

Testimony

“How the Lord made a Priest out of ... me?”
by Brother David of the Annunciation

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March 17, 2021

I dedicate this testimony to Mother Mary and
Father Joseph, who have walked with me the
whole way.



Friends,

So I am not a “cradle Catholic”. I never knew what a priest was growing up ; I barely knew who Jesus was. I had heard of the Name. I did go to a Christian camp for two summers near Yosemite Valley and during one stay I had lost my inhaler ; yet somehow never needed it for those two weeks. Several events in my life didn’t make sense until I could understand that God was operating miracles to awaken me to Truth.

For the couple of years that our family did attend services at a Presbyterian church in Los Angeles, I only understood church as the place where my Sunday School class made lunch for the elderly, and the role of Joseph in ‘Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat’ was given to a girl. I went on a mission trip to Tijuana my senior year only because I had a crush on a girl who had signed up to go. I ate a burrito on the way back to Los Angeles and had violent food poisoning. The poison of lust was already in me.

God was not present in our family ; we were our own clan, very sheltered, and I was an extremely naive 18-year old when my parents sent me off to college on the east coast, very confident their first-born son was on his way. An impressive job, magazine home, solid retirement portfolio, gourmet food and nice vacations were to be the measure of success for my life.

Little did my parents know they were letting me loose in a playground of heathen foolishness. I had already displayed some unruly behavior as a kid growing up – petty theft, pathological lying, risk-taking to impress friends and girls, ditching school. Minor offenses, you might say. But nothing was able to check my conscience enough to override an insatiable need for attention, peer approval and getting the girl. My parents are hard-working, faithfully married Americans who did everything to provide for their kids. But once I was given adult freedom, I pursued reckless and aimless ambitions in my 20s and 30s with such stupendous consequences ; sin was my compass.

Does God look at that and say to Himself, “well, I told them My foolishness is wiser, so, this guy would make a great priest !” If you had the patience to hear more details of my life before meeting Jesus, you would decide that I was the worst candidate for priesthood.

I can say that the only thing that made me change my ways - was the constant pain and sickness that the poison of sin had injected into me. And I had a high tolerance for pain and suffering, growing up with severe and debilitating asthma and allergies. When life became too difficult I never reasoned that it was sin, but simply because I was just messed up, and that life was painful, and there was nothing you could do about it. I would simply pursue some other avenue of sin in the hopes that this new remedy would work.

It never once occurred to me growing up what I wanted to do, and I suffered as a wandering spirit my whole life until knowing the Lord. My parents, very driven to provide their children with the best education, suggested what they knew each time I came back home, lost and confused, and this always involved more school. My young adult life spun around in a cycle of academics, quitting jobs, and moving back home. By the time I was 30 I already had two masters degrees. TWO. In the last effort to find that career path so necessary to launch me into success, I put myself through night school to earn a Masters in Accountancy, then studied like a mad man to pass the very difficult CPA exams, and then spent a year with an audit firm to validate the license. 3 – years – of – torture.

When I began the night classes at San Diego State University to earn the Masters in Accounting, the anxiety in me began to take on demonic proportions. I started to have horrific nightmares and began to see a dark shadow in my room at night. I would throw my pillow at it. I didn’t realize until much later that someone was astral projecting into my room and throwing curses at me. I wonder how many doors I had opened to give the enemy permission to torment me. I already regretted this new career choice but told myself there was no turning back.

There was a point in all that mess where I ended up crying out to God, crumpled down on the floor in the middle of the night, asking, God if you’re there, if You’re real, please...help. I lifted my hands up to Heaven, this was my last attempt, the only hope left I found at rock bottom. I cried out everything left in me, I turned numb. And then, I heard His Voice. Not a still small voice, but a strong voice, audible, yet somehow that made no noise and that only I could hear.

That moment convinced me of God, and after a year of looking for that accounting job in the 2009 economic crash, I finally received a job offer in France, with the #1 audit firm....the same in which my Dad had become an invested partner, where he spent his whole career and became extremely successful. So I moved back abroad to France for the 3rd time in my life, in June of 2010. And the misery continued. In many ways the deception of the enemy grew even thicker, in that span of time between finding God and finding Jesus. But signs along the way and divine coincidences also began to occur that were a beacon of light compelling me forward.

Predictable as it was, I got fired from that audit job after a year, and went to work in a Japanese restaurant in Paris. I would end up trying to start my own business a couple of years later in the food industry. These years were the most difficult – I saw everything come to the surface ; it was like all the darkness, lies, new age deception, godlessness and selfish, sinful pride manifested in a very real way, and I was fighting for dear life to wake up. A living nightmare if you will. It was horrific.

