

Power Priests

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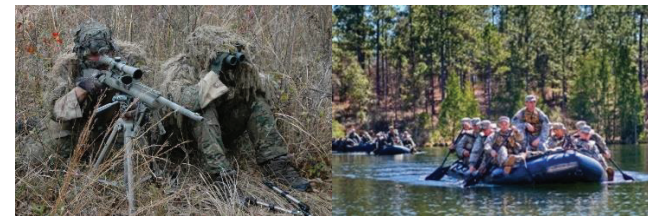
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Introduction

Behold, I have given you the power to tread upon serpents and scorpions and upon the full force of the enemy and nothing will harm you. Luke 10:19

In the summer of 1992 Lieutenant **Richard Sutter** is leading a patrol in the swamps of Florida. He has endured nearly 9 weeks of one of the most grueling courses offered by the U.S. military, lost 25 pounds off his already slender running frame, and is now just a few days from earning the highly coveted U.S Army Ranger tab. If he can successfully complete his assigned mission of leading two platoons, which include 60 of his fellow ranger students, on a raid to secure and control a compound held by drug lords he will pass his fourth and final phase.

Although Lieutenant Sutter's raid is a fictitious scenario designed to train this newly commissioned officer on basic leadership qualities during a high stress environment, a few years prior some of his fellow rangers faced real scenarios in combat situations.



Specialist **James Flynn** is a U.S. Army Ranger sniper, and his unit has been deployed to Saudi Arabia to protect the oil-rich country from Iraqi aggression. Iraqi

president Saddam Hussein ordered the invasion and occupation of neighboring Kuwait in early August 1990. Hussein defied United Nations Security Council demands to withdraw from Kuwait by mid-January 1991, and Specialist Flynn is now part of a massive U.S.-led offensive known as Operation Desert Storm.

Now if you picked up this book thinking you were reading about some timid or soft-spoken priests, who knew from a young age their calling was to serve the Lord, you have the wrong book. If you are interested in the story of how these two military leaders and ten other ordinary young men who were first warriors, athletes, scholars, and regular guys before following their call, continue reading.

“There is an essential aspect of the priest that does not change: the priest of tomorrow, no less than the priest of today, must resemble Christ” St. John Paul II in *I Will Give You Shepherds*

Perhaps a military leader is not your interest, how about a rising actor, a scientist, a dancing black belt, a former band member turned weightlifter or athletes from basketball to soccer to triathlons? Each of these men have a story before and after their calling that is worth telling.

More importantly, their stories and lives appealed to God, and He has called them to lead his one holy and apostolic church founded by Christ over two thousand years ago. These men can relate to our culture focused

on sports, education, and respect for our military service members.

**"I will give you shepherds after my own heart"
(Jeremiah 3:15)**

Amid negative press about the Catholic church, these men have led exemplary lives and used tools like the internet, television, travel, podcasts and even a global pandemic to share the faith. They come from different backgrounds, but they are all bonded by the truths of the Catholic faith. They are strong yet merciful and reforming without dividing which makes them worthy to carry the cross as power priests.

Today's priests have unique challenges. They are leaders in a church which must not only battle the evils outside the walls of their cathedrals and church buildings but at times even within them.

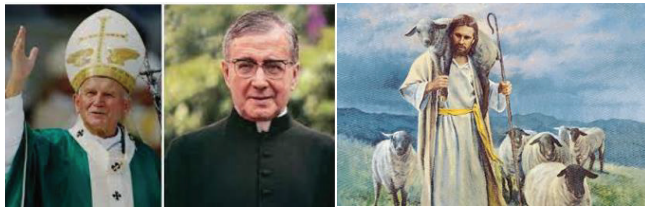
“The devil tempts one priest more than 100 seculars because to take away the shepherd scatters the flock-pray for priests.” St. Alphonsus Liguori

These power priests include 4 predecessors who set the example and foundation for the other 8 men still serving today. No single book can capture the stories of the thousands of priests who have faithfully served the church, but the 8 power priests still serving were all ordained after **Pope John Paul II** (JPII) released the encyclical *I Will Give You Shepherds* on March 25, 1992. It laid the foundation for today's priests by emphasizing

the human formation as the basis of all priestly formation.

The four pillars, later renamed dimensions, form the bridge to Christ for young men discerning the priesthood.

1. Human
2. Spiritual
3. Intellectual
4. Pastoral



A few months after that encyclical, JP II would celebrate the beatification of another one of these predecessor priests in Rome, Italy on May 17, 1992. **Fr. Josemaría Escrivá** the founder of Opus Dei, took the final step toward being recognized as a saint. JP II, who would also later be declared a saint, called Saint Josemaría Escrivá, the "saint of the ordinary." Since he like many of these ordinary men, were called by God to do extraordinary things.

Long before becoming the pope and Saint John Paul II, Karol Wojtyła, was a young man in Poland who loved the outdoors particularly hiking and snow skiing. Josemaría was a young man in Spain helping the poor

and hospitalized. Both men would be officially recognized by the Catholic church as saints.

Fortunately, for the rest us, we can reach that status unofficially when, by the grace of God, we make it to heaven. Yes, all of us can be saints by following the calling and will of God! That enlightening belief was shared by former high school soccer star from Madrid, Spain, **Luke Mata**, who around the time of St. Josemaría Escrivá's beatification was still displaying his skills on the soccer pitch.

Luke had recently graduated from Notre Dame with a degree in economics and was a director at an Opus Dei center just off the campus at the University of Notre Dame. He would later follow in the footsteps of Saint Josemaría Escrivá and become a priest.



While at Notre Dame, Luke met **Fr. Ted Hesburgh** who on top of being the President of the university was a leader in social justice and rights of all globally in the tumultuous times of the 1960s and 70s in the United States. Fr. Ted would advocate for the three loves of his

life, God, country, and Notre Dame while pushing for such social reforms.

While Fr. Hesburgh was president from 1952–1987, Notre Dame would go from an all-male Catholic university known primarily for good football teams to a top coed university attracting and educating some of the finest minds in the world.

“Priesthood begins with Gods’ invitation, but it develops out of man’s response.” Archbishop Tim Dolan

One of those students was **Vincent Bork** of Evansville, Indiana whose tenacity on the basketball court carried into the classrooms and labs at Notre Dame where he earned a degree in physics. He would later earn his PhD in physics from the prestigious Washington University in St. Louis before finding his calling as a priest. Who better to defend the faith than a scientist? Like Georges Lemaitre, the man who came up with the Big Bang theory, many of the great scientist were Catholic men of faith. Fr. Vincent Bork would continue in that path.

In the same year that Specialist James Flynn was joining fellow forces in the U.S. Army invasion to depose the Panamanian leader, general and dictator Manuel Noriega, the first Batman movie based on the character in DC comics was released. How are these two related? Just as comic book heroes like Batman fight evil, James Flynn and his fellow soldiers stopped General Noriega who was trafficking drugs.

Meanwhile a young hopeful actor, **Mike Schmitz**, from Minnesota was watching early Batman movies. Later, he would try out for and be one of the finalists to play Robin in the movie Batman Forever released in 1995.



Although Mike would miss out on this opportunity to become a star in Hollywood, God had greater plans for him in the real-life battle against evil. He went from potentially being an action hero in movies to spreading the word of God to millions, but he isn’t the only priest using podcasts and *You-Tube* videos to reach a broader audience.

While Mike Schmitz was in Hollywood, **Leo Patalinghug** was maintaining his martial arts skills and honing his culinary schools in the seminary. He would later become known as the cooking priest and show of some of his other skills during talks.

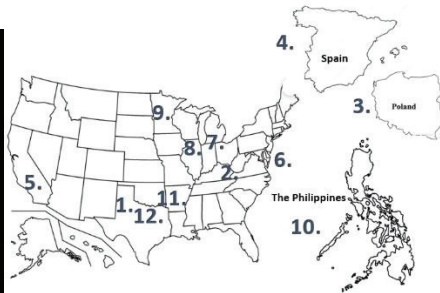
Around this time, **Stephen Gadberry** is a young farm boy in the Arkansas Delta. In just two years, he would be part of a one-car accident that would take the life of his father, Steve Gadberry, 32, and older sister Courtney, 11, on May 5, 1994. God’s mercy would help him and his family through the trial and years later he would share his inspiring story on *The Word on Fire* film, *The Making of a Catholic Priest* released in May, 20022.

Inspired by the trailblazer **Bishop Fulton Sheen**, whose television show drew high ratings in the 1950s and 60s, these priests provide insights about the Catholic faith through various media and their stories are powerful.

“Nothing is so strong as gentleness, nothing so gentle as real strength.” St. Francis de Sales

Edwin Leonard was a young boy when Sony Play Station was released in 1994. When not playing his home video games, the saxophone and karate would entertain the future priest and cross-fit enthusiast.

- The Twelve Span the Globe
1. Fr. James Flynn
 2. Fr. Richard Sutter
 3. Saint Pope John Paul II
 4. Saint Josemaria Escriva
 5. Fr. Luke Mata
 6. Fr. Vince Bork
 7. Fr. Ted Hesburgh
 8. Bishop Fulton J. Sheen
 9. Fr. Mike Schmitz
 10. Fr. Leo Patalinghug
 11. Fr. Stephen Gadbury
 12. Fr. Edwin Leonard



What connects these men? Why would we feature them together in a book? First and foremost, they were called by God to be priests and each of them answered that call. Secondly, they all adhere to the teachings of Christ and the Catholic church. Thirdly, they love what they do, and it shows in their witness.

So, what is a priest? A Roman Catholic priest is a man called by God to serve Christ and the Church through the reception of the sacrament of Holy Orders. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church states, **“the priest serves the faithful by building up and guiding the Church in the name of Christ, who is head of the body.”** (CCC #1547). A priest makes a lifelong promise of celibacy and obedience to a bishop or religious superior.

St. Thomas Aquinas said that a priest is a mediator; that he stands as a kind of bridge between God and humankind. The priest tries to bring God’s word and grace to humankind and strives as well to bring humankind to God in faith, hope and love. He does so with the power of the Holy Spirit as Jesus shared with his disciples on Pentecost.

Some have described the anatomy of a priest as follows:

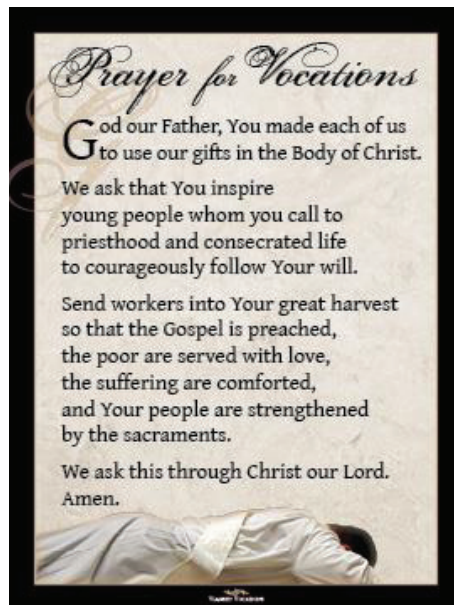
1. Brain- to know our faith and doctrines
2. Ears- to listen to us
3. Shoulders- to carry the cross with Christ
4. Heart- to love us like Jesus
5. Eyes- to see our thirst for God
6. Mouth- to preach the Good News
7. Hands- to bless and consecrate
8. Knees- to bend and pray
9. Feet- to go where God sends him

In these next chapters one can see how these ordinary men through the power of the Holy Spirit and their adherence to faith have and continue to do

extraordinary things. The internet, mobile phones and seemingly limitless connectivity through various social media sites, removes boundaries that once limited Catholics to just hearing their local priest. Through today's technology, these power priests can reach broad audiences.

Thirty years after Saint John Paul II released the encyclical *I Will Give You Shepherds*, we have these power priests. One teacher at The Heights school in Potomac, Maryland keeps a "dog list" of Catholic heroes on the classroom wall. Each one of these men would qualify.

Please start with a prayer for vocations.



Chapter 1

Fr. James Flynn- Power Sniper and Orator

"Satan never quits. He never gives up. He never tires. He doesn't sleep. He doesn't eat. He doesn't do anything but think about the destruction of souls."

Fr. Flynn



Army Specialist **James Flynn** is a U.S. Army sniper and combat veteran before he turns 20 years old. When he enlisted in the Army right out of high school in Granbury, Texas, he had no intention of being a sniper or going to combat. He simply wanted to peacefully serve his country for four years and save some money for college. Little did he know that the Army had other plans for him.

In 1987, when James enlisted, the U.S. Army had not sent soldiers into combat for the past 15 years. Since the end of the Vietnam war in 1974, no President wanted to give the executive order to send troops overseas and risk losing more lives in combat.

Born and raised in Arlington, Texas, now home of the NFL team the Dallas Cowboys, James was more interested in watching "battles" on the football than

serving in a battle with weapons. At 6' 4" James was built for football and being from Texas where football was like a religion, he grew up watching his Cowboys dominate the NFC East in the 1970s and early 1980s under legendary coach Tom Landry and Catholic/Navy veteran quarterback Roger Staubach.

His weekends in the fall would start with high school football often called Friday night lights since thousands of fans would come out on Friday evenings to cheer on their local team and see the talented bands perform at halftime. Saturdays were reserved for college football, and on Sundays the professionals played.

Although his parents raise him Catholic by the time he entered the Army, James was a self-proclaimed atheist. With all that football on the weekend, who had time for God anyway?

"After high school, I really got into atheism. I was not interested in God," Fr. Flynn confided. "I was not interested in the restrictions of God and what He would put on me"

After completing basic training and his advance individual training (AIT), Private James Flynn was assigned to a unit in Germany. He expanded his interest outside of Texas and football to travel and learning to speak the German language. As a 19-year-old, the interest in the learning the German language was partly influenced by his desire to meet girls, and eventually he had a German girlfriend. Although the relationship didn't work out, his language skills helped. His Army commander selected him to attend German sniper

school because he spoke the language better than anyone else in the unit.

While in sniper school, James Flynn honed his skills as a shooter. He not only learned how to hit a target over 400 yards away with deadly accuracy, but he also learned how to camouflage himself to ensure his survival. Snipers typically wear a ghillie suit which covers them from head to toe in green and other earth tones to blend in with the environment. In combat, snipers are typically attached to a scout platoon and are deployed ahead of the rest of the unit. So, camouflage is critical.



The movie, *American Sniper*, showed how the Army uses snipers in urban environments as overwatch on buildings for other units, but in non-urban environments they would often engage the enemy prior to the larger unit. Camouflage and deadly accuracy were paramount.

After completing sniper school, James and his unit began training for a potential deployment to the country of Panama. While his unit was training in Germany the Berlin wall officially came down in November of 1989. It had formerly separated East and

West Germany since the east side was under communist rule. Once the wall came down, the country of Germany united for the first time since the end of World War II.

“I went through sniper school — it was a great experience,” Fr. Flynn said. “The Germans were very good marksmen, and they were amazing teachers.”

During his 4 years on active duty (1987-1991) with the U.S. Army, James Flynn would experience first- hand some historic events and encounters with evil. Although stationed in Kentucky, Germany, California, and North Carolina, he would be deployed to multiple combat areas.

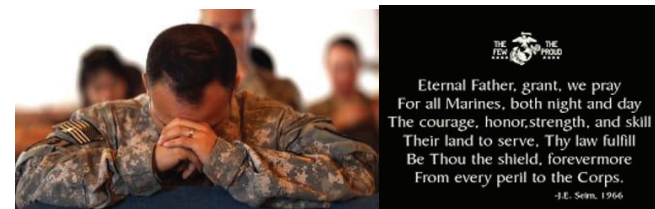
- In 1989, the U.S. military would send forces to Panama to depose the de facto Panamanian leader, General Manuel Noriega, who was wanted by the United States for racketeering and drug trafficking. Noriega’s military forces had recently killed a U.S. military officer and detained a Navy Seal and his wife as the group walked back to their hotel after dinner. President George Bush would launch “Operation Just Cause” and once again James Flynn would deploy. Following the operation, the Panama Defense Forces were dissolved and a new President, Guillermo Endara was sworn into office.
- In 1991 his unit deployed to Saudi Arabia to protect the oil-rich country from Iraqi aggression. Iraqi president Saddam Hussein ordered the invasion and occupation of neighboring Kuwait in early August 1990. Hussein defied United Nations Security

Council demands to withdraw from Kuwait by mid-January 1991, and Specialist Flynn deployed again as part of a massive U.S.-led offensive known as Operation Desert Storm.

Following his military career, James went to Texas A&M University to become an Engineer. As a self-proclaimed atheist who had seen evil and combat in person, James would earn his degree and come to know God through science.

“Matter is neither created nor destroyed- Yet we are alive- it doesn’t make any sense without God.” Father James Flynn

Although it took some time in college for James to come back to the Catholic faith, it was the example of his father, a Marine Corps Colonel, which laid the foundation for James’s conversion. As a young man, his family would go to Mass every Sunday and Holy Days of Obligation. He shared the following story.



“Every Sunday, my father would come back from Communion, he would come back from receiving the Lord’s Body and Blood, and he would kneel down. He would take off his glasses and put his hands over his face and he would pray. I remember that kind of burned

into my brain. So even when I was away, even when I was away from the faith and away from God, and an atheist, that image always was there for me. And I think it was one of those things that helped bring me back.”

“You know, for a three-war Marine Corps colonel to have that sort of humility of faith, I think that’s what helped me gain a humility to bring me back to the faith. So, within that, we come to understand what it is the man is supposed to be doing — fighting the battle, going before the family, showing them the way.”

Although James had come back to the Catholic faith, he was more interested in playing Rugby for Texas A&M and using his degree to earn a peaceful living. Upon graduation he worked in the commodities for Cargill Incorporated for three years. Cargill is a global food corporation and although James enjoyed his job, he felt a calling to feed souls and not just stomachs. So, at the age of 29 he started his seminary formation with the Dominican Friars in Denver and St. Louis.

In 2000, he returned to his home state as a seminarian for the Dioceses of Fort Worth, Texas and finished his theology studies at Assumption Seminary in San Antonio, Texas. Father Flynn was ordained to the priesthood in 2006.



He served as an associate pastor at two parishes, before becoming a pastor first at St. Thomas Aquinas in Pilot Point, Texas and then St. Francis in Grapevine, Texas before arriving at his current parish of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Keller, Texas.

At each parish he sprinkles in stories from his military experience, world travels and studies into his homilies. His honesty about his ignorance as a one-time atheist, couples with his knowledge and humor to proclaim a powerful message.

His presentation “Wearing the Armor of God,” during the North Texas Catholic Brothers for Christ’s conference in 2020, aligns our spiritual warfare as men with the battle soldiers fight on the battlefield.

“As a soldier it is important to have armor because armor gives you confidence. It gives you the ability to do things you wouldn’t normally choose to do.”

“Let’s attack and be the warriors the Lord desires.”

For thousands of years, there's been a war underway between people of faith and Satan. Father James Flynn shared, "Men must don the breastplate of righteousness and set the tone for their families and society itself in fighting for the salvation of souls in a troubled world."

Fr. Flynn's address was filled with personal experiences from his time fighting for his nation as well as scriptural lessons about using faith and courage in the fight against Satan.

