

Spreading the Gospel



“Hindsight is 20/20.” This statement is ringing clearly in my mind as I reflect on this year of 2020 itself. I graduated from Auburn University this May, and it’s been a gift to spend lots of time processing and praying these past few months.

This hindsight perspective is bringing me lots of clarity and I am being reminded that God is always working within us, even when we are completely

unaware of His movements.

I was raised in a loving Catholic family, but it wasn’t until I met a FOCUS missionary my junior year at Auburn that I encountered Jesus Christ and His Love personally. And this personal encounter changed everything. Now, I love the Catholic Church and I really enjoy studying the doctrine of our faith. But as Saint Paul writes in chapter 13 of his first letter to the Corinthians, all these gifts are lost without the most important aspect of our faith: love. So, growing up, my view of the Catholic faith was very tainted because I was missing the focal point of it - God's love.

It’s hard to find words, even two years later, to convey how Jesus shined in and through this FOCUS missionary, so I pray the Holy Spirit will fill in the gaps between my words! Here’s how it went down – after spending five semesters of college putting my worth in things the world told me would make me happy, something just wasn’t right. I was excelling in my pre-med classes, earned a decent score on the MCAT, had a fun and packed social life, and was involved in several leadership positions on campus. I was living the "Auburn dream," or so I thought. But even with all these good things going for me, I was still deeply lacking and unsatisfied in the dead of night.

This is when I reached out to a FOCUS missionary and asked if she could meet up for lunch. In all honesty, I didn’t know what FOCUS even was or why this girl was so radiant all the time. I had only met her once or twice, but these brief interactions stuck out to me in a striking way. Whatever she had, I wanted some of it. Have you ever encountered someone that’s just different, in the best way? Someone that, rather than letting life happen to them, is living life vibrantly? Someone who exudes peace and joy from a mysterious place of inner abundance? Someone who is comfortable in their own skin and fully present to those around them? Okay, I think

you get the point...That's what this girl was like. Little did I know, she had the love of Our Savior within her.

Long story short, what I thought would be a quick, thirty minute lunch meet-up at Taziki's turned into a multi-hour personal encounter with Jesus – He shined through Alex as she told me all about Him; she spoke of His love, His mercy, His goodness. She showed me many facets of His heart that day, too, as she listened, encouraged, prayed, and even wiped my tears in the middle of that Taziki's. That year, she continued to walk with me and point me to Jesus, and my life has never been the same. To know that we are loved changes everything and this is the mission that FOCUS lives out so excellently on college campuses. They meet college students where they are and show them the Father's love.

Once Jesus had captured my heart, I was blessed to continue to encounter Him and grow in His love even more through FOCUS. I learned how to be a better friend, a better listener, how to pray, and most importantly, how to share my zeal for the gospel with others. When you encounter the beauty of Christ's love, you don't want to keep this to yourself! There's something radical about the way FOCUS missionaries give themselves to participate in the New Evangelization. Just as Jesus's disciples participated in the multiplication of the loaves and fishes to feed the hungry masses, FOCUS missionaries participate in the multiplication of Christ's love on campuses full of college students who thirst for more than the world is offering them.

Six months after graduation, I continue to discover new ways FOCUS touched my heart and impacted my life, both in small and big ways. The virtuous friendships I formed through FOCUS healed hurt areas of my heart. This community taught me the importance and the discipline of getting rest, showed me the beauty and power of the Rosary, and above all else, cultivated within me a heart that yearns for union with Jesus Christ.

By Peyton Parra