Ironically, my business partner would be the first person to hand me the Gospel – the mystic Gospel of Jesus according to Maria Valtorta. I had also begun to watch accounts of near death experiences on the internet. The summer of 2015 was decisive – one morning while at the farmer’s market selling our product, began rounds of vomiting. I returned home later and couldn’t move ; I was on the floor in a fetal position, and sadness and grief welled up in me. This time, I cried out to Jesus – please Jesus, please come be with me, I need You, I need to be in Your Presence, I can’t do this alone....

And the next day, He showed up as I discovered the Heart Dwellers channel, where I learned you could have an intimate relationship, conversation, and fellowship with Jesus, see Him, hear Him, and talk with Him. Jesus didn’t show up in my room that day in a physical manner, but Holy Spirit arrived with the tools I would need to learn how to always see the Lord, instead of hoping for a rare visitation or open vision. Oh my.. for months on end I cried.

And thus began the process of deliverance, which is ongoing to this day, from all worldliness, sinful habits, unhealthy attachments, and misleading ways. At that time in life, I was about to sign an irrevocable 9-year lease for a storefront in France, and was to be soon engaged. The Lord appeared in a dream in which I was in the jewelry shop with my fiancée picking out a ring. I turn to look out through the large display window to the street, and see Jesus standing outside. He puts His hands up around His eyes to peer in – He sees me there, and, crestfallen, walks away in sadness. I woke up right away to the grief and realization of His feelings. I felt like I was punched in the heart. It wasn’t easy, and it certainly wasn’t pretty, but I quit both relationships with my good friend / business partner, and girlfriend / fiancée. God had other plans for my life.

One upside to living in the valley of death for so long is that once Jesus is Your Savior, you know it’s not the ‘new and improved me’ that you are living, but HIS life that has been given to you for free, totally undeserved, to live in for all eternity. I hear the Father talk to me sometimes, and I realize, He’s not talking about me but to His Son living in me. There’s just no room for smug pretense. God and I both know, life is not something I’m very good at. And He’s going to save my whole family of 2 parents, 2 brothers and 2 sisters because the black sheep of them all who was hand-picked by God – would never boast of being a Christian. “I peeled him off the floor and put a ring on his finger, and he will never forget that for the rest of his life,” God would explain to you.

But God didn’t just welcome me Home as the prodigal son that I am. When Jesus entered into life, or I entered into His, or we entered into “Our Life”, He gave me far-out promises, like becoming a priest. I didn’t know what that meant when He told me, but 5 years later, here I am, offering the Holy Sacrifice of Mass and going, “how did I get here?”

It was a specific moment of sitting with the Lord, (thank you Heart Dwellers for teaching me), when He unveiled the calling on my life. The next five years were a maze of discernment weekends with religious orders, conversations with priests, monks, nuns and missionaries, and year-long service programs where I volunteered at Catholic churches. The first of such was under the auspices of the OFM Franciscans at St. Camillus parish, outside of DC. The second, with Our Lady of Hope in Philadelphia, through Catholic Social Services. At the end of 5 years of searching, I knew a great deal more about the differences between Benedictines, Franciscans, Dominicans, and diocesan priests, but I was more lost than when I had started. So much that I even gave up becoming a priest.

I started packing my bags for Japan to be a missionary there. I had even bought my plane ticket. Funny thing along the way of getting lost – it’s where you and God meet.

And this is where the story of my heavenly parents must be told to explain how I got here, to priesthood, in a religious order, doing the artwork I had also been called to do. It all fell into my lap, but let's go back a few years.

As I already mention, after I had given my life to Jesus, or rather, begged Him to come to earth to visit me, I was immediately led to the Heart Dwellers ministry, the next day. Clare's messages at that time taught the Divine Mercy chaplet. I tell you what, when you're at rock bottom and you've just cried out to Jesus to be saved, hearing about the Divine Mercy revelation was like seeing the Coast Guard pull up next to my shipwreck as I'm in the freezing, shark-infested waters, about to sink down. I started praying those chaplets like they were the ladder into the ship. I remember, literally, I would race to say as many as I could in the Divine Mercy hour.

I was soon airlifted out of France where I was living at the time, in quite miraculous fashion, and brought back to America in a state of shell-shock. A providential friendship at a soup kitchen led me to attend worship services at a Presbyterian church. But the Divine Mercy devotion still kept shouting in my ear, "YOU NEED AN ABSOLUTION YOU MISERABLE WRETCH", and so when the next Divine Mercy Sunday rolled around I went to a priest at St. Gabriel's down the street. It took me several gut-wrenching days to prepare my confession ... and then, to my great dismay, was told I needed to become Roman Catholic to enter the confessional. Which I did.