"It's important for men to take up their battle position. It's important for men to be leaders," Fr. Flynn said. "The only way to do that is to put on the armor of Christ." Similarly, having the right spiritual armor is important in the battle against Satan.

Fr. Flynn reminded, "Satan never quits. He never gives up. He never tires. He doesn't sleep. He doesn't eat. He doesn't do anything but think about the destruction of souls."

In St. Paul's Letter to the *Ephesians 6:11-17*, Fr. Flynn said, Scripture details the armor of God:

"Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil. For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens."

Therefore, put on the armor of God, that you may be able to resist on the evil day and, having done everything, to hold your ground.

So, stand fast with your loins girded in truth, clothed with righteousness as a breastplate, and your feet shod in readiness for the gospel of peace. In all circumstances, hold faith as a shield, to quench all [the] flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

"As a sniper, I used to arrange the meeting with God. Now, I make it more pleasurable." Father Flynn

As serious as the battle with Satan is, Fr. Flynn ensures he sprinkles in some humor. As a sniper he had to take the shot at the precise time it was needed to protect his fellow soldiers. As Catholics, we can't sit on the sideline and not act when the enemy approaches.

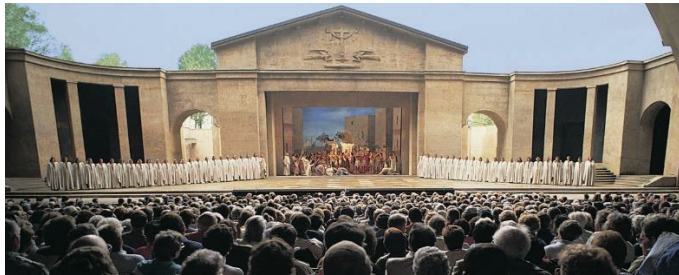
The sin of the first man, Adam, was not acting and stepping in and doing something. Adam simply accepted the fruit from the forbidden tree.

During Fr. Flynn's Jungle Warfare training in Panama, he was taught how to catch a monkey to survive extended time without food. The students were shown how to cut a small hole in a coconut and put banana in the coconut. Once the monkey put his hand in the coconut and grabbed the banana, they could not pull their hand out without releasing the banana.

All they had to do to get away was pull their hand out of coconut, but they would not since it meant losing the

banana. Their freedom was an open hand away, but they refused to let go of that which was trapping them.

Similarly, many of us hold on to old ways that keep us trapped by the devil. What's keeping you in your sin? The devil is like a sniper who throws the sack over the sinner when he or she refuses to let go of the things that are trapping them.



His global travels also offer examples. Fr. Flynn spent time in Oberammergau, Germany, which is famous for its Passion play that has been performed every 10 years since 1634 by the inhabitants of the village. As an atheist during his time there, he admitted living so close to such a historical event really meant nothing to him. He regrets missing out on some of the Catholic traditions like this during his travels around the world.

Although Germany is a nation that was the birthplace of Martin Luther's schism in the church and Nazi's rule brought tremendous suffering to many, the residents of this town in southern Germany have kept up a tradition of portraying Christ's greatest gift for almost 400 years. Through his suffering, we have life. Fr. Flynn shares how our lives should mirror Jesus's life on earth and

that through the hardships is how Christianity comes to our lives.

"We were created for greatness, not comfort." Pope Benedict XVI

Although he's a trained sniper, Fr. Flynn often talks about love. He clarifies that true love is not like his fraternity brothers who talked about being in love with a different girlfriend every few months. That's feeling of love, and not true love.

True love is sacrificial love. He brings a laugh to couples when he shares in marriage, that day when you look at your spouse and think, "how did you get here?" That's when you know it's sacrificial love.

"The love Christ shows us on the cross reveals that something that comes easily isn't worth much. Our faith is worth more than any other goal. So worth the work. Stop being trapped by Satan's trap." Fr. Flynn

Drawing on his time as a leader in the military, work and on the rugby field, he shares there are 3 ways to lead:

1. By force
2. Guilt
3. Love

Although the last way is not easy, it is the right way to lead. He further shares, "We've learned far too often you can't lead from the back. You can't lead from cowardice. You have must lead with a sense of purpose."

Drawing from his discernment from an atheist to a priest, Fr. Flynn shares that every Catholic male should take his discernment seriously. This should include being open to a calling to the priesthood. It is only through prayer and consultation with others that a young man can truly know what God desires for his life.

He pleads, "Please be open to God's will in your life, no matter what path that may take, and if you feel God is calling you to be a priest then please contact your pastor and the diocesan vocations office to help you further uncover God's will for your life."

Faith Challenge:

- Find some time each day (1, 5 or even 20 minutes) to silently listen to God. Ideally, do it in front of God's real presence in the Eucharist at your parish. Just as a sniper must sit still in silence and look and listen the discipline will help you discern God's will for you.

Works Challenge:

- Find a veterans group to support. Freedom is not free and although less than 1% of our nation serves in the military it is vital to maintaining our freedom. If you live in the United States, you are in the home of the free because of the brave.

Chapter 2

Fr. Richard Sutter- Power Runner and Army Ranger

I call you to follow me

Be Joyful, Be Approachable & Be Available



Before Richard Sutter was an officer in the Army leading a patrol in the swamps of Florida, he was a child and young man raised with 4 brothers and a sister in a strong Catholic home in Atlanta, Georgia. His father, Lloyd was a permanent Deacon, and his mother, Jill was a devout Catholic. Growing up in the 1970s and 80s, he did not always know that the military and priesthood would be his future, but he did know he didn't like to sit still.

Richard was always on the go. Between sports and school, he made the most of every day. His parents kept his focus on the faith as the family never missed Sunday mass, and ensured every child learned the bible and the catechism of the Catholic Church.

This education didn't always keep Richard out of trouble. As a young man, he and friend were out on their bikes one summer exploring a nearby neighborhood under construction. One of the homes had some windows under repair, and Richard's friend Chris dared him to throw a rock and see if you could take out on of the glass panels from nearly 50 yards away.

Richard was already familiar with the biblical story of the future King David slaying the giant Philistine, Goliath, with a rock from his sling. So perhaps he was trying to replicate the bible passage or just up for a challenge.

Richard found a good rock. Flung it towards the home and enthusiastic claimed victory when the glass window shattered into pieces. His joy quickly faded when an angry man bounded from behind the house toward Richard and Chris. Chris quickly hopped on his bike and sped away leaving Richard to fend for himself.

Although Richard was scared to face the consequence of his now regrettable action, he didn't run or bike away. He confessed what he did and even took the man to his mother to explain what happened. The two adults agreed that Richard would need to pay for the window. Rather than yell or humiliate Richard, they shared it in a caring manner. Although choosing to throw that rock wouldn't be Richard's last mistake, it gave him a sense of how his loving Father in heaven would deal with his and other's mistakes.

Eventually Richard would channel his energy and athletic skills towards more productive ventures. After playing all kinds of sports as young man, he focused on running in high school.

In track and cross country, he not only found success, but he also started developing leadership skills as the captain of his high school team. In college, he continued competing as a cross country runner, and although the race distance increase from 5 kilometers to 10 kilometers, he continued to be competitive as one of the top runners for his college, Belmont Abbey (BAC) just outside Charlotte, North Carolina. He captained the BAC Cross Country Team and served as student body president his senior year.

After graduating Magna Cum Lauda with a Business Management Degree and completing four years of ROTC (Reserved Officer Training Corps), Richard was commissioned a Second Lieutenant (2LT) in the U.S. Army. His strong grades demonstrated leadership and good eyesight helped him earn a coveted slot in the Aviation branch. He reported to Fort Rucker in Alabama to become a helicopter pilot, but God had different plans for 2LT Sutter.

Bear your share of hardship along with me like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. To satisfy the one who recruited him, a soldier does not become entangled in the business affairs of life. Similarly, an athlete cannot receive the winner's crown except by competing according to the rules. (2 Timothy 2: 3-5)

While learning how to fly a helicopter in simulator, Richard felt called to a different branch in the Army. Despite the potential glamour of being a pilot, Richard decided it was not in his future. After requesting a transfer, the Army assigned him to the infantry branch. These soldiers are the ground pounders, grunts, and queen of battle where the motto is “follow me” since in combat they are often given the toughest missions. Shortly after completing the Officer Basic course in Fort Benning, Georgia, Richard started the Army’s Ranger school.



In this book’s introduction, we left off with 2LT Sutter in the final of four phases of Ranger school leading a patrol in the swamps of Florida. Before he could reach this final phase, he had to complete numerous tasks and tests while getting limited sleep and even more limited food. As a college cross country runner two tasks came easy:

1. Complete the Army Physical Fitness test (APFT) which included completing over 60 pushups and 70 sit ups in 2 minutes as well as run 2 miles under 14 minutes. The latter he could do in under 11 minutes.

2. Complete a 5-mile run under 40 minutes in Army battle dress uniform (BDU) bottoms

Other tests included completing a difficult 3-mile obstacle course, an extensive land navigation course and passing a graded patrol in the first phase called Ground Phase.

During the second phase, Mountain phase in Dahlonaga, Georgia, 2LT Sutter would face one of his toughest challenges. Although a good athlete who could endure the long foot patrols while carrying well over 80 pounds in his rucksack, Richard had not done any rock climbing. After rappelling down cliffs and passing a knots test, 2LT Sutter had to climb the side of a mountain using nothing but his own hands and feet.

The instructor explained to the 6 Ranger candidates lined up for this next challenge that they needed to climb about 50 feet in the lane above them. Richard thought this may be the end of his school since he had a very difficult lane. His ranger buddy, Joe, stood next to him, and saw he had an easier lane. Joe was an experienced rock climber and offered to swap lanes with Richard. Richard quickly accepted the offer, thanked God for prayers answered, and quickly completed his climb. Joe completed his climb as well.

Years later, Fr. Richard would have a story to share in one of his homilies how God may give us challenges in life, but he also gives us helpers for the journey. In this case it was Joe, and months after this test during the mountain phase, both Richard and Joe would complete

all four phases of the Army's Ranger Course, survive 4 parachute jumps including one from one of those Blackhawk helicopters 2LT Sutter was once in training to fly and pin on the coveted black and gold ranger tab.

Shortly after completing Ranger school and the Bradley Leader's Course also in Fort Benning, Georgia, 2LT Richard Sutter reported for duty in Germany where he would serve as a platoon leader and ongoing ranger buddy for some fellow platoon leaders.

2LT Sutter would quickly excel in his first unit, 3/5 Cavalry battalion. Ironically, the young man who gave up the chance to fly helicopters in the Army to become an infantry officer was assigned to a Cavalry unit. Although Cavalry units in prior centuries involved fighting on horse, they had now evolved to fighting from helicopters and Bradley Fighting Vehicles. Richard would lead a platoon with 30 soldiers and 4 Bradleys.

Like most young officers, Richard was not perfect. He would eventually purchase the perfect car for Germany, a red BMW convertible which could top speeds of 120 miles per hour on the autobahn (German highways with no speed limits). This would prove helpful since after a long week of training, Richard enjoyed excursions around Europe, especially to the ski slopes in the winter. On his ski weekends, Richard would bring the same energy to the slopes that he brought to his career.

Rising at the crack of dawn, he'd typically be one of the first on the slopes and last to leave. By the end of the day, his red ski boots would be covered with snow from

his many adventures. The sunset and closing of the slopes meant his first full meal of the day since Richard believed in making the most of his ski pass. He'd pack some snacks, but never stop for an actual meal during the ski day.

These adventurous weekends and perhaps late-night fun never impacted his effectiveness as a soldier and leader, but on one occasion it almost did. The U.S. army units in Germany had limited space to train. So, to "exercise" the Bradley vehicles, commanders would schedule early morning convoys on the autobahn to ensure they and the soldiers driving them were combat ready. To avoid traffic, commanders would schedule these convoys very early in the morning. For a 5 am departure, units would assemble around 4 am to prep the vehicles and start getting in formation.

On one morning, the 4 am company formation was missing 2LT Sutter. Fortunately, the seasoned platoon sergeant with over 15 years of experience in the Army would cover for him. He'd also dispatch another NCO (Non-commissioned officer) to check on the young lieutenant's whereabouts. A call to his apartment was not answered, fortunately, Richard lived just a few blocks away from the military base.

So "Operation Wake Up the LT" commenced. Sergeant Jones hopped in his car, banged on Richard's door, and finally got him up. After quickly throwing on his uniform over his pajamas and putting on boots without socks or even tying the laces, they raced off to the base.

It was now 4:55 am when they pulled up next to the line of 15 Bradley vehicles lined up ready to go at precisely 5:00 am. Richard climbed in the turret of his Bradley assuming the position of commander next to his gunner.

Although he fumbled briefly with his headset for communicating with his platoon and company commander, he had in place just in time to hear his commander ask using his call sign, "Aztec 3 this is Aztec 6 are we ready to move." 2LT Sutter quickly responded with an enthusiastic, "Roger that, Aztec 3 ready!"

A young man saved by his NCOs would learn a valuable lesson in the phrase every military leader should follow, "if you take care of your soldiers, they will take care of you." Little did he or others know that God had greater plans for him to return that favor in a greater way. With a call to the priesthood, Richard would be asked to do more, and priests aren't given seasoned platoon sergeants.

Fortunately, Richard would learn from this near catastrophe and do better. He would do so well that he would eventually get an assignment to one of the battalion's 3 specialty platoons, an honor coveted by young officers.



As a 1LT now, Richard would add to his many accolades after his promotion. In addition to his jump wings, air assault badge and ranger tab, Richard would complete all the required tests for Expert Infantryman's Badge (EIB). Some of these tests included:

- Shooting "expert" by hitting at least 36 of 40 targets from various ranges of 50 to 300 yards away with his M16 rifle
- Completing a grenade throwing obstacle course
- Providing first aid
- Completing a land navigation course using just a compass and map
- The final test was to complete a 12-mile course in full combat gear (uniform, boots, and rifle) while carrying a filled rucksack in under 3 hours.

Richard would complete the "march" in about 2 hours since instead of a fast walk, Richard would put his cross-country skills to work and run most of the course.

I have fought the good fight to the end; I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith (2 Timothy 4: 7)

His military and athletic skills would capture the attention of the battalion commander who was tough former commander in one of the Army's elite Ranger Battalions before his assignment in Germany. The commander wanted Richard and his neighbor and fellow lieutenant, Greg, to train for and compete in the next Best Ranger competition. The plan was for these 2 young men to represent the battalion in this grueling three-day competition back in states, specifically Fort Benning, Georgia in 8 months.

Richard and Greg were already close friends. They not only shared a passion for fitness but more importantly the same faith. They tried to live out their Catholic faith, by attending weekly mass, even when training deployments and even ski weekends made that a challenge. They were both far from perfect, but good influences on each other when it came to fitness and faith. Greg had recently married his college sweetheart, Allison, who was also an officer in the Army, and kept him in line with his Catholic faith.

Richard had the edge on the fitness (and probably the faith too) having recently finished a few minutes head of Greg on recent 10-mile qualification run for the annual Army 10-miler in D.C. Although both had run it under an hour, Richard was the only of the two to qualify for the 3 slots the Army Division would give to compete in D.C. in a few months.

With these two events in his future, Richard was looking forward to the training and competitions, but God had other plans. While speeding along the autobahn with the music blaring from the radio, Richard and Greg discussed their training plans. The convertible top was down since it was a sunny warm day. Richard mentioned he was asked to consider being a general's aid, a prestigious job for a young officer. Accepting the role would put an end to the Army 10-miler and Best Ranger Competition plans.

As he was taught by his parents and other faith filled mentors, Greg reached over, turned off the radio and asked, or strongly suggested, "hey let's pray a rosary." Richard was a bit surprised but given that Greg was a bigger build than the lean runner, he agreed partly out of fear but primary because of their shared faith. After the rosary they discussed how God helps those who pray discern the right path. So even before cranking up the music and pushing the accelerator even lower, Richard felt he knew the answer. He would accept the role and become the general's aide.

In his new role, Richard gained valuable insights and connections that would accelerate his military career. He became well known by the leaders who would decide his future promotions. After completing his general aide assignment which include deployments in support of the NATO operations in the former Bosnia-Herzegovina region, now Captain Sutter attended the Infantry Officer Advance Course back in the familiar grounds of Fort Benning, Georgia. Familiar since that is

where he had completed Officer basic, Airborne school, Bradley Leader's Course and Ranger School over the previous 5 years.

Richard was set for a long successful military career. After completing the Infantry Officer Advance course and a brief assignment as a 2-star general's aide de camp with the 10th Mountain Division in Watertown, NY, he once again felt called to a new assignment. Captain Richard decided to leave the military after serving well past his obligatory four years in return for this Army ROTC scholarship and join the civilian workforce.

His new job as an Information Technology (IT) manager in New York city challenged him intellectually and drew on his strong leadership skills, and it also afforded him the time to continue pursuing his love for running. While at Fort Drum, Richard not only was able to make it to Army 10 miler in Washington DC that he had to forgo while in Germany, but he also achieved a personal best time of 54:17. This strong time encouraged him to try even longer distances. In 1998, he qualified for the prestigious Boston Marathon, where he completed the hilly course in just under 3 hours.

Despite these amazing accomplishments and a well-paying job, Richard felt God had other plans. So, in 1999, Richard gave up this lifestyle and his treasured Sea Doo and entered the priesthood. That Sea Doo may have been one of the toughest things to give up since it

helped him take a great Christmas card photo on the Hudson River with the Statue of Liberty as a backdrop.

At 29 years of age, Richard was one of the oldest Legionnaire of Christ seminarians, but his life experiences and untampered enthusiasm brought much value to his classmates and teachers. Having traveled all around Europe while stationed in Germany, Richard had learned about many cultures and traditions. He would soon be sent back to Italy where he'd continue to learn the bible, understand the teachings of the Catholic faith, and learn new languages.

His Latin, Italian and particularly Spanish lessons would serve valuable in the future. They would not only help him translate and understand ancient scriptures and interact better with local Europeans, but one day he would lead masses entirely in Spanish. As he freely admits, during some of the homilies in Spanish, he still needs help with a word or two, but as his NCOs and fellow officers helped him in the Army, his parishioners are there to help him.

After 8 years as a Legionnaire priest, Fr. Richard Sutter felt God calling him to become a Diocesan priest. He enjoyed the duties as a school chaplain and even could be found on the football and other sports fields blessing and cheering on the students.



Even as a priest, Fr. Richard has not lost his own competitive drive and athletic focus. He continues to coach young athletes and compete in triathlons including completing one full Ironman before focusing on half Ironmans more regularly. He qualified for and competed in the 2017 Ironman 70.3 World Championship in Chattanooga, Tennessee where he raced alongside 4,000 of the best amateur triathletes from 90 nations.

“If you want to start a war with Satan, you better be in shape.” Fr. Swink in *Priests We Need To Save the Church* by Kevin Wells

The triathlon training required “a lot of 4:30 in the morning wake ups” he shared, but he remained motivated since one of his races was dedicated to a child in need. One of his parishioners, 8-year-old Frances Brown, was battling macrocephaly-capillary malformation (M-CM) syndrome, a rare neurological disorder. She endured multiple surgeries on her brain and spine. So even while competing he was focused on his parish and serving God.

