three from three different cultures, again, uh, to who this group, um, shared input, retreats, talks, uh, spiritual direction with our sisters throughout the world. And most of them came there and we had simultaneous translation of the material.

Molly:

So you touched on spiritual direction, which is another ministry that you have done for many years. So, um, a lot of people, uh, find this term very foreign, spiritual direction. Can you explain what spiritual direction is and why someone would seek out spiritual direction?

Mary Kevin:

It's actually exactly what it says. It's we have many voices in our heads and in our hearts day and night, and that's very normal. The spiritual direction is about listening for which voice is God's voice, which voice is the Spirit's voice and learning how to tell that, to recognize that in my everyday life. Right? And I

think a lot of people do not realize that God cares that much to be with us all the time and to direct us. Actually, God is the director in these sessions and I am a listener. So the person comes with a part of their life that they want to share and have clarity on. And they do most of the talking and I do most of the listening. Then I try to reflect back to them what I hear and then they can share with me, does that resonate? Does that feel true in your heart and showing them, how do you know if it's God's voice or just it's in your head or attempt

Molly:

As someone who is directing others spiritually? Um, what fulfillment do you gain from that? Because obviously you give a lot of fulfillment to people to help them find peace in the chaos of their minds. What do you get out of that?

Mary Kevin:

Oh my, Oh my I've probably don't tell anybody, but I probably get more all during your session.

Molly:

It's your senior and the podcast.

Mary Kevin:

Okay. And God, and God is here too. Yes. I think that's really true. I receive more because have you ever taught school?

Molly:

I teach eighth grade, Sunday school.

Mary Kevin:

Um, I began by teaching little ones and that's hard work. Yes. But the joy that you, the teacher experienced when they get it? Yes. That's like that spiritual direction when people discover, Oh, I really am loved by God. Oh, God really is with me all the time. That, that is so rewarding. Yeah.

Molly:

So you said you started out as a teacher, which many sisters do start out as teachers. Um, what was, what was that like? And how long did you teach?

Mary Kevin:

I taught for 16 years. That was some trunk of my life. That was like grade school and uh, grade school, religion. Okay. So I taught first grade for many years and then we had public school. And so the public schools said, let's, we're all Catholics, but let's take religion out the school. And so I was the teacher of all eight grades, all eight grades. And then I was called to formation ministry

Molly:

And formation. For those who don't know is what process to become a sister. Correct. So you, uh, you were kind of led for those years, all the sisters who were going through formation

Mary Kevin:

Yes. In those years, yes. I had an opportunity to go to school, to prepare, had a wonderful team and sister Angela Marie who's this, it was, it was, uh, my first real experience of team. And, uh, you can't beat that.

Molly:

The formation process for a lot of people is a bit of a mystery. Um, not on purpose, just because they don't spend a lot of time around a sister's information. Can you talk about what that formation process is and, and why it does take so many years and, and what they go through during that time?

Mary Kevin:

No, that's quite a, we have two more hours, right? Yes, exactly. Uh, formation is an experience of living in community with women who are already committed to this way of life. And it's like getting your feet wet, getting your heart burned in the good sense. Uh, getting your mind challenged, getting your will strengthened and getting your life directed the way you want it to go. And the way God is inviting you to go. So for example, some women who were in formation have not been called to this life. And that's wonderful. The, the goal of formation is to discover where is God calling me, right. Not this nice other friend that I have, but me and the first time, the first period is called a candidacy or postulate. Those are some of the old names. That

Molly:

Is what we caught on the podcast and sister speak.

Mary Kevin:

Yeah. And that's why it was, um, six months to two years. And then the next period is called new vicious where you really get serious and try, this is an interesting way to say it, but I think it's accurate. You live without the vows as if you have the vowel.

Molly:

Yes. And we've talked about the vows, um, a few times on the podcast, so listeners are familiar, but you mentioned something interesting is that, um, the timeline to become a sister is varied. It is a very personal timeline. So you said, you know, postulancy can take six months to two years. Can you explain why it varies person to person and what that extra time, um, or what the less time, um, kind of means in their relationship or journey along vocation?

Mary Kevin:

Well, take my case, for example, I was 14 when I entered and 14 and 1896 does not mean what it means today. Right. Okay. So I came from a family of deep faith, right. And it wasn't so much that I understood my faith, but I was absorbed in it. It was what we breathe. I remember my parents saying, um, whatever God wants, whatever God's Holy will is we kind of grew up with that. That was understood. We want to do God's will naturally I had to grow up physically and psychologically, but the foundation of faith was there. Right. A lot of times today, many who want to explore religious life have not had that kind of foundation. So it would take longer just using that one example to say nothing of other examples, you know, um, so many things that young people experience today that we never experienced, you know, many of them have had such trauma. Um, so that takes, that healing process has to happen.

Molly:

So you go through candidacy and then you go through novitiate and then you take what are called first vows or temporary vows. Um, and then you're, I affectionately say a baby nun. Um, and you spend the next couple of years really living in the community as a sister. What are you learning and teaching during that time, that is different from a final vow where you are fully fledged, a member of the adores.

