

Fifth Sunday of Lent

The Readings: <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/032121-YearB.cfm>

In John's Gospel today some Greeks approach the apostle Philip and request to see Jesus. "Sir, we would like to see Jesus."

Then, Philip and Andrew went and told Jesus about this request.

How did Jesus respond?

Jesus didn't open his calendar book to check when he might have an opening in his schedule. He didn't directly respond to the request at all.

Instead, Jesus goes to the very core of his mission. The very reason for his coming to earth. He describes himself like the grain of wheat that must fall to the ground and die, so that it's very purpose can be fulfilled.

Jesus came to earth to die for us.

To die so that our sins can be forgiven.

To die so that the gates of heaven could be opened for us.

To die so that we can have a seat at the heavenly banquet.

Jesus says, "It was for this purpose that I came..."

Jesus very humanly admits that he is troubled in anticipating the suffering he will soon endure. And yet, his love and burning desire to complete his mission to save us was far stronger.

Jesus tells Philip and Andrew, "...when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself." Jesus is saying that soon, not just those Greeks asking for him, but EVERYONE will see and experience Jesus's great love for all of humanity.

How have we, each of us, seen and experienced Jesus in our lives?

How have you felt his great love?

How has he gradually formed and molded you to be more like him?

Last weekend, all deacons in the Archdiocese had what is called a Convocation Day. It's a time for us to be called together by the Archbishop for a day of recollection and renewal.

Archbishop Aquila gave an opening presentation which was then followed by several other speakers. One of them was Fr. Randy Dollins who is the Vicar General - sort of the Archbishop's right-hand man. You might remember Fr. Dollins. He has been to Blessed Sacrament several times to do Confirmations.

The talk he gave to us deacons was about "Having a Playbook". Those of you who are football fans know about how football teams have playbooks that contain strategies for offensive and defensive plays that they use in the games.

But what Fr. Dollins was talking about is our own personal playbook for being a Christian. And more specifically, what is our personal testimony. Why are we a Christian, and how did we get there?

You've probably heard people give their testimony and tell the story of their particular spiritual journey. Dr. Scott Hahn, a protestant minister turned Catholic theologian, wrote a fascinating book about his personal journey and conversion to the Catholic faith. These personal stories can be powerful in helping others come to know who Jesus Christ really is and how he changes lives.

Fr. Dollins told us the story of having dinner at the home of some friends one night. They shared with him their recent experience of buying a car from a company called Carvana - perhaps you've heard of this slick, new car buying experience.

They actually have vending machines for cars. You select a car online and they deliver it to your door. No salespeople, no hassle, no haggle. No hours spent in a dealership.

Well, this man went on and on for a half hour as to how wonderful this car buying experience was with Carvana. He was really passionate about this and it was easy for him to tell about his experience.

Shouldn't it be just as easy for us to share our experiences about what Christ has done for us in our life?

Fr. Dollins went on to encourage us to pray about, and put together, our personal testimony. He shared his own testimony with us as an example.

I have to admit that yes, I HAVE shared certain stories about my spiritual growth and failures. But I have never actually put together a short, concise testimonial. I'm still working on that and perhaps I will share it with you at some point.

I would, however, like to tell you about one particular spiritual turning point in my life. It's one of those times when the Lord intervened to "save me".

I had just completed my freshman year of college at Penn State. I had thrown myself into the college experience full bore. I don't think I need to elaborate on that!

I had broken my foot playing intermural sports near the end of the spring semester and went home in a cast after finals ended. Soon after I was diagnosed with bilateral hernias that required surgery. I was feeling pretty low.

This was back in the old days when you would check into the hospital the day before surgery and then spend a day or two in the hospital after surgery.

A young priest showed up from a nearby church soon after I had checked into the hospital. Unbeknownst to me, my mom had requested for a priest to visit me before surgery. I met Fr. Regis that day and we talked for quite a while. He related to me and I to him and he was easy to talk to. We kept in touch and became friends.

He mentored me in my faith and walked with me all through the ups and downs of my life even when we were 1500 miles apart after I moved to Colorado.

He had a way of gently course correcting me in my faith without me hardly knowing it was happening. He was one of those special people who, when you talked with him, you felt like you were the most important person in his life. He was the face of Christ to me. I don't think I would be a deacon today without his influence in my life. Jesus helped save me through this priest.

Fr. Dollins told us deacons that the next time he comes to visit our parish he will ask us to give him our 4-minute personal testimony. So, I need to be ready.

Our life's journey, our testimony, is a search for Jesus. It is nurtured by a deep longing for his magnetic love for us. It reveals his work in us. Jesus saves us in many ways. Often through the love of other people and our life experiences.

What is YOUR testimony?

How has God changed and molded you?

What have been those spiritual turning points in your life?

What have you experienced that could help someone else see Jesus?

How has the Lord saved you?

Pray and reflect on your life and the ways the Lord has led you, taught you, and loved you. Fine tune your testimony so you are ready to share it with others. Start by sharing those experiences with your spouse or a close friend.

Be ready, because someone is wanting to see Jesus.

Deacon Kevin Heckman

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March 21, 2021