A dead thing can go with the stream, but only a living thing can go against it. G. K. Chesterton

Since being named the pastor of St. Gabriel’s parish in Charlotte in 2019, he has continued staying fit, but with some more responsibilities his racing has been limited. He has focused on shepherding his parishioners with a special emphasis on youth and teen ministries. The role has tapped his leadership skills learned in the military, his financial acumen he learned in business, and his language and catechism knowledge from his time in the seminary.

“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.” (Matthew 16:19)

Whether he is hearing confessions on a golf cart he occasionally drives around local college campuses or meeting with church counsels, he shows the energy needed to juggle all his duties. His compassion mirrors that of the man who forgave his childhood breaking window antics. His parishioners return that compassion when they help him finish some sentences during his Spanish homilies, akin to his platoon sergeant waking him up for formation.

Most importantly as the “quarterback” (his words) at Mass, this runner, triathlete, snowboarder, bass fisherman, golfer, and Army veteran shares personal stories in his homilies to humanize the word of God. He organizes parish trips each January to Washington D.C. to join others in the annual March for Life. After marching to uphold the sanctity of life from conception

in a mother's womb to natural death, Fr. Richard joins the group for a few days of skiing in West Virginia.



When he does get a break, he finds time for golf, cheer on his beloved Atlanta Braves or to visit his family. For a while his parents retired to Melbourne, Florida. So, he returned to the state where he completed the swamp phase of Ranger school to relax. Now they live closer to him in the Carolinas, and recently visited him for Easter week.

Each day, he focuses on 3 things.

1. Being Joyful
2. Being Available
3. Being Approachable

Great advice for anyone and especially those focused on achieving greatness as a student, parent, priest, or leader. Even on vacation, Fr. Richard enjoys waking up with morning mass. He solemnly fulfills the unique role of an ordained priest during the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. No accomplishment can compare.

He reminded his parishioners in a recent homily on the birthday of the church, Pentecost Sunday. Jesus ascended to heaven with one simple message. "I call you. I call you to take up your cross daily and follow me." How can we answer that call, and like a former Captain, Ranger, Ironman take up that cross and follow Jesus?



Faith Challenge:

Fr. Richard recently had a Meditations and Outdoor Stations and Rosary Walk built at his parish. Complete the stations each Friday during Lent.

The Stations/Way of the Cross is a devotion instituted by the Church to aid in meditating on Christ's passion and death. At each of the 14 stations, Catholics pray while we meditate upon the scene it represents, we make the Way of the Cross in memory of Christ's painful journey during His passion.

1. Jesus is condemned to death	8. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem
2. Jesus takes up his Cross	9. Jesus falls the third time
3. Jesus falls the first time	10. Jesus is stripped of his garments
4. Jesus meets his sorrowful Mother	11. Jesus is nailed to the Cross

5. Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry the Cross	12. Jesus dies on the Cross
6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus	13. Jesus is taken down from the Cross
7. Jesus falls the second time	14. Jesus is laid in the tomb

Works Challenge:

Find a friend to work out with on a regular basis. It can be as simple as playing a sport together or if you love running, like Fr. Richard, go for a run, swim or bike ride. You may not only strengthen a friendship, but also help someone stay healthy. As you develop your friendship be a witness to faith by inviting him/her to church, confession or to simply pray before or after your workout.

Chapter 3

St. John Paul II- Power Polish Pope

Be Not Afraid



Born Karol Józef Wojtyła on May 18, 1920, in Wadowice, Poland, Pope John Paul II's early life was marked by great loss. His mother died when he was nine years old, and his older brother Edmund died when he was 12. He had every reason to be angry with the world and God for taking these loved ones from him at such an early age, but instead he turned their loss and tragedies around World War II into an opportunity to share God's love for the whole world.

"Be not afraid" was one of his favorite sayings, and since he experienced loss and witnessed atrocities early in life, he practiced what he preached. Although many books and articles have appropriately been written about this great saint, this story hopes to explore the lesser-known stories and highlight how his powerful example inspired a generation of Christians including many of the priests featured in this book.

How did he inspire others?

1. By applying lessons learned through his theater, writing poetry and athletics
2. Studying hard
3. Persevering through tragedies brought on by evil
4. Loving his faith
5. Spreading that faith around the world

Growing up, John Paul* was athletic and especially enjoyed snow skiing, hiking, and swimming. His father, also named Karol, was a former army officer employed by the town council in Wadowice, a small town just 40 miles from the large city of Krakow. His mother, Emilia, was Lithuanian but spoke German at home laying the foundation for John Paul's flair for languages.

JPII was valedictorian of his high school class. He gained admittance to Krakow's Jagiellonian University in 1938. Founded in 1364 by King Casimir III the Great, it is the oldest university in Poland and the 13th oldest university in continuous operation in the world. It is often regarded as Poland's most prestigious academic institution. Fellow alumni include, Nicolaus Copernicus, who was a Renaissance era astronomer, and Catholic who formulated a model of the universe that placed the Sun rather than Earth at its center.

*to avoid confusion and brevity we will use Karol Joseph Wojtyla's chosen name of John Paul or JPII for the remainder of this story. He will forever be properly known as Saint Pope John Paul II

"There is no evil to be faced that Christ does not face with us. There is no enemy that Christ has not already conquered. There is no cross to bear that Christ has not already borne for us and does not now bear with us." JPII

In his first year at the university, JPII continued his interest in theater and poetry. His fellow thespians included actors from various faiths including close Jewish friends. The school was closed in his second year by Nazi troops during the German occupation of Poland. During this occupation John Paul worked with the underground networks that helped hide and smuggle Jews to safety. Although the Nazis would kill an estimated 6 million Jews often in concentration camps, many believe JPII's experience laid the foundation for his future efforts as the pope to heal rifts between Catholicism and Judaism.

"Violence and arms can never resolve the problems of men." JPII

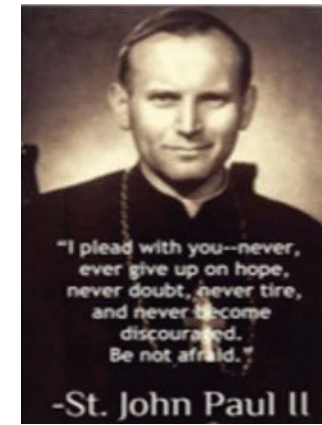
JPII continued his university studies underground and performed in a secret theatrical group that performed in stores and private homes helping bring some normalcy to an occupied nation. While in high school John Paul had the honor of meeting the Archbishop of Krakow. When Cardinal Adam Stefan Sapieha asked him whether he was thinking about becoming a priest, the future pope replied, "No, Your Eminence, I'm going to study philosophy."

While studying philosophy and acting, John Paul was also caring for his sick father. To cover living expenses, JP II worked at a factory. His experiences gave him material for his poetry and provided materials for one of his early encyclicals he wrote forty years later as pope, *On Human Work* released in 1981.

“As the family goes, so goes the nation and so goes the whole world in which we live.” JP II

When his father died, JP II knelt and prayed for 12 hours by his bedside. A short time later he began studying for the priesthood. The future pope never shared if there was a single moment that led him to hear God’s call, but clearly the tumultuous few years in Poland since high school had a profound impact on his discernment. JP II later shared that witnessing Nazi horrors, including the murder of many priests, showed him the real meaning of the priesthood. Just as Jesus prayed to his Father in the garden, perhaps John Paul used those 12 hours by his father’s bedside to discern his Father in heaven’s call for his life.

By the age of 20 he had lost a sibling, both his parents, and some Jewish friends. The Nazi occupation forced his formation in a secret seminary run by Krakow’s cardinal. Despite these challenges, JP II continued forward unafraid and shortly after World War II ended, he finished his religious studies at a Krakow seminary and was ordained in 1946.



The end of the war did not mean an end to Poland’s foreign occupation. The defeated Nazis made way for the similarly religious suppressing government, the Communists of Russia to take over occupation. John Paul would endure and continue his work as priest unafraid of the dire consequences if caught practicing his faith publicly. **“Be Not Afraid.”**

Ironically, the Communist authorities forced John Paul to develop a public speaking style that would eventually work against them: denied access to the media, he and fellow church leaders traveled ceaselessly among the people and grew skilled at communicating with large crowds. This ability would enhance the impact of the messages he delivered as pope to the faithful around the world, especially during his trips, when his ability to appeal to the millions who gathered to see him was captured in global television broadcasts.

“Life with Christ is a wonderful adventure.” JP II

John Paul's interest in athletic pursuits didn't stop once he became a priest. Groups of students often joined him for hikes, soccer matches, ski trips, cycling, and canoeing. These excursions were always accompanied by prayer, outdoor masses, and theological discussion.

Even after becoming a bishop at the relatively young age of 38, archbishop at 44 and a cardinal at 47, JP II continued his annual ski trips. On one occasion he was stopped by a border patrol officer thinking he was an imposter since surely a Catholic cardinal would not be skiing. The officer and soon the world would learn JP II was far from an imposter.

He was a genuine loving priest who set the example of faith and fitness for many priests to follow. In 1978, he became the first non-Italian pope in more than 400 years. He was a vocal advocate for human rights and political change. His fitness, enhanced by the installation of lap pool in the Pope's vacation home per his request, gave him the physical strength to become the most traveled pope in history, serve as Pope for 26 years (the 3rd longest tenure of any pope in history) and even survive an assassination attempt.



For those not familiar with the assassination story, it is a story of perseverance, forgiveness, and fearlessness. John Paul's speeches about religion and politics created many followers but also some enemies.

1. In his first trip abroad as Pope, he went to the Latin American countries of the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and The Bahamas (January–February 1979), where he reaffirmed for the bishops who cover half the world's Catholics. He also advocated for human rights, personal dignity, and religious freedom. While in Mexico, he attracted a crowd estimated at five million people which is still considered the largest crowd ever assembled.
2. His second trip (June 1979) was to his home of Poland, where he declared to his audiences that their Catholic faith dictated that they had a right to be free. A controversial message under the Communist rule. John Paul's speeches and activities served as models for the Polish priests

who would carry out his independence campaigns in the country after he returned to Rome.

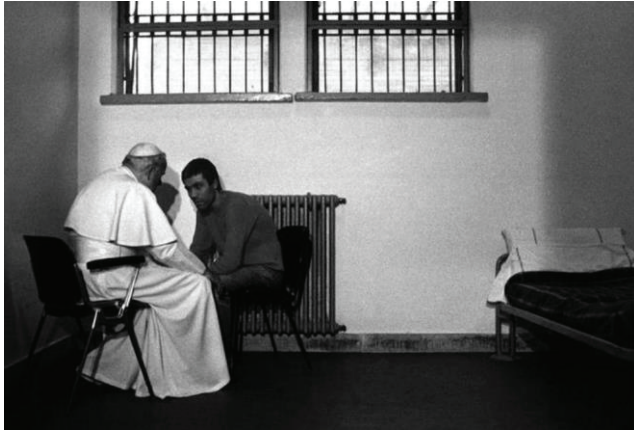
3. John Paul's third trip (September–October 1979) took him to Ireland and United States. In Ireland, he condemned violence done in the name of religion. This region had a long history of violence between Catholics in the south and Protestants in the North of Ireland. In the U.S., where he was given a Wall Street ticker-tape parade decried the neglect of the poor and denounced the exploitation of poor nations by wealthy ones.
4. On his fourth trip (November 1979) he visited Turkey to meet with the head of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Although his message was of peace, some thought he intended to pressure Soviet leaders through the church for an end to Communist rule. Although that change would have to wait a decade, with the fall of the Berlin wall and independence of Poland in 1989, he did rile some hatred by one Turkish citizen.

Ali Agca described the Pope as the “masked leaders of the crusades” and threatened to shoot him if he visited Turkey. Unafraid, JP II kept his plans and visited Turkey. Two years later, Agca would sneak into Italy and fire 4 rounds from a 9mm weapon into JP II as he circled among the crowds in Vatican square. Two rounds would lodge in his lower intestine while the other two hit his left index finger and his right arm.

Following an operation that lasted 6 hours, the 61-year-old Pope would survive, but spend 77 days in the hospital. As a credit to his fitness and faith, JP II would not just survive but thrive upon his recovery. Before the assassination attempt John Paul had complete 9 pastoral trips around the world. Afterwards he would complete 9 times as many over the next 18 years. JP II credits the intercession of Mary as a major factor in his recovery, and he would continue to maintain a strong devotion to her.



One of his first trips after his recovery was to the United States to meet the President Ronald Reagan. These two former actors not only enjoyed their shared interest, but more importantly pledged to jointly work for world peace and justice. Their cooperation is often credited as a major factor in the fall of Communist Soviet Union influence in Europe including his home of Poland.



Incredibly just a little over 18 months after being shot by Ali Agca, JP II would visit him in his Rebibbia prison to offer his forgiveness and witness to the message of Jesus. Although much of their conversation has remained private, they would form a friendship over the years. Ali Agca was also spared a harsher sentencing due to the merciful pleading of the Pope.

“Freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought” JP II

John Paul II died in Italy in 2005, and in July 2013 the Catholic church declared he would be named a saint in April of the following year. Although this short story barely scratches the surface of the many influences of this great saint, the hope is to share how his legacy continues today and encourage further inquiry by readers who may have been born after his passing.



He would leave us with many fruits of his labor including a revised Catholic Catechism and a clear message to protect life at all stages of development. He would team up with fellow saint Mother Teresa to spread this latter message, and although she would precede him to heaven, passing in 1998, their message was clear and rings true still today.

- “A nation that kills its own children is a nation without hope.” JP II
- “Abortion is the greatest destroyer of peace, because it destroys 2 lives, the child and the mother’s conscience.” Mother Teresa

A few of his major influences not already shared include:

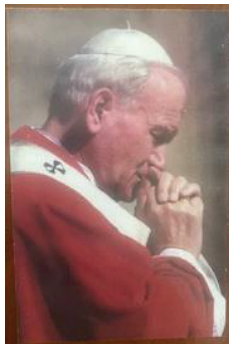
- In 1968 influencing the writings of then Pope Paul on the great encyclical *Humana Vitae* (Of Human Life)
- In 1984 establishing diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the USA
- Forming the first World Youth Day in 1986
- In 1992 officially presenting the revised *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and encyclical *I will bring you Shepherds*

So much more could be shared about this saint and his influence on the church and church leaders who have followed his advice to **be not afraid**. As a man who truly lived by his words, JP II set the standard for priests and lay members of the church to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Christ.

- “Be not afraid” to pursue healthy passions while balancing schoolwork
- “Be not afraid” to share the message of Christ
- “Be not afraid” to stand up to evil
- “Be not afraid” to forgive

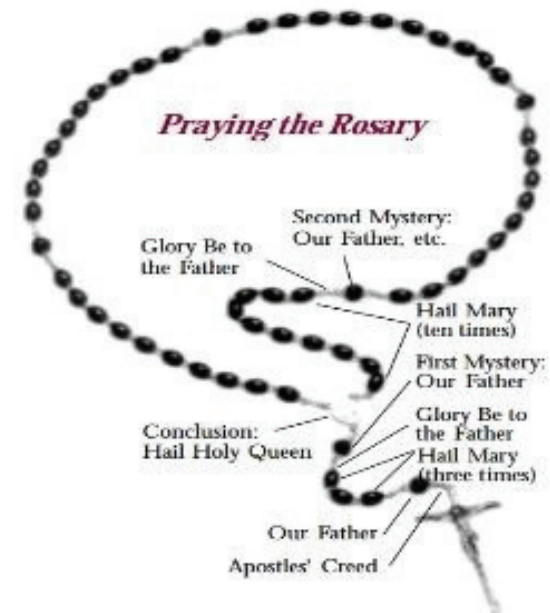
The latter we celebrate on Pentecost Sunday, when Jesus tells his apostles to go do the very thing that he was just crucified for doing. Would you be afraid?

“As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them. “Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.” (John 19: 20-23)



Faith Challenge:

- Saint John Paul II shared, **“The Rosary is my favorite prayer. A marvelous prayer! Marvelous in its simplicity and its depth.”** Try praying it today and every day, and here are a few tips if you think it’s repetitive. Follow the mysteries each day to recall the major events of Christ’s time on earth and pray for someone on each bead.



**THE
JOYFUL
MYSTERIES**
MONDAY & SATURDAY

1. The Annunciation
Luke 1:26-38
2. The Visitation
Luke 1:39-56
3. The Nativity
Luke 2:4-15
4. The Presentation
Luke 2:22-39
5. Finding Jesus in the Temple
Luke 2:41-51

**THE
SORROWFUL
MYSTERIES**
TUESDAY & FRIDAY

1. The Agony in the Garden
Matthew 26:36-46
2. The Scourging
Matthew 27:26
3. The Crowning with Thorns
Matthew 27:29-30
4. Carrying the Cross
Luke 23:26-32
5. The Crucifixion
Luke 23:33-46

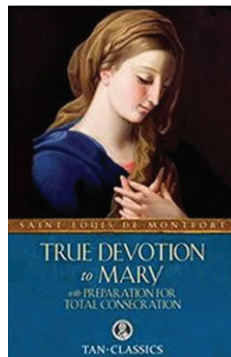
**THE
LUMINOUS
MYSTERIES**
THURSDAY

1. The Baptism of Jesus
Matthew 3:11-17
2. The Wedding Feast at Cana
John 2:1-12
3. The Sermon on the Mount
Matthew 5:1-12
4. The Transfiguration
Matthew 17:1-8
5. Institution of the Eucharist
Matthew 26:26-28

**THE
GLORIOUS
MYSTERIES**
WEDNESDAY & SUNDAY

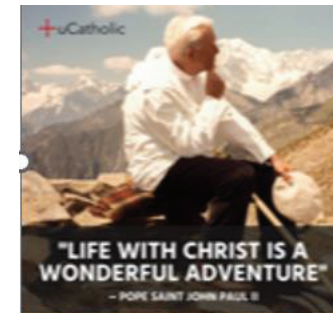
1. The Resurrection
Matthew 28:1-10
2. The Ascension
Luke 24:50-53
3. Pentecost
Acts 2:1-41
4. The Assumption
Revelation 12:1-5
5. The Coronation of Mary
Revelation 12:1

- If you are already praying the rosary, consider reading one of JP II's favorite books, *True Devotion to Mary* by St. Louis de Monfort.



Works Challenge:

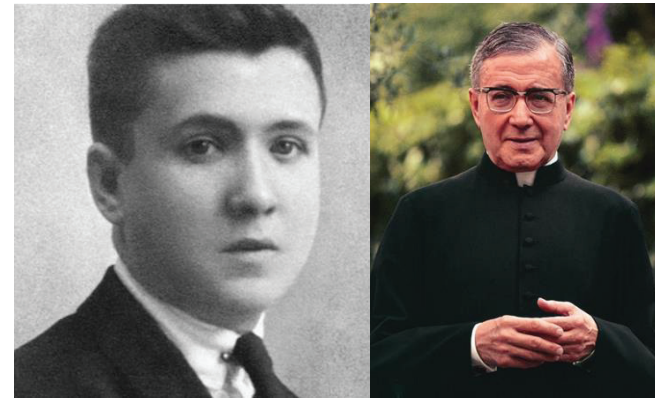
- Invite a friend, maybe one you need to forgive, on a hike or some other outdoor activity like skiing to enjoy God's natural creation. As Saint John Paul II showed, do not limit it to a Catholic friend.