Mary Kevin:

Well, there, you will probably have different views on this. When I made, first of all, I was, I was 16. Right. And we were taught when you make first Rouse, do it as if it's forever. Right. So nothing is different. Nothing is different in that sense, if, if that's your mindset, right. If you're know for sure, this is your call now, not everyone has that conviction. So they might need more time to see, I think this is right, but let me try it on. So it's honoring the person's growth, right? The person's journey, not everybody's journey is the same.

Molly:

Uh, so you've done kind of a lot of things over your spiritual direction, formation teaching, uh, which is a common theme. Many of the sisters have had multiple careers. What did you find most fulfilling? Um, and what do you think taught you the most about yourself while you've been so busy teaching and helping others grow? What helped teach you and grow?

Mary Kevin:

I think, um, formation ministry would be a top priority. I was ministering in formation the first time, and I realized I have learned so much in this ministry. It just was incredible to me, how much I learned from the women, with the women in admiration of their courage to enter this journey with us, that and spiritual direction. They're just so related. It's the same thing in an individual way and kind of in a corporate way. Right.

Molly:

Another question, um, I've heard, uh, with people talking about spiritual direction is, um, you know, is it just for those in religious orders, can lay people be directed spiritually. Um, do you have to, you know, meet certain criteria to be, uh, in contact with a spiritual director and what are those criteria?

Mary Kevin:

There's one, you, you want to be searching. And sometimes people come with a searching for peace in their life. Some people come with a searching for God in their life. They can name that. Some people come with, I think I'm supposed to be doing something with my life, but I don't know what, can you help me with this? So outside of that, you have to be hungry, hungry for that. Yeah. Yeah.

Molly:

Um, so very, uh, at the beginning of this interview, you said we as a church, uh, still need some updating. Can you expand on your thoughts on that? Um, I know it's, uh, a feeling that a lot of people have. Um, but I bet they'd be surprised to hear a sister say that. So can you talk about, um, what you feel still needs?

Mary Kevin:

Oh yes. Well, I would say some parishes throughout the United States have not begun the renewal of very do and that's more than enough updating. Um, I think, uh, like science, math, um, technology. If I taught today, what I taught in science in 1896, the school board would fire me. Right. And rightly so, how about what I teach? What I taught in religion in 1896 and today right now, does that mean everything is up for grabs? I don't think so, but our understanding of how we, we experienced God, how we recognize God, how nature is a revelation of God. That's the first book of revelation is creation. So there's just, the field is white for the harvest is

Molly:

Yes. Yes. I think that's a really fabulous way to describe that. I really like how you said that. Uh, so something we ask every sister on the podcast, we talk about habits, which is of course, uh, the name of the podcast, both because our habits make us who we are and, uh, habits where traditional investments for sisters, what is your best habit?

Mary Kevin:

I can tell you what I desire it

Molly:

To be. That's fine. We'll take that,

Mary Kevin:

That my whole life becomes adoration. And I love how our life charter says that it's number 27. When you enter the community, you'll be able to,

Molly:

That's a joke for the listener, just freaked out. Don't worry, family.

Mary Kevin:

What to grow in adoration means that our entire person, our entire person in every relationship, in every circumstance, in all of our sinfulness and in all of our giftedness becomes ever more surrendered with Jesus, not to

Molly:

Jesus with Jesus,

Mary Kevin:

To the father. Right.

Molly:

And I liked that. You said, um, you know, some people say we spend an hour and adoration for those who are not Catholic. Uh, what is adoration? Traditionally adoration

Mary Kevin:

Was a time we chose individually to spend before what we call the blessed sacrament, which is the presence of Christ among us in bread and wine. Um, and traditionally we would do that like 40 hours devotion. It was a prayer of 40 hours that would happen in a parish and people would sign up to pray for an hour.

Molly:

Yes. And that means that there is consistent prayer for those full 40 hours. It never breaks. That's right. Um, it's also called perpetual adoration. If you would like to research more about that, there's a ton of information about perpetual adoration online. Um, so your best habit you hope is that your whole existence is adoration. What is your worst habit?

Mary Kevin:

My worst habit. Which one shall I choose?

Molly:

We're open to all of them, but we're an equal opportunity.

Mary Kevin:

Let's see. Um, one of, one of my often your worst habit is one of your best gifts. Yes. Okay. I see things quickly and I want you to see them too. Right. So maybe that's it.

Molly:

I do want to clarify one thing for the very, um, precise listener, Mary Kevin, you were not actually alive in 1896

Mary Kevin:

In God's heart. I sure was.

Molly:

But on this earth, um, when were you actually born in 1932, 1932. And you took your vows when you were 16 years old. So that is 1948, the 49 49. So you've been a sister for 70 years, 70 years. That's a really long time. God is good. God is good. And have you loved every minute of it?

Mary Kevin:

I have, except when I had to do the dishes, it wasn't my turn. Exactly.

Molly:

Oh, those ones we just get, we'll just skip assistant Marian. Kevin, thank you so much for coming on the podcast. I always enjoy sitting down and talking with you and it's even more fun today because we got to do it for the podcast. And thank you so much.

Mary Kevin:

Thank you. So delight.

Molly:

Thanks for joining us for show notes. And behind the scenes, check out our website, adores.org habits is brought to you by the doors of the blood of Christ us region. Co- Produced by Cheryl Wittenauer, Lori Benge and Molly McKinstry edited by Molly. Mckinstry. Thanks. We'll see you all next week.