I was confirmed the following year in the Roman Catholic church at St. Patrick's in Charlotte, NC. On Divine Mercy Sunday. Funny, today as I write this testimony we are celebrating the feast day of St. Patrick. Maybe he interceded to kick my rear hard enough to finally sit down and write this. The wonderful parish secretary there handed me a book, "33 Days to Morning Glory". Written by Fr. Gaitley of the Marian Priests of the Immaculate Conception, it summarizes the various consecration programs of 4 great saints, to prepare for total surrender of oneself to Jesus through Mary. I did, and from that point on I saw Mary grab hold of my hand and begin walking home with me. I consecrated myself to Mary on the feast of Her Immaculate Heart.

She determined that of the 3 cities where I could have served with the OFM Franciscans, it would be in DC, because the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception is there, the national Shrine of the Catholic Church in America. Many Masses, confessions and hours of prayer spent there. After a year of service She then guided me to serve at Our Lady of Hope in Philadelphia. And when a car parked in front of the parish one day with the license plate, 'Exodus', I realized I was in the wrong place and knew I was supposed to be somewhere else. After a few last ditch, half-hearted attempts to become a priest, I had given up on that calling and figured, as aforementioned, that I would be a missionary to Japan.

Little did I know God was literally going to allow a plague to descend upon my Egypt and guide me through the waters to the Promised Land of priesthood and religious life. While I was at Our Lady of Hope, I dedicated my Lent to St. Joseph and decided I would renew my consecration to him. Yes, after consecrating myself to Mary I wasted no time in doing the same with St. Joseph.

At the time, I had been following a class by Kevin Zadai, online, in which he suddenly says, "you will discover God's destiny for your life this weekend." And guess what? I did. I heard from Clare that very Sunday. Palm Sunday in fact. Inviting me out to New Mexico to join a prayer community, sold out to Jesus. I said yes. In the midst of a global epidemic...surreal. The last vestiges of worldliness and attachments resisted, but I could see through the smoke and mirrors now, and knew I was being extended an incredible invitation to "follow Him".

And when I arrived, unbeknownst to me, was a community of priests to welcome me. The Franciscan Oblates of Mt. Carmel. That summer I was invited to profess my vows as a 3rd order Franciscan and a priest. It was suggested that I do so on the next Marian feast day - this was agreed to. What was that particular feast day, you might ask? - the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Mary and Joseph turned me into the priest God had decided to make of me, revealing the Divine Orchestration of Holy Spirit that makes me marvel each time I think about it. When I was lost, Jesus found me. When I lost my vocation, I was given it. God works in such mysterious and then surprising ways. And it's a family affair. And I didn't have to go to seven years of seminary! Phew....

If I have this podium to share with you God's Love and Divine Will, please let me bless with you this : God is bringing His Bride back to the garden, restoring His Church to the beginning. Nothing could be simpler and truer than living one's vocation under the parental roof of Mary and Joseph. Nazareth is Heaven on earth. And the Holy Family is the safe refuge for all walks of life, not just priests.

Recently, God reminded me of the promises He had given to me 5 years earlier, and that they had all come true. "Now," He said, it's time to graduate, to kindergarten." I understood – our vocations are not who we are, but what He does, and what He loves most about us is that we are simply His little, very needy children.

One thing hasn't changed since receiving the vocation of priesthood. My insatiable need for love and approval. It has only grown bigger, a huge chasm, that at times is agonizing. I used to be sin-sick. Now, I'm homesick. I long, I cry, for the Fatherland.

I must confess, the first years as a Christian were not easy for me. I never could fully trust in God's Mercy, even though He says, via St. Faustina, that "the greatest sinner has the greatest right to My Mercy". I know that's true - because I see what God did to restore me. Intellectually I understood what was happening. Scripturally, it was all lining up. This is God Who loves me. But my heart couldn't come to peace with His terms of contract. This is free, and forever?

But then, the companion I had always been hoping for showed up. Her name... is Mary. It is through Her motherly love and heavenly intercession, both of which are very real, and very available to everyone, that I found the relief in my heart and the ability to trust in Jesus ... through Her. I don't have the guts to go to Him directly. I'm no saint. I'm a momma's boy. Always have been, and always will be. I will not expound upon theological tenets or provide further miracles to convince you. All I will say to you is that God took a dead man, put him in the arms of Mary, and turned that pig-pen sinner into a priest. That should be enough to pique your interest, and from there, if you want to learn more about Her, Mary will reveal how much She loves you. And yes, I capitalize She, because She is My Queen. My Mother is the Queen of Heaven. I boast in that. I hope you will too.

May the Holy Family of Nazareth keep you, watch over you, guide you, and bless you.

And praise! the Lord God, Our Father, Our Savior, bless Him! for His immeasurable Love and Mercy.

Amen.