Chapter 4

St. Josemaría Escrivá- Power Founder

Don't let your life be sterile. Be useful. Blaze a trail.



Josemaria may not sound like a common name to some readers, but in the Spanish speaking countries it is usually considered a single name when given to a baby boy. Appropriately it is a combination of the Spanish names of Joseph and Mary, the parents of Jesus Christ. In Hebrew it means “he who pardons”, and unlike some other priests featured in this book, Saint Josemaria Escriva responded to his call to the priesthood at a young age.

In short Josemaria, was no ordinary Joe. There’s a television show called *Ordinary Joe* which follows the three different paths of a young man’s life based on three different decisions he makes shortly after his college graduation. Other shows, movies and books have had similar themes where one or two decisions

vastly changes a character's outcome based on the path they choose.

One popular children's book series called *Choose Your Own Adventure* which this author particularly loved, allows the reader to determine the outcome by choosing one of two choices throughout the book. Although the book and shows are met primarily for entertainment, they can also teach us a lesson in life.

How do we choose the best path? Unlike the TV show, where the Joe character seems to randomly choose different careers almost on an impulse, Josemaria listened to the call from God to become a priest and later to found Opus Dei, The Work of God. While carrying the name of Jesus' earthly parents, Mary and Joseph, Josemaria first learned how to discern God's will by listening to his parents.

Josemaría Escrivá was born in Barbastro, Spain on January 9, 1902, and baptized on January 9. His parents, Jose Escrivá and Dolores Albas, were faithful and pious Christians who introduced their children step by step to the Christian way of life. His father was a textile merchant, and his mother was entirely devoted to her family and to raising their children: Carmen, Josemaria, Asuncion, Lolita, Rosario, and Santiago.

At two years old Josemaría fell seriously sick but recovered through the intercession of Our Lady of Torreciudad.

In the 1910's the family suffered a period of additional trials. In 1910, his sister Rosario, died at only 9 months

old. Two years later Lolita died at the age of 5, and a year later Asuncion died at the age of 8.

Around the same time, his father's business suffered an abrupt turn due to the unjust actions of one of his partners and the family's savings were lost. This severe economic setback resulted in the family leaving Barbastro and settling in the town of Logroño where his father had found work as a salesclerk in a business similar to the job he left in Barbastro.

Josemaria, a bright young student with a cheerful and open personality, watched his parents suffer these hardships but kept his deep faith in God.

At the age of 16, while walking in Logroño on a cold winter day, St. Josemaria noticed footprints in the snow left by the bare feet of a Carmelite friar. As he considered the life of dedication represented by those footprints, he felt a deep awakening in his soul and wondered if he too was called to give himself to God. From that day St. Josemaria felt that God wanted something from him, though he did not know what it was. Convinced that he could best discern this call as a priest, he decided to give up his intended career as an architect and enter the seminary.



St. Josemaria openness to the will of God began at an early age due to the devout faith of his Catholic family. Despite losing 3 children and suffering financial loss, his mother would recite daily prayers with him.

This foundation of faith in her ordinary life, laid the foundation for St. Josemaría's lifelong dedication to both Mary and the work of Opus Dei.

Shortly after losing his father in 1924, St. Josemaria was ordained a priest in 1925 at the age of 23. With the permission of the Archbishop, St. Josemaria moved to the capital city of Madrid to work among the poor and destitute while teaching and studying for his doctorate in Civil Law at the prestigious University of Madrid. As he would later describe it, "when I was 25 I used to come frequently to these undeveloped areas to wipe away tears to help whoever was in need, to bring a little warmth to children, the old people, and the sick; And to receive a lot of love in return and once in a while a pelting of rocks."

Spain was boiling with anticlericalism and priests were under attack. Churches and convents were burned, but that did not dissuade St. Josemaria. He walked from one part of the city to another bringing the sacraments to the sick and dying. As the Hebrew meaning of his name implies, St. Josemaria went to hear confession of many including children to remind believers that Jesus pardons.



On October 2nd, 1928 the feast of the guardian angels father Jose Maria returned to his room after Mass and there suddenly he saw the long awaited will of God. He saw the people of every nation and race of every age and culture seeking and finding God right in the middle of their ordinary life, their work, their family, and their friendships. People who look for Jesus to love him to live his holy life until they were completely transformed and made into saints- saints in the world.

"He waits for us every day, in the laboratory, in the operating theatre, in the army barracks, in the university chair, in the factory, in the workshop, in the fields, in the home and in all immense panorama of work." St. Josemaría

The apostolic work of this new vision would become Opus Dei and as a result, a new path to holiness was opening in the Church, to promote, among people of all social classes, the search for holiness without changing one's state in life. This idea may not seem extraordinary today, but at the time it was groundbreaking. Men and women are called to holiness

as priests and nuns, but also as doctors, teachers, lawyers, business leaders, architects, parents etc.

Despite the inspiring vision, the beginning could not have been more challenging. Growth was slow, and after eight years less than 20 people had joined Opus Dei and then war broke out in Spain. St. Josemaria was a poor unknown priest with no financial resources or patrons, but he never quit. His vision of holiness for all would later be confirmed during Vatican II.

Now the laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth. Lumen Gentium 4:33

Civil war brought even fiercer religious persecution. Thousands of priests and nuns were murdered, and St. Josemaria was forced to abandon his clerical dress and to go into hiding in Madrid moving from place to place to avoid capture and death. For a while he even lived in an insane asylum pretending to be mentally ill. Later he and a few members of Opus Dei found refuge in the consulate of Honduras where they lived in a single room during this time, he still ministered to many risking his life to do so.

Despite the difficult conditions brought on by the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and then World War II (1939-1945), Father Josemaria continued his priestly ministry and build up the Work. In 1946 he traveled to Rome to seek Vatican approval so that international expansion could begin. He would live in Rome for the

expansion could begin. He would live in Rome for the rest of his life and by the mid-1970s Opus Dei would be flourishing in over 30 countries on six continents.

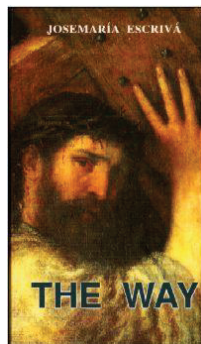


Father Josemaria made long catechetical trips where he would meet with large crowds spreading the message of the sanctification of work. Each Christian, whatever his/her job or position in life should be a good son or daughter of Christ. His message still rings true today.

“You and I must be rebels but the kind that gives solutions. Solutions based on justice and charity- Christian solutions.” St. Josemaría

On June 26, 1975, he died suddenly of a heart attack. In 1982 Opus Dei was established as a personal prelature by Pope John Paul II. As previously shared in May of 1992, Fr. Josemaria was declared blessed and then on October 6th, 2002, before an enormous crowd in Saint Peter's square Pope John Paul II declared him to be a saint- referring to him as the “Saint of ordinary life.”

for priests and nuns. “Be holy as my father in heaven in holy”, he says for all of us.

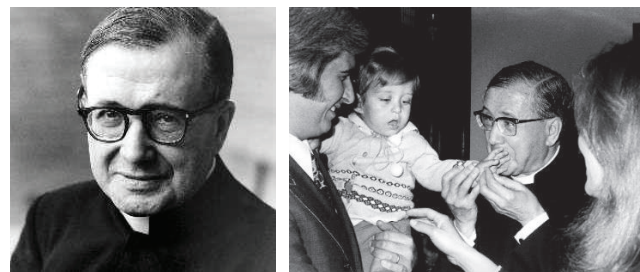


Through Opus Dei, God continues to reveal ways to sanctify our ordinary lives, and through his many books and videos, St. Josemaria continues to preach that message long after his departure from this life. His books generally have brief titles with brief reminders that have a powerful message. From *The Way*, to *Furrow*, *Christ is Passing By*, *Holy Rosary* and *In Love with the Church*, St. Josemaria offers practical and timeless guidance. *The Way* alone has sold more than 5 million copies in more than 45 languages.

Have you noticed how human love consists of little things? Well, divine Love also consists of little things." St. Josemaría Escrivá, The Way

Members of Opus Dei now number nearly 100,000 around the world with members in Africa, Asia, the Americas and of course Europe. The numbers of men and women are roughly equal. With 98% lay members, most of whom are married, Opus Dei continues to emphasize the power of doing the work of God in our

regular profession. The other 2% are priests, like Fr. Luke Mata, also featured in this book, who help guide the members along their spiritual formation.



St. Josemaria humbly emphasized that he simply listened to God's call as an ordinary Joe who was called to extraordinary work. He shared in a talk in the 1970s "I didn't found Opus Dei, Opus Dei is the work of God. All I did is get in the way. Is that clear?"

All readers are encouraged to explore more about St. Josemaria and the work of Opus Dei throughout the world so all of us can better live our Christian vocation in our daily lives. His feast day is celebrated each year on June 26.

To appropriately wrap up this chapter and the eternity of the message God asked St. Josemaria Escrivá to share, contemplate for your life the first line of his first publication, *The Way*.

"Don't let your life be sterile. Be useful. Blaze a trail. Shine forth with the light of your faith and of your love." St. Josemaría Escrivá, The Way

Faith Challenge:

- Find one of St. Josemaria's many books and use for your daily reflections. Recommend starting with *The Way*.
- Ask God for some intention through the Prayer for Saint Josemaría's intercession

God, through the meditation of Mary our Mother, you granted your priest St. Josemaria countless graces, choosing him as a most faithful instrument to found Opus Dei, a way of sanctification in daily work and in the fulfillment of the Christian's ordinary duties. Grant that I too may learn to turn all the circumstances and events of my life into occasions of loving You and serving the Church, the Pope and all souls with joy and simplicity, lighting up the pathways of this earth with faith and love. Deign to grant me through the intercession of St. Josemaria, the favor of (make your request). Amen
(Complete one Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be to the Father.)

Works Challenge:

- Follow St. Josemaría Escrivá's example and incorporate your faith through small things in your ordinary life. Find an opportunity to support life. Whether working for the life of a child in the womb or the care of the poor or elderly.

Chapter 5

Fr. Luke Mata- POWER SOCCER PADRE

Assist others, love Mary, and lean on your guardian angel



Growing up in Madrid, Spain, Luke Mata enjoyed being part of a large family, studying his faith, and playing soccer. Called "futbol" in the soccer crazed nation of Spain, Luke excelled at the national sport. His premier ball handling, precise passing and strong shot made him one of the top players in the area. Although he'd modestly claim that he was not even the best soccer player in his family, Luke's skills would take him from Spain to one of the top soccer programs in New Jersey at Bergen Catholic High School.

Since all his 8 brothers and sisters were very tough and athletic, Luke's claim of not even being the best player in his family may have been accurate. The family could have their own soccer matches, and his father ensured they were raised to be tough. Luke's Dad would find unique ways to ensure all the boys were disciplined and tough enough to follow Christ. Every year he would organize for his sons what he called "a wild adventure,"

something that would be hard and help them grow in virtue.

One of these ways was the 24-hour walk. With very little notice, Mr. Mata told all his sons to get dressed put on some shoes and follow him. Within minutes all the Mata boys plus a few neighbor friends were ready to go. Just as when Jesus called his apostles and later told them to take nothing but a staff and sandals for their journey to spread the message of Christianity, the Mata boys did not know where they were going, but they were ready to follow dad, walking for twenty-four hours without breaks.

He (Jesus) said to them, "Take nothing for the journey, neither walking stick, nor sack, nor food, nor money, and let no one take a second tunic." (Luke 9:3)

They left their home just before noon and would not return until next morning, just in time for the Sunday noon Mass at their parish. They walked and talked. Some of the younger brothers complained, but the older ones cajoled them forward respecting their dad's wishes. When some of the younger boys couldn't walk anymore, Mr. Mata "gave in" and allowed them to stop for a few minutes, but that was it. When they finally returned home, they attended Mass and then enjoyed a great breakfast and the memories and a lesson in discipline and endurance.

Admittedly the boys thought their dad was crazy for making them walk all night, but it would serve as a strong example and appreciation for what the early disciples endured. This experience, the boys claimed,

was even harder than the "wild adventure" their dad had organized the previous summer, a survival week. A week in the wilderness with no food and no water. They had to survive with whatever they could hunt and fish and find in the trees. But the walk, they said, was much tougher.

For Luke, his endurance would serve him well in soccer. After over an hour of playing in a game, many other players would slow down, but Luke was able to continue to attack the goal and scored most of his goals late in the match. His teammates would relish these moments when he could find a way to score a late goal to break a tie or secure a victory.

In a playoff game his senior year, it was an assist, not a goal that would help his team. With the score tied 1-1 and just minutes to play against their rival Don Bosco, Luke received the ball just 10 yards past midfield. The defender was forcing him to the left side knowing that his right foot was naturally stronger. Luke used his endurance and burst of speed to dribble up the left side hoping to draw another defender and open the right side for a potential cross.

As he passed to the far left of the 18-yard box, Luke noticed his teammate Paul racing down the right side of the field toward the back post. Having worked on improving his left foot, Luke was confident he could make a strong pass. For a second, he thought he could take a shot on goal, but the goalie was in a good position for the angle he had. So selflessly, Luke made the crossing pass hoping Paul could finish the job.

The ball sailed passed the defenders outstretched leg and over the goalie's reach and looked like it could potentially go into the goal without any assistance, but the timing with Paul was perfect. Paul simply put out his right foot and volleyed the ball into the net. As his coach had taught him, he closed the back door, and Bergen Catholic would win the game.

As the team celebrated, Paul received most of the attention for his goal. Since the team's bench was on the opposite side of the field (or "pitch" as some say) many didn't even know who made the crossing pass. One coach even asked Luke who made the cross, and he simply said, "I don't know, it was a team effort." His Dad had not only taught him to be tough, but humble giving God the praise.

Later in life that endurance, humility and giving priority to God would serve Luke well. While some smaller colleges were interested in Luke playing soccer for them, Luke's strong academics earned him an acceptance into the University of Notre Dame. As a premier Catholic university named for Our Lady*, the discernment was easy for Luke. Since he was a young boy, Luke had been involved with Opus Dei** (Latin for The Work of God) in Spain and had a strong affinity for Mary and accepting the call of Angel Gabriel to be the mother to Jesus.

*Notre Dame was founded by French priests in 1842 and named Notre "Our" Dame "Lady" to honor Mary the mother of Jesus.

** See more about Opus Dei at <https://opusdei.org/en-us/>

As he pursued his degree in Economics and Computer Applications, Luke decided to not continue playing competitive soccer at the college level. The academic rigor and his continued work with Opus Dei took priority, although Luke did find time for some intramural soccer. Luke still found time to sing in the Glee Club, lead as president of the Spanish club, serve as a teaching assistant, and volunteer as a counselor for international students.

"Tackling serious matters with a sporting spirit gives very good results. Perhaps I have lost several games? —Very well, but — if I persevere — in the end I shall win." St. Josemaria Escriva

Inspired by the example of St. Josemaria working with the poor in his home of Madrid, Spain, Luke volunteered to work in poor, rural areas of Mexico during his college summers. Those experiences led Luke to found **Youth Service International**, an organization that trains students to work in underprivileged areas in various parts of the United States and abroad, especially Mexico and South America, but also including places in Africa and Asia. The experience in training and forming volunteers, especially working in rough areas side by side with the volunteers, proved to be a wonderful preparation for his priestly vocation.

During those summers of service work building houses, bridges, and churches, and conducting medical field trips, Fr. Luke managed to break his collar bone, to rupture the ligaments of both shoulders, to break his nose, and to get deathly sick from drinking highly

contaminated water. The Good Lord, however, was saving him for a priestly call.

After graduating in 1988, Luke would pass on lucrative opportunities from businesses in Chicago and New York to stay near Notre Dame and serve as the director of Windmoor Study Center which was and still is a thriving student residence run by Opus Dei. He also worked as the president of Youth Service International and in 1991 Luke was appointed to the organizing committee for the World Youth Day in Denver that would take place in 1993. During those years he was able to meet Pope John Paul II several times and even got to put his Notre Dame Glee club skills to use when he played the guitar and sang for the Pope.



Luke performing for John Paul II with his band

Shortly after the World Youth Day, Luke was ordered, as a citizen of Spain, to return home and serve in the Spanish military. Since King Carlos III introduced conscription in 1770, young men of Spain were required* to serve, and Luke did his part. As a tank driver he served his country like some of the other priests profiled in this book and St. Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuits did in the 16th century. Unlike St. Ignatius of Loyola (Priest who found the Jesuits) who

severely injured his leg while serving, Luke completed is required service unscathed, but while serving he continued share the good news of his Catholic faith.

Although Luke had turned down good opportunities in New York after his military service, he received another opportunity to live in the Big Apple, when Opus Dei asked him to be the director of the Center of Studies for young members. While living in New York City he remained fit through soccer, basketball, and tennis. He'd frequently go for a run in Central Park, a 6.25-mile run. He thought about running the New York City marathon several times, but his memories as a 14-year-old running the Madrid marathon with his dad and brothers (another wild adventure his dad has suggested) convinced him not to try again; one marathon was enough! After much prayer and with the help of spiritual direction Luke discerned to enter the priesthood. Luke knew he would have to train hard for this race, and he poured his heart and mind into his vocation.

*The Spanish government removed this requirement in 2001 and is now an entirely volunteer military.



After studies in Rome at the University of the Holy Cross, Fr. Luke Mata was ordained to the priesthood, in 2006. He later earned his Doctorate in Moral Philosophy from the same Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome in 2008 and currently serves as the Vicar of Opus Dei in California.

Although his competitive soccer days are in his past, Fr. Luke still has some skills on the playing pitch. Just as he made that crucial assist in high school, Fr. Luke continues assisting others to understand and deepen their Catholic faith. Like one of his favorite saints, St. Barnabas, who assisted Saint Paul in spreading the good news of the early church, Father Luke spreads the message of sanctifying our ordinary work by offering it to God. His PhD dissertation explored the nature of love and examined the basic need all human beings have, to be loved.

“Without grace there is no hope, but with it there is no shortage.” St. Barnabas

Acts 11:24 describes St. Barnabas as “a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith”. These words could describe Father Luke, who despite being a good man and full the holy spirit and faith, can be quick with a joke or a laugh. St. Barnabas sold his property to support St. Paul and the early church. Father Luke passed on a lucrative career to follow his call to serve and show others the love his PhD dissertation explored.



Since moving to Los Angeles in 2008, Father Luke continues to honor our Lady and remain true to the lesser-known words of the famous Notre Dame victory march. Most know the second verse of the song which starts with “Cheer Cheer for old Notre Dame”, but some may not realize the first focus is on our Mother Mary. After “Rally sons of Notre Dame” the songs focus on the glory and beauty of our mother with phrases like:

*Sing her glory and sound her fame
Raise her Gold and Blue...*

*Strong of heart and true to her name
We will ne'er forget her
And will cheer her ever
Loyal to Notre Dame.*

Father Luke advocates a regular devotion to Mary including a focus on praying the rosary. As he discerned his call to the priesthood, the words of Mary at the wedding at Cana where Jesus performed his first miracle by turning water into wine, ring true.

“Do whatever he tells you.” John 2:6

Father Luke felt God calling him to serve and now he and others are feeling a call to build a shrine in Los Angeles, California to honor Mary.



It will be called **Mary, Mother of Fairest Love Family Shrine**. The Shrine will be a place for both quiet reflection and growing more in love with your family. Situated in southern California, the vision is to create a destination filled with elegant architecture and sprawling parks, with spaces for contemplation and spending time with others. With its serene ambience and beautiful grounds, the Shrine will offer families and friends a respite from the bustle of daily life, enabling them to spend meaningful time together.

For Catholics, the shrine’s design will embody the magnificence of human love, as exemplified by Mary, in her role as the Mother of God. In addition to a beautiful church, the Shrine’s grounds will include unique prayer spaces and areas where we can host educational programming regarding family life and family love for all ages.

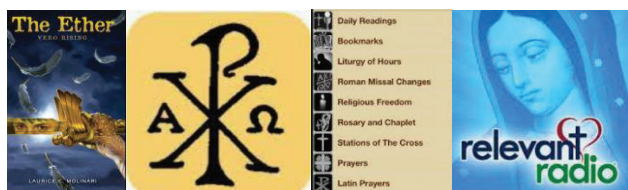


The ultimate hope is that the shrine will foster the spiritual and relational growth of singles, couples, and families of all faiths.

“Pride leads to disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.” Proverbs 11

God uses everything in our past as a force for the future if we are willing to surrender to his will. God continues to use Father Luke’s unselfish skills on the soccer field, his toughness from 24-hour walks, marathons, international service, as well as his strong mind and wit enhanced at Notre Dame and during his PhD studies to powerfully spread the word and show others God’s love and the way to Christ.

In the spirit of St. Barnabas, Father Luke will humbly serve ensuring that the focus remains on God and our powerful intercessor, Our Mother Mary.



Faith Challenges:

- Pray the simple but powerful *Prayer to Your Guardian Angel*. If you have not memorized it, try now.

Angel of God, my *guardian* dear to whom God's love commits me here, ever this day, be at my side, to light and guard, rule and guide
- If you'd like to learn more about Guardian angels in a fun way, pick up *The Ether* series of books by Laurice Elehwany Molinari. They are an entertaining way to learn the faith.
- Download the *Laudate* and *Relevant Radio* apps- they are great companions to faith that he recommends.

Works Challenge:

- Volunteer some time to assist others through organizations like **Youth Service International** or many other faith-based organizations that work in underprivileged areas. Your one week a year or few hours a month can go a long way to help others.

Chapter 6

Fr. Vince Bork: Power Professor and Scientist

Chaplet of Divine Mercy & Flowers for Mom

Jesus, I Trust in You



Born in Evansville, Indiana, Vince Bork learned early on to love three things:

1. God
2. Science
3. Basketball

At times in his life, the order of those loves fluctuated, but they all remained in the top 3 even as Vince attended football crazed Notre Dame for college. Born to Polish parents, Vince also loved his ancestral traditions which included the Catholic faith. Despite his paternal great-grandfather changing their last name from Borkowski to Bork to blend in as American, Vince was a proud Polish son.

As a young man, he relished eating homemade perogies and the traditional white fish on Christmas eve. His family regularly attended mass and prayed the rosary

often inspiring his love for prayer and the intercession of blessed Mary.

Although Vince would lose his father to an early death, Vince learned some valuable life lessons from him. A few of those included the importance of an education and respect for women, especially his mother and of course the mother of Jesus. His mother was a strong influence on his faith teaching him to show reverence as the apostle Thomas did, **“My Lord and My God.”** (John 20:28)

One tradition his father left with him Fr. Vince loves to share. On his birthday, Vince gives his mother flowers. Yes, rather than expect gifts from her on a day that he was simply born, he gave a gift to the one who did all the work on the day. A beautiful gesture that we all should follow to show the proper respect for mothers!

For a man’s glory comes from honoring his father, and it is a disgrace for children not to respect their mother.
(Sirach 3:11)

As a young man, Vince moved basketball up in importance on his list. He was never the tallest or fastest on his team, but he was always scrappy and feared no one. For those not familiar with the basketball crazed state of Indiana, in the 1960 and 70s high school basketball was so popular they made an award-winning movie about it called, *Hoosiers*.



Any reader who has not yet seen that movie should watch it and understand some of the basketball traditions in the state. For many years, all high schools in Indiana competed in one class. So small schools with just 50 students would compete against larger schools with 500+ students for the state basketball title. In the movie, *Hoosiers*, one of those small schools, Milan High School, makes it all the way to the state finals. I’ll let the movie tell you how they do.

“If you celebrate the victory before you play, you are going to lose!” Fr. Vince

Back to undersized Vince Bork competing in basketball. Without a 3-point line* to spread out the court or the speed to dribble around his opponent, Vince developed a strong post game despite being outsize by most defenders. With his back to the basket, Vince could turn quickly to make a fade away shot or even shoot a hook shot made popular by much taller NBA legends like Kareem Abdul Jabar and others.

*The 3 point line was introduced to Indiana high school basketball in 1987

To round out his game and garner more playing time, Vince also played scrappy defense and became an adept passer. Always a good student in the classroom, Vince studied the game of basketball to understand better ways to break a full court press or find a teammate when playing against a man-to-man or zone defense.

Despite some success in high school basketball, Vince lacked the size and natural athleticism to compete at the college level, but that didn't stop him from still playing the game he loved. While his good grades help him earn admission to the University of Notre Dame, his basketball skills made him popular with classmates hoping to compete in intramurals and the famous bookstore basketball tournament.

Although Notre Dame is more famous for football, more students compete in basketball than any other sport. Although just a few miles south of Michigan, Notre Dame is in basketball-crazed Indiana. The bookstore basketball tournament has been a spring tradition for over 50 years.



Teams of 5 students and/or faculty members compete outdoors on full courts in a single elimination format. With over 500 teams competing each year, the early games are self-refereed and played in any kind of

weather. Students get very creative with their team names and making the sweet 16 is quite an achievement. As a junior, Vince and his teammates made it to the final 16 teams but lost to one of the eventual finalists who had some athletic football players on their team.

Fortunately for Vince, graduation from Notre Dame didn't bring his basketball playing days to an end, but with limited time while working towards his PhD in physics, Vince focused more on periodic pick-up games. He also wasn't particularly focused on his faith until an illness kept him from attending the annual Notre Dame vs. USC football game. Since he was too sick to go to the game, Vince joined a group going on a retreat hosted by Opus Dei. After a good confession he realized there was more to life than beer, basketball, good grades, and girls. Apparently, beer and girls had joined the top of his list since his youth.

While his love of science took front seat while attending the prestigious Washington University in St. Louis, Vince also kept his faith strong while staying at the nearby Opus Dei center (Wespine). He also actively worked with local youths. A side bonus of being a summer camp counselor, was meeting other counselors who shared his love of basketball and the faith. At Wespine, he also worked with Fr. Hilary Mahaney, who was an athlete in his own right, having starred as a pitcher on the Notre Dame baseball team.

Although Vince contemplated following his father's footsteps and instilling the love of education and

respect for women while raising a family, he felt a calling. While discerning if that call included serving God as priest, Vince had some helpers along the way.

The mother of two of his basketball loving fellow counselors was a devout Catholic named Carolyn who prayed daily while raising her 6 children. She essentially “adopted” Vince as one her own while he studied for his PhD. She would prepare meals for him, ensure he always had clean clothes, and eventually awakened him to his calling in life.

Just as Jesus listened to his mother at the wedding at Cana in the gospels, when she told him **“They have no wine.”** (John 3:2) Vince listened to his “adoptive” mother. Vince had always considered the priesthood, but as he pursued his PhD in physics, he pondered life as a research scientist. While his love of science and basketball filled much of his time, he did consider dating until his “adoptive” Mom lovingly reminded him that God had greater plans for him.

At Cana in John’s gospel, Jesus said to his mother, “... how does your concern (about the wine) affect me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother simply said to the servers, “Do whatever he tells you.” Similarly, Carolyn simply told Vince that he should not focus on dating, “God wants you to be a priest.” Vince humble reply echoed a similar tone to Mary’s reply to the Archangel Gabriel call for her to be the mother of Jesus, “I’m not good enough.” Carolyn retorted, “Yes you are.”

While the words to Jesus in John’s gospel would lead to our saviors first miracle of turning water into wine,

Carolyn’s words to Vince would lead to his ordination to the priesthood within a few years after earning his PhD. On a smaller scale of miracles, Fr. Vince would eventually cook for himself and wear a scapular under his clean t-shirts. He would continue to love basketball and science, just in the proper order.

For nothing will be impossible with God. (Luke 1:37)

Why would a gifted scientist, become a priest? Actually if one studies history, the Catholic church and priests in particular have contributed much to the advancement of science. From Jesuit priests who advanced the study of astrology to devout Catholic French scientist Louis Pastuer, the contributions are numerous.

Some who don’t know their history or the teachings of the Catholic might even argue that one must choose between science and faith. That ignorant notion couldn’t be futher from the truth, and Fr. Vincent Bork would continue that tradition and choose both.

“be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves” (Matthew 10:16)

Shortly, after graduatiing from Washington University in St. Louis, he spent the next three years teaching mathematics and science at Christendom College in Virgina. While teaching, he also took classes in philosophy before applying for the priesthood for the Diocese of Arlington, Virginia.

Since his ordination in 1995, Fr. Vince has been immersed in pastoral ministry first served as the parochial vicar of St. Michael Church in Annandale,

Virginia. For the past twenty-five years he has served at many parishes around the diocese of Arlington.



He strives to bring souls to Christ especially through the sacraments and devotions to the Divine Mercy and Total Consecration to Holy Mary. As explains to his parishoners, the history of the devotion to Divine Mercy has its origin in the apparitions of Jesus Christ reported by Saint Faustina. Saint Faustina is a story in her own right since she was a poor Polish nun in the 1930s with only three years of simple education but is often quoted by these power priests. The three colors coming from Jesus have a special meaning.

1. Blue- water for baptism in the name of God
2. Red- blood of Chirst
3. White- the Holy Spirit

Appropriately, Saint John Paul II declared the Sunday after Easter be called "Divine Mercy Sunday" and confirm Sister Faustina as a saint. Father Vince regularly gives the picture of Jesus as the Divine Mercy to couples as a wedding gift to remind them about God's mercy and graces a Catholic wedding can bring. He ensures the

picture has the description, "Jesus, I Trust in You" as a reminder that a good marriage takes 3.

1. A faithful husband
2. A faithful wife
3. A merciful God

"The Divine Mercy Novena is a great way to start off the Easter Season" Fr. Vince Bork



As a long time camp counselor, Fr. Vince continues to enjoys working with the formation of the youth. Although the intensity of his basketball playing style has lessened, he still can shoot a pure jump shot or one of his famous hook shots.

"Science can purify religion from error and superstition. Religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes." Saint John Paul II

Father Vince likes to mix the sports and education, and shared:

“Integral formation involves more than just catechesis using sound Catholic doctrine. Young people especially need intense intellectual formation so as to serve Christ in a culture characterized by subjectivism and relativism.”

Some of that intellectual formation, includes basic lessons related to science.

Science tells us that we need 4 basic things to survive.

1. Water
2. Air
3. Food
4. Light

And look what the bible tells us about Jesus.

1. Jesus is the living water
2. Jesus is the breath of Life
3. Jesus is the bread of life
4. Jesus is the light of the world

Science is right, we need Jesus to live.

If that sounds too simplistic, consider what Fr. Vince studied during his graduate and pos-doctoral research:

- Amorphous solids using low temperature deuterium nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR).
- Elucidating structural and dynamic information from polymers and biochemical compounds using Cross-Polarization Magic Angle Spinning (CPMAS) NMR

If you are reading this book and understand either of those, you too may be as powerful as some of these priests. So we will leave an explanation of those to another book, but Fr. Vince continues to work in science as professor keeping up the tradition of scientist as priests.

Fr. Vince likes to sprinkle in small scientific facts in his homily to remind parishioners of the amazing power of God and the world He created. In one recently homily he asked, “Which animal on the planet if you stacked all of them together would weigh the most?” Most would guess elephants or a large animal, but the answer is ants. Ants are so widespread throughout the world helping maintain our ecosystem that they would be the heaviest.

"Science does not consist simply in believing what we are told, but in inquiring into the nature of things." St. Albert Magnus, Patron Saint of Science

Historical Catholics and Catholic priests have contributed significantly to science. Here are a few historical examples:

- St. Albert Magnus (1200-1280- a German Dominican Friar who touched on many scientific areas including the speed of light and the solar system
- Fr. Roger Bacon (1212-1290)- a Franciscan Friar who was one of the earliest European advocates of the modern scientific method

- Fr. Francesco Grimaldis (1613-1663) an Italian Jesuit, physicist and astronomer credited with ground breaking studies
- Fr. Nicholas Steno (1638-1686)- a Danish scientist who first discovered the circulation of blood in the human body and later become a Catholic convert and Bishop
- Fr. Andrew Gordon (1712-1751)- a Scottish Benedict monk invented the first electric motor
- Fr. Roger Boscovich (1711-1787) a Jesuit from Yugoslavia who was a mathematician and considered the father of modern atomic physics
- 35 craters on the moon named after priests since so many Jesuits in particular contributed to discoveries

The Catholic catechism supports faith and science,
“Consequently, methodical research in all branches of knowledge provided it is carried out in a truly scientific manner and does not override moral laws, can never conflict with the faith, because the things of the world and the things of faith derive from the same God.” CCC Paragraph 159



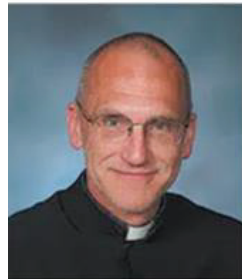
While serving as the parochial vicar at Holy Trinity parish, Fr. Vince continues working with The Institute for Advanced Physics (IAP). He has taught a course on *The Science Before Science* to high school students and assists IAP on special projects. As a living example that science and faith are complementary, Fr. Vince continues to love his faith, science and basketball. He recently celebrated his 27th year as a priest in May of 2022.

“We don’t have to be afraid to carry our crosses and be faithful to Jesus, because He is never going to ask us to do anything we can’t do” Fr. Vince Bork

He also encourages all young men and women to maintain a strong mind, body and soul. For the body, he enjoys hiking and has scaled a few 14,000 foot peaks in Colorado.

For the soul he emphasizes prayer. Just as an athlete does not try to run a marathon before building up to the distance gradually, he shares the same approach to prayer. If your goal is to start praying the rosary daily, start with a decade. Just as a PhD in physics comes only after completing high school, undergraduate and a masters, our prayer life needs to evolve and build up gradually. Even if physics, basketball or going to church is not your favorite thing, find the studies, sports and aspects of the faith that draw you back to Mass, the sacraments and a regular devotion to Mary.

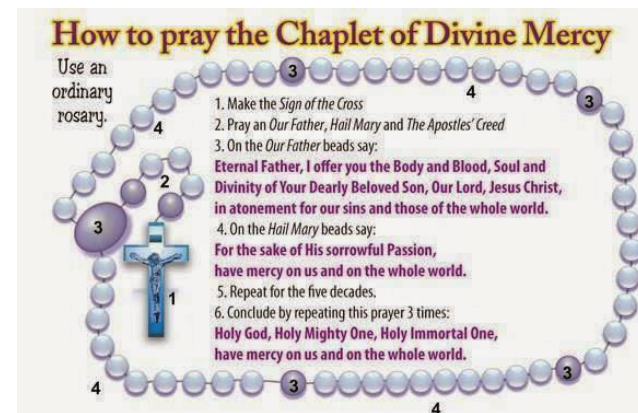
If you struggle in your faith or studies remember as Fr. Vince reminded his parishoners, **“the saint is not the one that doesn’t fall, the saint is the one who gets up again and again.”**



Fr. Vincent P. Bork

Faith Challenge:

- Try praying the Chaplet of Divine Mercy once a month for starters. One of Fr. Vince’s favorites saints is St. Faustina. Her apparitions of Jesus Christ inspired the Roman Catholic devotion to the Divine Mercy and earned her the title of “Secretary of Divine Mercy.”



Works Challenge:

Remember that through your parents you were born: and what can you give back to them that equals their gift to you? (Sirach 7:28)

- Buy flowers or doing something special for your mother on your birthday. She did the work, and even after all the advances in science there is not better gift than the gift of life.

Chapter 7

Fr. Ted Hesburgh- Power University President

Come Holy Spirit

God, Country, Notre Dame



Unlike most priests featured who answered their call later in life, Ted Hesburgh felt his calling to become a priest at the age of six. Raised in Syracuse, NY by religious parents who took their family to Mass regularly and sent their children to Catholic school, Ted was supported in his decision to pursue the priesthood.

As a 6-year-old, there is no way he envisioned how that decision would impact his life, but perhaps like Dr. Seuss's book *Oh The Place You'll Go!* he had visions of going places in life. (Look for a priestly version later in this book.) His travels as a priest would bring him to every continent, including Antarctica and the South Pole where he claims to have said his quickest prayer due to the cold.

He would serve as counselor to 4 popes, 6 U.S. presidents and serve as the president of his beloved

University of Notre Dame for 35 years. He held 14 presidential appointments dealing with social issues and received 150 honorary degrees from various colleges and universities.

When Ted was in eighth grade, several Holy Cross missionaries visited his parish. One of them, Rev. Tom Duffy, C.S.C., spoke to Ted and the other altar boys about life as a Holy Cross priest. Upon hearing of Ted's hope to join the priesthood, Father Duffy encouraged the Hesburghs to enroll their son in the Holy Cross high school seminary at the University of Notre Dame. Although his mother respected Ted's desire to be a priest, she insisted that he was not old enough to leave their home, and instead he attended a local school, Most Holy Rosary High School.

In high school, Ted studied English, French, Latin, religion, history, algebra, geometry, and chemistry under the instruction of the nuns who ran the school. When he was not in school, Ted did a variety of odd jobs such as mowing lawns and selling newspapers to earn money, and during his senior year, worked 40 hours a week at a gas station. He also played sports and socialized, including dating girls from his school.

While Ted enjoyed his time at Most Holy Rosary High School, he did not lose sight of his dream of becoming a priest.



Throughout high school, Ted stayed in contact with Father Duffy and was eventually given the choice to join the Eastern Province of Holy Cross at Stonehill College in Massachusetts or the Western Province of Holy Cross at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana. Ted chose Notre Dame, and in the fall of 1934, left his home in Syracuse to follow his dream.

Although neither of their parents had gone to college, four of the five Hesburgh children went to college, earning collectively four bachelor's degrees, four master's degrees, and one doctorate. After studying at the Holy Cross Seminary at Notre Dame for three years, Ted relocated to Rome and earned his Bachelor of Philosophy degree from the Gregorian University.

While in Rome, Ted was already focused on saving souls. His paternal grandfather and namesake, Theodore Bernard Hester who had lost his faith after a series of tragedies was dying. The young seminarian prayed diligently and cajoled his grandfather to return to the faith. His grandfather was hesitant since in his early 20s he had suddenly lost his wife and 2 of his 3 children (Ted's father was the only surviving child)

within the same year, and later in life he would lose his eyesight. What kind of God would allow that?

When the family put his grandfather in a Catholic hospital and he received daily communion, he returned to his faith. The nuns said, "he died like a saint," and young Ted Hesburgh experienced first-hand the power of prayer and the Eucharist.

Ted returned to the United States and in 1943 was ordained a priest in the Congregation of Holy Cross in a liturgy at Sacred Heart Church, later the Basilica of the Sacred Heart, at Notre Dame. While walking into the church that day, Ted read under a memorial to Notre Dame men who had given their lives in World War I. It read "**God, Country, Notre Dame**", and Ted decided then he'd dedicate his life to that trinity too.



Once, when asked what he would want written on his tombstone someday, Father Ted responded with one word: "Priest."

"A priest is a mediator; he stands as a kind of bridge between God and humankind. The priest tries to bring God's word and grace to humankind and strives as well to bring humankind in faith, hope, and love."
Saint Thomas Aquinas as quoted in Fr. Ted's autobiography *God, Country, Notre Dame*.



After his ordination, Fr. Ted went to the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. where he taught and earned his doctorate in theological studies. Having been ordained during World War II and remembering his second dedication, Father Ted persistently asked how he could serve his country as a military chaplain overseas.

Although no overseas opportunity came, he was asked to return to Notre Dame where many veterans of the war were returning to school. These veterans offered unique challenges since they were older than the typical freshman, and many were married.

On one occasion Fr. Ted accompanied many of the veterans to the Indiana Dunes on Lake Michigan for an

afternoon outing. Unbeknownst to him, it became his first experience at a keg party! These war veterans deserved some relaxation, but as the third keg flowed many students became too drunk. So, the quick-thinking Fr. Ted simply broke the fourth keg in the sand.

He loaded everyone up on buses and even a flatbed. Instead of returning directly to campus, the group unloaded west of campus. Fr. Ted then led the Jody calls (rhyming calls the military uses to march or run in cadence) and marched them to their dorms ensuring they sobered up before entering.

Although he started as a professor, the then president of Notre Dame, Fr. John Cavanaugh saw his leadership protentional and quickly moved him into administrative roles. Fr. Ted was moved from the head of the Theology department to the executive Vice President of the university just 5 years after his ordination.

Four years later, he would be named President of the university. 18 years prior he entered Notre Dame as an 18-year-old freshman. At 36-years-old, he went to work to help Our Lady's university reach academic excellence.

Father Hesburgh understood the special role football played in Notre Dame's reputation, but he was focused on improving the higher education. Fr. Ted recognized that raising the bar of academic excellence would only be achieved through multi-pronged efforts involving faculty, facilities, and the student body, and this would be accomplished through extensive fundraising and a good deal of reorganization.

Father Hesburgh began by putting new leaders in charge across the board. From deans of schools and colleges to directors of research projects and chairs of various departments, he removed those who were ill-suited to their positions and replaced them with leaders who would help move the University forward and improve the quality of the schools, colleges, and departments in which they worked.

With the institution of new administrators and grants from the Carnegie Corporation and the Ford Foundation, the departments began to improve as new faculty were hired, new facilities were constructed, and new curricula were developed. In 1953, the Distinguished Professors Program was created to attract the top scholars in each academic area to Notre Dame. By the end of Father Hesburgh's time as President, more than 100 named distinguished professorships, each backed by at least \$1 million, had been created.

During his 35 years as President, Father Hesburgh's Notre Dame doubled its enrollment, added 40 buildings, grew its endowment from \$9 million to \$350 million, increased student aid from \$20,000 to \$40 million, and upped the average faculty salary from \$5,400 to \$50,800. Faculty and enrollment numbers also rose as financial matters improved: faculty jumped from 389 to 950 and total enrollment climbed from 4,979 to 9,600.

Led by Father Hesburgh, Notre Dame reached the front rank of American higher education, significantly advanced its research and scholarly initiatives, and transformed it into the world's preeminent Catholic university. He turned its governance over to a two-

tiered, mixed board of lay and religious trustees and fellows in 1967, steered the institution through the turbulent 1960s, and opened its doors to women in 1972.

In 1986, when he retired, a survey of 485 university presidents named him the most effective college president in the country.

Without justice, especially to the poor, the homeless and the hopeless, there will be no peace. Fr. Ted



This powerful president and priest did not limit his influence to the university. Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh raised a powerful moral voice in national affairs.

"This mystery of life is what really is at the heart of our concern, because we say it is a gift so stupendous, so magnificent, so mysterious that no one but God has any rights over it." Fr. Ted's Address at the "Respect for Life Mass," University of Notre Dame, 1975

For 15 years, he served on the United States Commission on Civil Rights and was always a defender of life from conception until natural death. He advocated for civil rights at a time where drinking fountains, restaurants and even bathrooms were

separated by race. He desired that this great nation would recognize that all men and women are made in the image and likeness of God and therefore should be treated so.

**God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.
(Genesis 1:27)**

As an adviser to presidents, special envoy to popes, theologian, author, educator and activist, Father Hesburgh was considered for decades the most influential priest in America. He established a Center for Civil and Human Rights at the Notre Dame Law school to ensure graduates who continue to affirm equal rights for all consistent with the teaching of the Catholic church.

After the Second Vatican Council, in the mid-1960s, endorsed a larger role for lay Catholics in the Mass and other aspects of the faith, Father Hesburgh championed the church as the people of God. A few lines from Vatican II documents had lines similarly worded to his doctoral dissertation.

But the Lord wishes to spread His kingdom also by means of the laity, namely, a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love, and peace.

Vatican II Lumen Gentium chapter 4

The transition to a more active laity in the church and administration of Notre Dame, did not come without

resistance. So, Fr. Ted often turned to prayer. His favorite was a simple one that recognized the power that comes through the Holy Spirit.

"The real secret to handling the demands upon you is possessing inner peace. No matter what the problems, the tensions, the pressures, one can only help oneself by thinking clearly and acting calmly and resolutely. This cannot be done without inner peace, born of prayer, especially to the Holy Spirit, in search of light, inspiration, and courage. I have a simple three-word prayer that has served me well for many, many years: *"Come, Holy Spirit."* It has never failed me." Fr. Ted

As shared earlier, Fr. Ted was very influential as a counselor to 4 popes, 6 U.S. presidents and as the president of Notre Dame for 35 years. Yet, he never forgot that real power and influence came from prayer. His devotion to the Holy Spirit and Our Lady was unceasing. Appropriately his closest sibling was his sister, Mary, who was just 18 months older than him.



In his vocation as a priest, he found Our Lady's presence to be a great comfort and inspiration. As a student at Notre Dame, and later as a priest on campus, he visited

the Grotto almost daily. The beloved Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes is a beautiful replica of the one in France, where Our Lady appeared to St. Bernadette in 1858. Father Hesburgh believed that Our Lady was very much present at Notre Dame, and the Grotto was a daily reminder to seek her intercession. His ritual rarely varied. He would say a "Hail Mary" or two and give special blessing to the driver and other passengers in the cars passing by the Grotto.

As he envisioned as a 6-year-old in upstate New York, Fr. Ted was first and foremost a priest. In July 2000, when he received the prestigious Congressional Gold Medal, that had first been conferred on George Washington, President Bill Clinton noted "The greatest honor you'll ever wear around your neck is the collar of a priest.

God has chosen the weak of this world to confound the strong. (1 Corinthians 1:27)

He remained loyal to his commitment to God, his nation, the church, and Notre Dame while championing human rights, peace, and care for the poor around the world. As he shared in his autobiography. "I guess that I would like my life to say to the young people especially: He believed, he hoped, he tried, he failed of enough, but with God's grace, he often accomplished more than he rationally could have dreamed. "

"The Holy Spirit is the light and strength of my life, for which I am eternally grateful. My best daily prayer, apart from the Mass and breviary, continues to be simply, 'Come, Holy Spirit.' No better prayer, no better results: much light and much strength." Fr. Ted

Faith Challenge:

- Follow Fr. Ted's advice and start your day with a quick "**Come Holy Spirit.**" Here's the full prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who has taught the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit, grant that by the gift of the same Spirit we may be always truly wise and ever rejoice in His consolation. Through Christ our Lord.
Amen

- If you have received the sacrament of Confirmation, you may recall The Gifts of the Holy Spirit which offer guidance and strength.
 1. Wisdom
 2. Knowledge
 3. Understanding
 4. Piety
 5. Counsel
 6. Fortitude
 7. Fear of the Lord

Works Challenge:

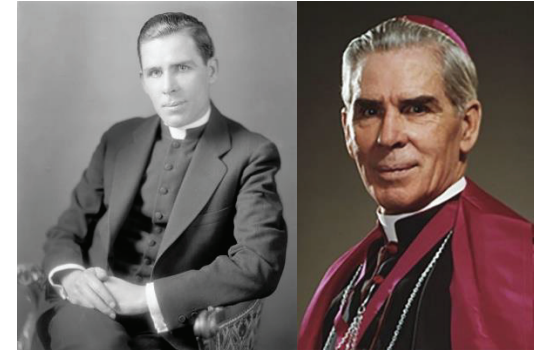
- Find a cause that is consistent with your Faith teachings and advocate for it. As Fr. Ted's alma mater asks when highlighting work that Notre Dame professors and students are doing to make the world a better place, "What would you fight for?"



Chapter 8

Bishop Fulton Sheen- Power TV Evangelist

“Very few people believe in the devil these days which suits the devil very well.” Bishop Sheen



With most of the priests featured in this book born in the latter half of the 20th century, it may seem odd to feature a priest born in the 19th century. Thanks to the persevering work of influential Catholics like Terry Barber and others, Bishop Fulton Sheen remains relevant today.

The Venerable Fulton J. Sheen, as he is properly called, is often quoted since his many years on radio and television provides a large repository of relevant Catholic insights. How is a man born prior to the invention of cars and airplanes relevant today? What can we learn from someone who lived during the same century as the American Civil War and lived through the two World Wars? Many things, and in a book primarily about priests ordained in the late 20th and early 21st

century Bishop Fulton Sheen exemplifies the continuity of the church that Jesus founded over two thousand years ago.

By comparison, no government or empire in the entire history of the world has lasted that long. Although the Catholic church is not a nation or empire, it is a body of believers who adhere to shared beliefs. By the way, historians credit the Pandyan Empire in Southern India as the longest empire at over 1,800 years. For those familiar with the Roman Empire from the bible, that lasted about 500 years, and for those in the United States, that government has lasted nearly 250 years and counting.

Before jumping into his story, it only seems appropriate to share one of those insights.

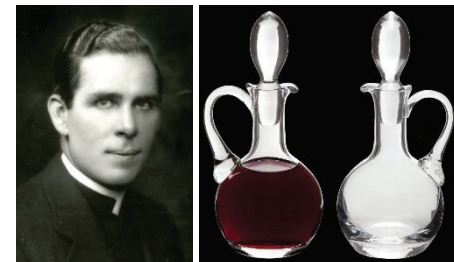
“Sin is not the worst thing in the world. The worst thing is denial of sin.” Bishop Fulton Sheen

Two simple sentences that say so much. If sin was the worst thing in the world, we could point to any Catholic and simply see a sinner. We could dismiss many Catholics as hypocrites since all of us are sinners including our first pope, Saint Peter.

As many have pointed out, one single difference between Judas and Peter in the bible offers an example of this statement. Both Judas and Peter were called by Jesus to follow him for 3 years as one of His 12 chosen apostles. Both heard the messages of Christ and witnessed the followers and the enemies of Christ and his message.

Both would eventually betray Christ. After the last supper, Judas took money to deliver Jesus to the soldiers who would eventually crucify him. Although Peter defended Christ that night in the garden by drawing his sword and cutting off an ear of one of the soldiers, he would eventually deny even knowing Jesus not once but three times shortly after the crucifixion.

So, what’s the difference? Instead of seeking forgiveness, Judas hanged himself. Peter recognized his sin and sought forgiveness. He did not deny his sin or add onto his sin. Instead, Peter focused on the very reason Jesus walked on this earth, to open the gates of heaven to all of us.



The Venerable Fulton J. Sheen would share that message and many more during his 22 years on radio and additional years on a weekly television show. Some would call him the original “Catholic TV evangelist.”

Fulton Sheen was born on May 8, 1895 in El Paso, Illinois to a farmer Newt Sheen and his wife Delia. He was the oldest of 4 children and served as an altar boy at the Cathedral of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception in Peoria, Illinois.

While serving Mass as an 8-year-old altar boy for Bishop John L. Spalding of Peoria, Sheen dropped a wine cruet on the floor, and it shattered. After the Mass, Bishop Spalding spoke to the frightened boy and made two bold predictions about him. First, the bishop said he would one day study at Louvain in Belgium; second, he told the young Sheen, "someday you will be just as I am."

After attending a parochial catholic school through high school, Fulton focused on learning. He went to college at St. Viator where he earned both an undergraduate and master's degree.

Shortly after his graduation in 1919, Fulton was ordained a priest, and he pursued further studies:

- Earned a bachelor's degree in canon law from the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., in 1920
- a Ph.D. in philosophy from the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium in 1923
- Doctor of Sacred Theology from the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome in 1924.

That's 5 degrees in just over 5 years, and one of the two predictions by Bishop Spalding.

After a further year of study in Belgium, Bishop Sheen served as a priest in London for one year before moving back to Peoria, Illinois, in 1926 to serve as a parish priest. Later that year he left Peoria to join the philosophy faculty at the Catholic University of America,

where he taught for the next 25 years. He was not only a respected teacher but also a gifted orator.

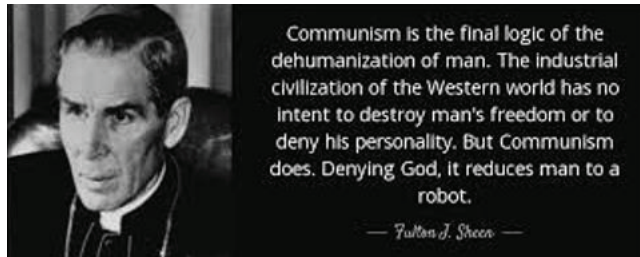
**"The real test of the Christian is not how much he loves his friends, but how much he loves his enemies."
Bishop Fulton Sheen**

Steadily the reputation of the young Catholic University professor grew, first on campus, then in wider circles as his brilliant oratory attracted more attention from the media. Father Sheen's first experience in broadcasting was in 1926 when he was invited to record a series of Sunday evening Lenten sermons on a New York radio station.

Four years later, the young priest was asked to be a summer fill-in for two weeks on *The Catholic Hour* radio program. The audience response was so positive that he was asked to continue as a weekly speaker on the show. This show reached an estimated four million listeners at the height of its popularity. The popularity of radio in 1930 provided Sheen with an opportunity to gain a wider audience. He thus began his two-decade radio career on the program.

From 1930 to 1950, Father (then Monsignor) Sheen's weekly talks on *The Catholic Hour* presented Catholic teaching in a way that had never been done before. Drawing from the deep well of his faith and scholarship, Professor Sheen addressed topics ranging from devotion to the Blessed Mother to the dangers of Communism. Rooted in his thorough knowledge of the philosophical thought of St. Thomas Aquinas, he preached the Gospel and showed how it applies to

personal moral decisions and the great social issues of the time.



On Easter Sunday, March 24, 1940, Monsignor Sheen appeared on the world's first broadcast of a Catholic religious service. He spoke on "The Spiritual Symbolism of Television." The program was broadcast by W2XBS, the experimentally licensed predecessor of present-day WNBC in New York. With the expansion of channels and the internet, Catholic masses are ubiquitous online and on EWTN.

His time on the radio overlapped with the Second World War and the beginning of the Korean War. As Soviet influence expanded to other countries including Korea, he sharply criticized communism. In 1948, during the initial days of the Cold War, he published *Communism and the Conscience of the West* which proved to be a prophetic witness to the grave dangers of atheistic totalitarianism. These dangers have endured and even increased since the end of the Cold War. So many Catholic leaders still quote Bishop Sheen since the moral and spiritual struggle continues for the very soul of mankind.

"Satanism is the destruction of the harmony and order God meant for us" Bishop Sheen

During his radio broadcasting day, Bishop Sheen received so much fan mail. Many of those letters were invitations to speak. Monsignor Sheen traveled all over the country giving academic lectures, missions, retreats, guest homilies, commencement addresses, and speaking at meetings of various *Catholic* organizations.

The busy professor not only kept up his full teaching schedule but also wrote numerous books. He published 34 books during his 23-year teaching career at Catholic University (and another 32 after he left the University). In addition, transcripts of his weekly radio talks were published in dozens of booklets by the show's sponsor the National Council of Catholic Men. Many of his other talks and sermons were published as pamphlets.

"Books are the most wonderful friends in the world. When you meet them and pick them up, they are always ready to give you a few ideas." Bishop Sheen

In 1951 Sheen became a titular bishop, and he served as auxiliary bishop of New York (1951–66). During much of his tenure in New York, he moved from radio to the growing popular media of television.



He hosted a weekly television series, *Life Is Worth Living* (1951–57), that attracted about 30 million viewers. He would often speak without a script and often use a chalkboard to discuss practical matters of Catholic faith. He was also not afraid to talk about geo-political matters.

“Atheism is not the knowledge that God does not exist, but only the wish that He did not, in order that one could sin without reproach or exalt one’s ego without challenge.” Bishop Fulton Sheen

Bishop Sheen was appointed national director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in 1958, a position he held until 1966, when he was appointed bishop of Rochester, New York. From 1961 to 1969 he hosted another popular television show, *The Bishop Fulton Sheen Show*.

During his years on television, he won an Emmy Award for Most Outstanding Television Personality, was featured on the cover of Time Magazine, and became one of the most influential Catholics of the 20th century.

In one of his episodes he used the eagle, the symbol of the United States, in an example. Eagles build their nests high in the mountain crevices. When young eagles are ready, the mother pushes them out the nest. Before the young eagle crashes to the ground the mother eagle swoops down and catches the eagle and brings it back to the nest. She repeats the process until the bird learns to fly.

As the eagle stirs so does God among all the nations. God pushes us out of the nest (home or church) to share his message. He provides guidance and repetitive prayers to remind us of our faith until we are ready to fly on our own.

Between 1962 and 1965, Bishop Sheen attended all the sessions of the Second Vatican Council. He worked closely with then Father Joseph Ratzinger, who was a theological expert on the commission for mission, and who later became Pope Benedict XVI. In a 2012 interview with Vatican Radio, the Pope recalled how "Fulton Sheen ... would fascinate us in the evenings with his talks."

“The secret to my preaching is that I have never missed spending an hour in the presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. That’s where the power comes from.” Bishop Sheen

Throughout his years, he maintained his daily holy hour in front of the Eucharist. Many people credit his example for the growing popularity of parishes continuing the tradition with Eucharistic adoration. Like a good athlete who practices to become better, Bishop Sheen prayed and listened during these hours and credits those sessions for the powerful sermons and good thoughts.



Two months before Archbishop Sheen's death, Pope John Paul II embraced him in St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York and thanked him for all his work.

"You have written and spoken well of the Lord Jesus Christ. You are a loyal son of the Church." Saint John Paul II to Bishop Fulton Sheen in 1979

Bishop Sheen died shortly after open-heart surgery in 1979 at the age of 84. Even after his passing, his influence continues. His books and videos remain popular, and among his other more popular books are *The Way to Inner Peace*, *The Power of Love*, and *Three to Get Married*.

In the latter book, he shares advice that is still relevant for couples today, "In all human love it must be realized that every man promises a woman, and every woman promises a man that which only God alone can give, namely, perfect happiness."

"You must remember to love people and use things, rather than to love things and use people." Bishop Sheen

Influential Catholics like Terry Barber have been revitalizing the message of Bishop Fulton Sheen. Through the Catholic Resource Center, Terry has distributed over 25 million inspirational Catholic audio CDs and DVDs. Some Catholic teachers use Bishop Fulton Sheen's videos and materials in their classroom, and Catholic University continues to honor him with honors including some students distributing prayer cards in his name.

As a pioneer in media, Bishop Fulton Sheen was a powerful trailblazer who set the foundation for much of the Catholic media today. His legacy will continue, and he leaves us with this challenge.

"Who is going to save our church? It's up to you, the people. You have the minds, the eyes, and the ears to save the Church. Your mission is to see that the priests act like priest, your bishops act like bishops, and the religious act like religious." Bishop Sheen



Bishop Sheen's coat of arms

Faith Challenges:

- Watch or listen to one of Bishop Fulton Sheen's shows or *Catholic Answers* radio or podcast.
- Learn and follow the Precepts of the Church.
 1. To assist at Mass on all Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation
 2. To fast and abstain on the days appointed
 3. To confess our sins at least once per year
 4. To receive the Eucharist during the Easter time
 5. To contribute to the support of the church
 6. To observe the laws of the church concerning marriage

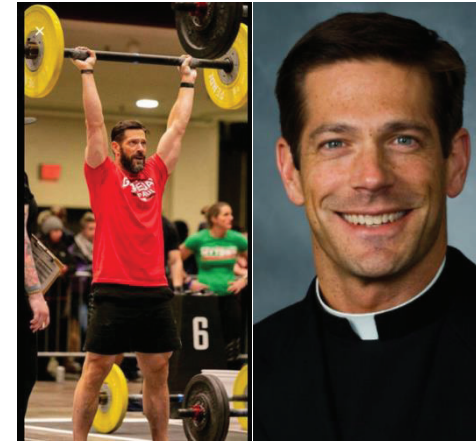
Works Challenge:

- If you are old enough to vote, ensure you support candidates who stand for values consistent with your Catholic faith. If you are not old enough to vote discuss with your parents about how their faith influences their political views. Just as Bishop Sheen criticized the atheistic nature of communism, all must defend freedom of religion and the lives of all.

Chapter 9

Fr. Mike Schmitz- Power Bible Podcast Preacher

"My life doesn't make sense unless I know Him, and my life is unfulfilled unless I make Him known."

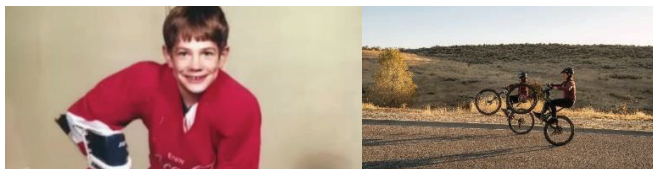


In one of his many online videos, Fr. Mi Schmitz shares that his autobiography is the crucifix. His point is that every time he sinned, he added to the thorns in Jesus's crown and the pain of the cross. Now that may not seem like much of story about this famous priest, but it shows the depth of Fr. Schmitz love for Jesus and his faith. He continues that because Jesus rose on Easter Sunday, He was able to transform the sign of our shame (our sins) to our symbol of hope (salvation in heaven). None of those things we did to hurt him could stop God's unstoppable love for us.

Even as a *YouTube* and podcast sensation Fr. Mike Schmitz believes his story is that of sinner. Fortunately for the 200 million plus listeners of his viral *Bible in a Year* podcast his biography is much fuller. The priest who receives rock star like welcomes wherever he goes owes much of it to his faithful family, forgiven sins, an understanding girlfriend, and failure in Hollywood.

Michael Schmitz was raised in a Catholic family with three sisters and two brothers in Brainerd, Minnesota. He loved playing hockey and riding his BMX bike. Some readers may not know what BMX even stands for, but for any young boy growing up in the United States in the 1970s and 80s a bicycle motocross (BMX) was a prized possession. Introduced in 1973, the original manufacturer of BMX correctly figured that boys wanted their bikes to be like motorcycles just without an engine. Hundreds of millions of sold bikes later proved their theory correct.

Despite going to Catholic school and attending Mass daily with his classmates as well as on Sundays with his family, Michael was largely indifferent about Catholicism and did not enjoy going to Mass. He loved hockey because he understood the game and improved his skills. He loved cycling because he knew how to ride fast and even pop wheelies.



His Catholic roots run deep. His grandmother was a head nurse in a hospital in Minnesota where they decided to start allowing abortions shortly after the passing of Roe vs. Wade in 1973 which made it legal in the United States. As a Catholic who agreed with science and the Church's teaching that life begins at conception, she resigned without having another job.

His Mom followed in her footsteps and raised 6 children in the Catholic faith in Brainerd, Minnesota. Father Mike recalls that she was loving, and only asked that the children keep the house clean and get along. Young Michael didn't always comply, but he tried, and on her birthday, he'd show her some new tricks he learned on his bike. What more could a mother want?

Despite his less than desirable gifts as a child to his mother, the family remains close. Fr. Mike has many found memories of his childhood, and when he describes his favorite type of summer day one can see the closeness of the family as well as how active Michael Schmitz was and continues to be.

He enjoys waking up at his parents' place on the lake. Get in prayer and say Mass. Get out for a run. Drink some coffee with his mom and dad, siblings, and in-laws. Eat bacon. Get outside in a kayak or paddle board. Wake surfing with the family. Eat lunch. Play Bags (AKA "Cornhole"). Go for a boat ride with his nieces and nephews and wrap the day up with beer and pizza at local favorite restaurant called Zorbas.

“God uses everything in our past to forge for the future only if we are willing to surrender to his will.”

Fr. Mike Schmitz day 343 of Bible in a Year

With such a strong knit family, one may wonder how forgiven sins played a role in his path to the priesthood. Despite his indifference to his faith as a young man, Michael received all his required sacraments of Baptism, Holy Eucharist, Reconciliation and Confirmation. At around age 15 a powerful confession changed all that.

On his prized BMX bike, Michael rode to his church’s rectory one Tuesday to speak to a priest. He figured they only worked on Sundays, so he didn’t even call ahead or make an appointment. Fortunately, one of the priests made time for him. After a thorough confession, Michael began to better understand God’s message of love and forgiveness.

In high school two of his passions were James Bond novels and sports. He once read that James Bond did 100 pushups and 100 sit ups a day to stay in shape as a spy. So, he started including that in his daily workout to prepare for one career option. In addition to hockey, Mike enjoyed running track and was always fascinated by the decathlon particularly. He would later share in an interview, “if you win that one (the Olympic decathlon), you get the title of “World’s Greatest Athlete”. And it’s official. And whenever people talk about how awesome whatever athlete or sport is and you get to just pull out your gold medal from under your shirt (because of course you would wear it

everywhere. I mean, you are the World’s Greatest Athlete for crying out loud) and say, ‘Oh that’s cool. But you know: WGA.’”



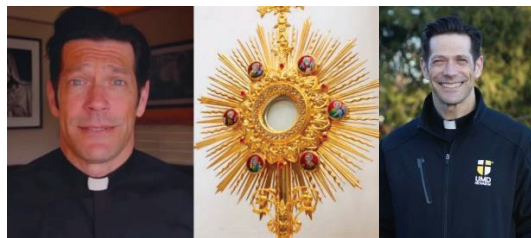
Although a good athlete, he was not quite Olympic material and the spy career sound less appealing than becoming a movie star. So shortly after high school, Mike left Minnesota for Hollywood, California to try his hand at acting. With the looks and voice of a leading actor, he auditioned for the 1995 film *Batman Forever*. Although he made it to the final cut, Chris O'Donnell beat him out for the role of Robin in the film that would go on to make over \$300 million worldwide and help launch Chris's career in many films and television shows.

But Mike's Hollywood dream didn't end there. Since he had done so well, he was asked to audition for another movie the crew was casting. The movie was called *Hackers*, and he auditioned for the male lead. He

didn't get it, but the male lead, Jonny Lee Miller played opposite Angelina Jolie. The two lead actors ended up marrying each other. So, Fr. Mike likes to now joke, "I could have been the first ex-Mr. Angelina Jolie. That could have been part of my story."

Mike may have missed out on Hollywood and the thrice married actress, but he did date before discerning his call to the priesthood. In fact, he had a 3-year relationship with one young woman who he credits as a faith-filled partner on his journey. Although they were in love and had even discussed marriage in their future, Mike felt the call to the celibate life of the priesthood. When he shared that with her, she replied in support, "If this is what God wants for you, this is what God wants for me."

What a beautiful example of true love and accepting God's plan. She recognized the greater good and her role even though it hurt. Now as part of his ministry at The University of Minnesota- Duluth, Fr. Mike is often called to assist young couples when one feels called to the religious life. He encourages the "left behind" partner, and anyone experience pain or loss to ask, "How is God loving me right now?"



After attending the St. Paul seminary school of divinity at the University of St Thomas, Mike was ordained a priest in 2003 into the dioceses of Duluth, Minnesota. With short stints at some parishes, Fr. Mike made his way back to college.

He's the director of youth and young adult ministry for the diocese and he's chaplain for the Newman center at the University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD). He actually lives in the Newman center on campus just above the chapel making him accessible to students at all hours of the day. He proudly calls his role with students on campus at UMD his primary ministry.

"Whenever a man accepts responsibility for the life of another, in some way he becomes a father" Pope Francis

Even with the help of **FOCUS** (Fellowship of Catholic University Students) volunteers, Fr. Mike stays quite busy during the school year. The students appreciate having a well-known priest in their presence, but particularly appreciate his sincere love for them and the faith. Some even call him "Dad" as a sign of that appreciation which touches the priestly father very deeply.

While his dioceses is only 100 miles away from his hometown, Fr. Mike is well traveled and has been as far as the Philippines and Australia to give talks. Since 2015, Father Mike has been the primary personality involved in Ascension Presents, with free videos offering Catholic perspectives of cultural societal issues. His videos are posted weekly, and have covered topics *from Mixed*

Martial Arts to Batman v Superman. Beginning in 2017, those talks were also offered in audio form as podcasts.

Known nationally for his inspiring homilies and humor, Father Mike Schmitz had quickly become a household name among Catholics in America and beyond even before his viral Bible in a year Podcast.

“The heart of religion is worship, and the heart of worship is sacrifice.” - Fr. Mike Schmitz

During a visit to the University of Notre Dame in early 2020 (just before the global shut down due to Covid 19), he spoke about two of his favorite topics, the Eucharist and worshipping God. He emphasized the point, “There is no greater human action than worshipping God.”

He goes on to point out that two things happen every single time we go to Mass than connect worship and the Eucharist. He also guaranteed the audience they would be able to answer in unison.

After he said, “pray my brothers and sisters that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the almighty father” they all chimed in with the answer.

1. May Lord accept the sacrifice of your hands for praise and glory of his name
2. For our good and the good of the whole church

These words that are often overlooked between the Liturgy of the Word and Liturgy of the Eucharist offer a

bit of a “halftime” reminder for why we go to Mass.

“May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church.” Awesome.

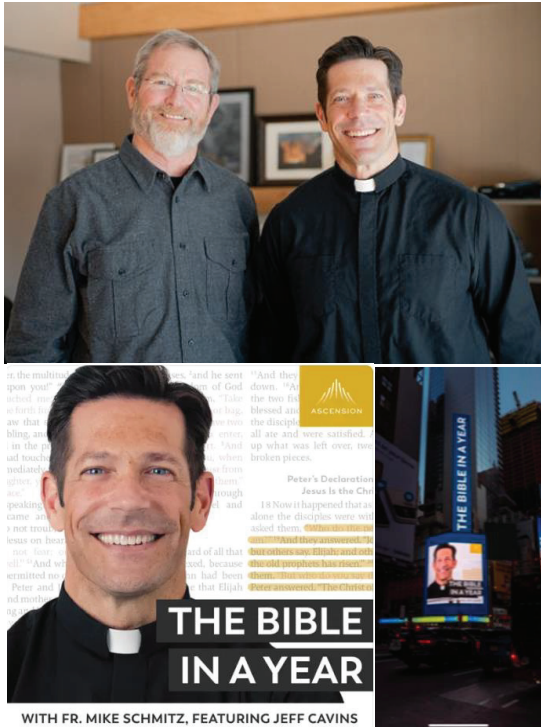
At Notre Dame and on other videos, Fr. Mike emphasizes the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist as a crucial Catholic belief that some don’t fully believe. Appropriately he points to scripture for proof.

John 6:51-68 “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.

On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

“You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

As Fr. Mike points out, “Jesus is willing to risk the entire program of salvation on one thing- the Eucharist.”



During the pandemic in 2020, Fr. Mike was turning to the bible for answers. He also figured others were looking for answers and eventually teamed biblical scholar Jeff Cavins to launch a new podcast, *The Bible in a Year Podcast*, which consists of 365 episodes and run about 22 minutes long. Over the year he read the entire bible and added his own prayer and commentary every day. Fr. Mike and Jeff figured they could team up like a Catholic “Batman and Robin” to help others understand the bible. Even before it even launched, it became the number-one ranked podcast overall on

Apple podcasts. Over 250 million downloads and listeners proved their theory correct.

“The Old Testament Is The New Testament concealed; the New Testament Is The Old Testament revealed” Fr. Mike Schmitz

The success of *The Bible in a Year Podcast* has made Fr. Schmitz the face of the Catholic bible. He even landed an advertisement in NY Times Square. Fr. Mike may have not made it in Hollywood, but he is now a star in high demand for interviews and speaking engagements. He shares so much valuable insights that these pages won’t even touch the surface, but he does especially love to remind all listeners who include non-Catholics about the 7 books which trace back to the early church and found only in the Catholic bible. Sirach is one of those and he takes from it one of his favorite quotes.

**Sirach 2:1: My son, when
you come to serve the LORD, prepare yourself
for trials.**

**Be sincere of heart and steadfast, undisturbed in time
of adversity. Cling to him, forsake him not; thus will
your future be great. Accept whatever befalls you,
in crushing misfortune be patient; For
in fire gold is tested, and worthy men in
the crucible of humiliation. Trust God and he
will help you; make straight your ways and hope in
him. You who fear the LORD, wait for
his mercy, turn not away lest you fall. You
who fear the LORD, trust him, and your reward will not
be lost.**



One speaking engagement he made time for was the 2022 March for Life in Washington DC. His personal story about his grandmother shared earlier in this chapter rallied the crowd. They cheered wildly as he spoke about the right to life for the unborn.

“No Catholic can responsibly take a ‘pro-choice’ stand when the choice in question involves the taking of innocent human life”. United States Council of Catholic Bishops 2021

Appropriately just a few months after this march, the United States Supreme court overturned the Roe vs. Wade ruling on June 24, 2022, moving the legal battle over the right to life to the state level and scoring a victory for the unborn.

Fr. Mike Schmitz loves being a priest. He loves offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and preaching. He loves hearing confessions and being a part of someone’s Great Story, the story that God is calling His children to live. What’s next? Sources shared that he is working on plans for *The Catholic Catechism in Year* in 2023.

Faith Challenge:

Open a good Catholic bible and read. Even if it takes you a few years, The Bible in Year Podcast with Fr. Mike Schmitz is worth your time.

Works Challenge

Find way to support the FOCUS ministry at a college near you. The Fellowship of Catholic University Students needs donations, volunteers, and prayers to bring the faith to students.

Chapter 10

Fr. Leo Patalinghug- Power Chef

“God uses food and the meal to communicate his love and salvation for the children who call God, our Father who gives us the daily bread.” Fr. Leo

Jesus said to him, “Do you love me?... feed my sheep.” John 21:17



The Bible is filled with stories around food and meals. Appropriately, one power priest, Fr. Theo Patalinghug uses cooking and his culinary skills to bring the faith to many.

In the Old Testament, one of the earliest stories about Adam and Eve involves eating. In this case it was eating the forbidden fruit which is original sin. Later it's during the Passover meal that God shows his almighty power to the Pharaoh of Egypt, and he finally frees the enslaved Jews. Then while the Jewish people are wandering in the desert before entering the promised land, God sends manna (bread) from heaven.

“They all ate and were satisfied” Luke 9:17

Similarly, Jesus uses meals to reveal many things about the faith. One of his early miracles which all four gospel writers include in their writings, is the feeding of 5,000. From just 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish, Jesus miraculously feeds the 5,000 followers listening to His message.

“This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” Luke 22:19

His last moment with all his 12 apostles is appropriately a meal and better known as the last supper. He clearly establishes the Eucharist as his true body and blood and reinforces the mission he had for the loyal 11 apostles to spread his message to the world.

While He was reclining at the table with them, He took bread, spoke a blessing, and broke it, and gave it to them. Luke 24:40

After his resurrection, Jesus meets up with 2 disciples walking on the road to Emmaus and reveals himself in the breaking of the bread at a meal. Maybe readers can think of other examples of the importance of meals in the bible, but all can agree that meals are important since no one can live without food.

Fr. Leo Patalinghug, otherwise known as “the cooking priest”, is a powerhouse when it comes to evangelizing through food, but like many of the

featured priests his childhood was normal but atypical for a priest.

Born in the Philippines, his family moved to Baltimore, Maryland when he was a toddler. Father Leo received his food passion from his mother: “I think the reason my family has so many friends was because my mother cooked so well,” Father Leo said. “We all became family because of the hospitality my mom and dad showed to family and friends. ... Food is that connection.”



As a youngster, Leo was active in the martial arts and breakdancing. He would go on to earn 2 third-degree black belts in the martial arts and win awards for break dancing before finding his call to the priesthood. In addition to the black belt in Tae Kwon Do, he won a national competition in Arnis, a form of full-contact stick fighting.

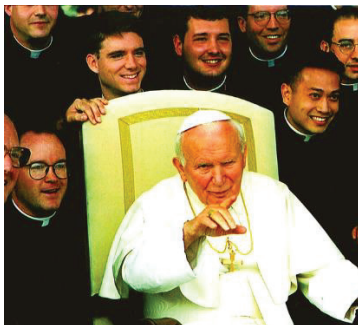
As a child he went to church only to please his parents, who wanted him to learn to be kind to

others. "The church was a part of what they were," he recalled.

In college he pursued degrees in writing and political science with the intention of studying law and journalism at the University of Maryland. He also taught high school speech, debate, and drama. Along with his brother, he founded a martial arts school.

One Sunday after a Mass without his parents, a missionary priest approached him and asked him to come over and talk about missions. "He opened my eyes," he said, "I went on a pilgrimage ... and that is where I really got the message." He also credits having a great example of faith from his parents, getting involved as a youth minister, and having good friends who took their own faith seriously.

"God spoke to my heart in a powerful way through confession, and since then I just immersed myself in the life of the church. I've never been happier. It saddens me that people have such a negative impression of Catholic Culture." Fr. Leo



Later as a seminarian in Rome, Leo became immersed in Italian culture, long meals, and the churches in Rome.

He became good friends with the Italian chefs. They would teach him about rigatoni and lasagna; he would show them how to make American foods like hamburgers and ribs. He would also help Mother Teresa who was busy feeding the poor in India.

Fr. Leo was ordained in 1999 and served as a parish priest for five years at St. John's Church in Westminster, Maryland. He was often invited to his parishioners' homes for dinner. To their surprise, he would turn the table and cook for them, using these opportunities to build friendships and engage in relaxed conversations in the kitchen.



The experience in Rome and those unstructured times spent making a meal together with parishioners provided the practice and inspiration for two milestone events:

1. In 2009 Fr. Leo won a televised Food Network competition called *Throw Down with Bobby Flay*
2. In 2010 Fr. Leo published his first book, *Grace Before Meals: Recipes for Family Life*

During the televised competition, Father Leo shared some insights into his culinary skills. "Do you know who taught me how to cut?" he asked Bobby Flay. "Mother Teresa. When I was a seminarian, I'd go to the soup kitchens, and Mother Teresa said, 'Okay, Brother, your job is to cut vegetables.'"

"If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one" St. Mother Teresa

While the judges were making their decision on who made the better fajitas, Fr. Leo was praying his rosary. Bobby Flay, a Catholic and former altar server shared, "There was lots of praying during the judging, but he didn't need it."

In *Grace Before Meals* which became a bestseller, Fr. Leo shared 30 simple recipes and inspiration to help make family meals a way of life. Father Leo showed that mealtime is the perfect setting for discussing the major issues all families face. In fact, research shows that frequent family dinners can reduce many risks facing children, including drug and alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy, depression, eating disorders, and poor academic performance. These are meals that nourish body and spirit.

Father Leo decided to choose Jesus' passage, "'Do you love me? And He said, 'Feed my sheep.'"

To launch on this food-faith mission, Father Leo took culinary classes, and said he always makes friends with chefs. "And with every chef I ask, 'How do you practice what you are taught?'" he said. "Everywhere I go, I do learn about that cuisine, whether it is Asian,

European, Latino, and even parts of America. I become a disciple to that food and to those people." As a result, he strives to feed people without the desire to convert, like Saint Mother Teresa and Saint Paul, "who were an amazing influence... Evangelize, not proselytize, that is what we are called to do," he said.

"My job, as a priest and chef, is to keep inviting people to the Lord's table. And with good food, it's a start to bring them back to "tasting and seeing" the goodness of the Lord." Fr. Leo

Fr. Leo found mealtimes with parishioners to be powerful opportunities to evangelize, catechize and just to have healthy fellowship. He created the Grace Before Meals movement to encourage this for others.

Grace Before Meals, which started off as a joke with Fr. Leo and some of his priest friends, has become an international movement to bring families back to the dinner table. Through this movement, he developed a "Theology of Food" to help people understand their relationships with God and each other through the powerful experience of cooking, eating, and sharing a meal.

He now hosts his own TV show called *Savoring Our Faith* on EWTN. He hosts and contribute to radio shows. He has authored several more books (*Epic Food Fight* and *Spicing up Married Life*) and written articles about this unique message of food.

He also travels nationally and internationally giving lectures, cooking demonstrations, and other presentations to audiences of all backgrounds. He created a non-profit, called **The Table Foundation**, and hosts a podcast called *Shoot the Shiitake*. The name plays off slang phrase to “shoot the sh*t” by replacing the last word with an edible mushroom native to East Asia.

On the podcast, Fr. Leo talks with unique and interesting guests from all walks of life. He draws out connections to help bridge social divides. Like sharing a meal, two completely different people have many things in common. His show hopes to bring people to a better understanding of how we are all connected.

“We may not always agree, but we still must learn how to live with each other, and have some fun in the process, even if it's just a casual opportunity to "Shoot the Shiitake!" Fr. Leo

Now an icon for connecting food with faith, Father Leo busily travels from town to town and country to country to spread love and faith through food and cooking demos. “If you want to find God, look for God between pots and pans,” he said. “This is from St. Teresa of Avila. This is not my idea. I am just promoting it through modern evangelization.”



Fr Leo Patalinghug currently serves as a priest member of a community of consecrated life, Voluntas Dei (The Will of God). Founded in 1947, Voluntas Dei members live the evangelical counsels of obedience, poverty, and chastity amid the world in order to be “salt of the earth”, “light of the world” and “leaven in the dough.” They are defined by three essential elements:

- 1. Consecration:** the members are called to give themselves totally to God, for His honor and service, in each institute erected by the Church.
- 2. Apostolate:** The members are called to work in the temporal order and in this way witness to Christ. Working with the power of love in the world and from within the world, they share in the evangelization task of the Church.
- 3. Secularity:** All of God’s people are called to dedicate themselves to Him, wherever they are.

As Fr. Leo shared in one of his podcasts, being a Voluntas Dei priest gives him some flexibility to lead his non-profit, host his tv show and podcast and

travel to lead pilgrimages since he does not have a specific parish assignment.

His **Table Foundation** works to harvest the power of food to do good one meal at a time by bringing people together around a common table. The group believes that the simple act of sharing a delicious meal prepared with love promotes peace and harmony in our world. They aspire to build community and better people's lives through our passion for amazing food.

They also help the homeless community in the Baltimore, Maryland area. Their food truck provides sandwiches and homemade hot soup to the homeless poor on the streets of Baltimore. Space blankets, hand warmers and toiletry kits are also given out.

Fr. Leo's unique background also makes him a great leader for pilgrimages, which he's been doing since 1999. He is more than a tour leader; he is a shepherd that cares for his flock. His trips are promoted as "offering a sincere and gentle approach to create an authentic and deep spiritual experience, combined with one-of-a-kind cultural and culinary excursions, mixed with 'bite-sized' theology filled with practical life lessons presented in an entertaining way. Pilgrims leave refreshed, entertained, and changed for the better."

"Cooking and hospitality are hallmarks of Filipino culture." Fr. Leo

When asked about his favorite foods, he still lists his mom's pan-fried steak, caramelized onions, and garlic fried rice. He also loves fried chicken and barbecue as well as pasta and various Asian cuisines. In short, he likes about anything, if it's prepared with good technique, a sincere heart, and shared with family and friends.



Not surprisingly, Fr. Leo claims St. Lawrence, the patron saint of grill masters, as one of his favorite saints. St. Lawrence was a martyr in the 3rd century and has the second most churches in the world named after him. He is second only to Mary. As a deacon, Lawrence oversaw the distribution of alms and food among the poor of the city under Pope Sixtus II.

After Pope Sixtus II was killed in August of 258 by the decree of the evil Emperor Valerian, the prefect (chief officer) of the city captured Lawrence and demanded that as archdeacon and caretaker of the treasury, he must hand over the riches of the Church. Lawrence asked if he could have three days

to gather the wealth, which he promptly used to distribute as much property and riches to the poor as he could to prevent it from being seized.

On the 3rd day, Lawrence gathered a group of Christians from the streets of the city – poor, crippled, blind, sick, and suffering – and led them to the prefect. He presented them saying, “Here is the treasure of the Church. The Church is truly rich, far richer than your emperor.”

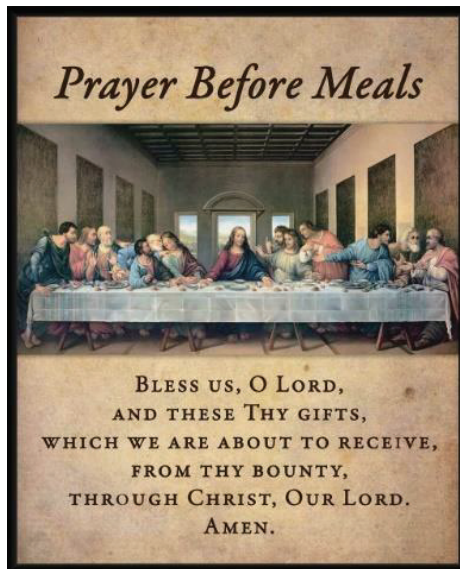
The Emperor didn’t really find this to be funny, and had his men prepare a gridiron with hot coals beneath it. Lawrence was then bound and placed on the grill! As you can already see, Lawrence was known for his sense of humor, and after being left on the gridiron for a while, he made the famous cheerful remark: “I’m well done on this side. Turn me over!”



Although Fr. Leo should not face the same fate as St. Lawrence, he does share his love for the faith, the poor and a great sense of humor. His podcasts and television shows are energetic and entertaining. He has shown off some of his martial arts skills at Catholic conferences impressing audiences by

breaking thick wooden boards. As an athlete, chef, and priest he shares the power of God through his strong mind, body and soul enhanced by nutrients from his great cooking.

“We are people made in the image of the Trinitarian Communion and we will only survive if we are being fed in body, mind, and soul.” Fr. Leo



Faith Challenges:

- Watch or listen to one of Fr. Leo's podcasts or television shows.
- Learn and pray before each meal (even in public). The simple prayer will give the proper credit for our blessing and set a good example for others.

Works Challenges:

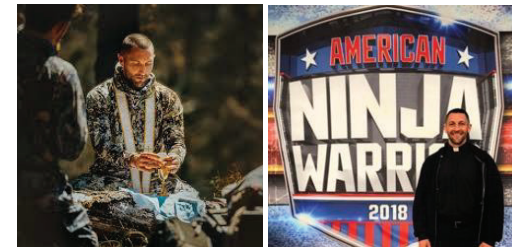
- Find time to share a family meal a few times a week with your family. If you are old enough find a simple recipe and cook for your parents.

Chapter 11

Fr. Stephen Gadberry- Power Ninja and Country Boy

The Making of a Catholic Priest

"There are some things in life you just have to do because of love." Fr. Stephen



From his Arkansas upbringing to his military experience, through his vocational ascent, Fr. Stephen Gadberry shares his trials, tragedy, and ultimate joy in answering Christ's call to the priesthood in the groundbreaking video, *The Making of a Catholic Priest*, released by **Word on Fire** in May 2022. Much of the content is accredited to that video.

On May 5, 1994, 8-year-old Stephen was riding with his 12-year-old sister Courtney and 3-year-old sister, Allison in their Dad's truck. Their Mom was home resting during her pregnancy but had prepared supper in a casserole dish. When that dish started sliding across the dashboard, his Dad reached for it pulling the car off the road. After the car flipped into a ditch, Stephen checked on his Dad and sisters and quickly realized they needed some help.

Despite a broken ankle, Stephen hobbled up to the road to flag down a passing car. Allison was crushed under the steering wheel by her Dad but would survive after being air lifted from the scene. His older sister, Courtney and his Dad passed away at the scene.



Stephen became the man of the house and never cried about the incident. The house on a farm in Wynne, Arkansas and would soon include twin boys born 6 months after the accident.

“Life is crazy man; you don’t even realize how delicate it is. This stuff just happens so fast.” Fr. Stephen

He doesn’t know why this tragedy happened, but he knows it has prepared him for battles in his life.

With all the jobs he needed to do as a young man growing up on a farm Stephen learned many skills. He dreamed of being a plumber, carpenter, mechanic, and opening a handy man business after school.

“Something that got me through all these years of my childhood was my faith.” Fr. Stephen

His Mom and Grandmother though encouraged him to go to college, and he tried it for a year. He hated it and thought about going into the military. His only hesitation was leaving home since so many relied on him there.

In 2005 he joined a special operations unit in the Air Force which required survivor skills. He was excited to tap into his various skills learned on the farm even while the United States military was actively in combat since the terrorist attacks on 9/11/01.

The first 2 weeks of training were a weed out phase, and Stephen made it until the very last day. After special operations, the Air Force reassigned him to a logistics role in Germany. Rather than focus on high-speed operations he was planning and executing the transportation and storage of supplies for the various U.S. bases in Europe.

The Air Force provided him a car to drive around Germany and he soon realized his unplanned path in the military had some nice side benefits. Although the role moved him away from his family in Arkansas, it gave him freedom in a new country.

Rather than stray from his faith during this first time on his own, Stephen embraced it. He would attend daily mass and frequently spend time in adoration.

He started getting a fuller image of what it meant to be a Catholic priest from one of the chaplains who mentored him.

In 2007, Stephen deployed to Iraq with his unit and stayed on the largest U.S. base in the sector. Since it was a key headquarters for planning operations, it was frequently targeted with bombings. While his role did not involve direct contact with enemy soldiers, the bombings and combat experience taught him some valuable lessons.



**“Never go into battle alone. Always have a wingman”
Fr. Stephen**

Even after receiving many awards and an early promotion after his time in Iraq, Stephen felt God was calling him for something else. God had a new mission for him. He felt God wanted him to be a wingman for those looking to follow Christ.

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. Matthew 18:20

Before leaving the Air Force, Stephen met with the vocation director in Little Rock, Arkansas and shortly

afterwards he received special permission to get out of the military early.

After taking off the uniform in June 2008 he started the seminary that August. With his military training he quickly embraced the disciplines of the seminary.

His vocation director shared 3 non-negotiables.

1. 40 hours of study a week
2. A daily holy hour
3. Healthy boundaries

These guidelines along with the four pillars shared in the book’s introduction, provided the structure Stephen had grown accustomed to in the military. Just as the rules and procedures on the base in Iraq protected him from the bombings, these guidelines and the guidelines of the church protect our souls.



Stephen was instructed to keep the four pillars in balance.

1. Human
2. Intellectual
3. Spiritual
4. Pastoral

The balance was important since all were critical areas of focus for a future priest. As this college dropout poured himself in the study of Philosophy and the church teachings, he found great joy in the intellectual side of the seminary.

“Through surrender joy came.” Fr. Stephen

He also found great joy in his hospice ministry. Although it meant dealing with people near death, they and their grieving family members were grateful for the Catholic faith and a shepherd of that faith.

His conversion to deepen his faith was a slow and gradual conversion like Peter. Through daily chipping away at his faults and improving with some steps back along the journey, Stephen continued to move forward.

As a farm boy, he sometimes found it difficult to follow some formalities even after years of military training. Once while in Rome, serving for Pope Francis he was able to share a brief conversation with the pontiff. After talking about one of his heroes, Blessed Stanley Rother, he asked for and received a hug from the holy father.

“Hey dude, can I have a hug?” Fr. Stephen to Pope Francis in Spanish



He couldn't have found a better hero. Blessed Stanley Rother was a German farm boy from Oklahoma. He was a simple guy who like Fr. Stephen loved the land and the Lord. Fr. Rother, a priest of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, served in the diocese's mission in Guatemala during the dangerous years of guerilla uprising and government oppression. He helped build a radio station and spread the message of Christ.

**“The shepherd cannot run at the first sign of danger.”
Blessed Stanley Rother.**

In 1981, Fr. Rother was killed for speaking out for the poor and his parishioners, who were being tortured and killed by government forces. He became the first U.S. born priest to be declared a martyr. His heart remains in Guatemala, but his body is buried in Oklahoma.

To follow the lead of his hero, Stephen was ordained on May 28, 2016, to be that shepherd. He soon became the pastor of not one, but two parishes in Arkansas:

1. St. Mary Church in Batesville
2. St. Cecilia in Newport

An advisor suggested he start working out at a gym during his lunch hour. Although he was hesitant since he felt it was selfish to take the time away from his flock, he grew to know his fellow gym members. They started connecting with him on personal issues. He was not expecting it, but they relished his wisdom as priest. He was evangelizing at the gym.

“Evangelization is not something you do, but the way you live.” Fr. Stephen

In 2017, he started serving as a chaplain for the Cross Fit games. As he surrounded himself with these athletes, he received permission from his bishop to try out for and was accepted on the TV show *American Ninja Warrior* in 2018.

Although he did not pass the first stage, he inspired many who saw a priest battling on such a tough course. Just as an *American Ninja Warrior* participant must balance on various obstacles and show strength on others, both skills are needed along our life's journey to Christ.



Above all, the Diocese of Little Rock priest made it clear he's an evangelist: "I'm insanely in love with our Lord Jesus Christ; I want to share him with everybody."

His story shared in the previously mentioned documentary, *The Making of a Catholic Priest*, is a chance to share the story of God's impact on his life on a global scale through the show produced by **Word on Fire**.

"I believe in the power of the story." Fr. Stephen



The documentary is about an hour long and tracks his life from childhood growing up in Wynne to his service in the U.S. Air Force in Iraq to his calling to the priesthood. He shared the following in an interview with Aprille Hanson Spivey for *Arkansas Catholic*.

The experience of recording was both "extremely exhausting, but it was a very holy moment," Father Gadberry explained.

"It was the opportunity to sit down and dig deep into my history for two days," he said. "... It really showed me how faithful God is and how he has been faithful my whole life."

One of the more powerful moments of the documentary Father Gadberry said was sharing about the death of his father and older sister.

"I never cried over it," he explained, adding at the time, he tried to be the man of the house, holding the emotions in. "As I got older, it developed into a wound."

While talking about the accident in the documentary, he started crying for the first time.

"It was just a flood of emotions," Father Stephen said. "A bizarre hurricane being unleashed, terribly traumatic memories and terrible wounds in a split-second washing over in a love and peace and it gave me understanding. ... It was really kind of the foot of the cross, from this side of the resurrection. Terribly painful but filled with joy and hope. I knew the cross wasn't the end at that moment."

Father Stephen was given the option to watch the documentary before it premiered, but declined, wanting to see it with his parishioners first.

“They all know me, but to see my story presented in its totality in a way I’ve never shared it with people is a very vulnerable moment, and I wanted to experience what they experience at the same time,” he said.

“Because I know the power of God’s mercy, I’ll be able to watch it as if it were somebody else.”

Initially, he was hesitant to do the show, not wanting the focus on him, but rather God’s work in him. He hopes it leads people to Christ.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

Romans 1:16

“People that are not Catholic, people that are not Christian, maybe people totally atheist are going to see this stuff,” he said, adding that the show will appear in at least seven film festivals across the country this summer. “... Hopefully the story that’s being told leads them to Christ. Hopefully the cinematography attracts people, but the message pushes them to God.”

Even after reading much of his story in this book, all readers should find the free video and watch it to hear it in Fr. Stephen’s words.



Growing up on a farm in Wynne, Fr. Stephen was accustomed to the family dogs running around the property.

“From my time in the military, then subsequently my eight years in seminary, your heart grows fond of all those things from home,” Fr. Stephen

In the summer of 2017, he went to the Independence County Humane Society and first saw a six-month-old collie mix he would name Murph. He was sitting in the back of a kennel where another young pup was barking and jumping. When the shelter worker let the rambunctious puppy out to run in the yard, “Murph just watched that crazy dog run out. Murph stood up real calmly, walked up to the gate like, ‘This guy’s gone, now can we talk,’” Father Stephen said.

Now 3 years old, “Murph is very disciplined, very athletic, very fast. He’ll run himself to death playing with the ball and frisbee,” he said. His best friend is Shorty, a 3-year-old beagle mix previously owned by a parishioner, who Father Stephen adopted.



This busy power priest who is shown above with another priest featured in this book recently celebrated the 5th year anniversary of his ordination. He keeps a journal of every mass. Like a good logistics soldier, Fr. Stephen logs the date, location and for whom it was celebrated. Over those five years, he celebrated 2,601 masses which is more than 1 a day.

Over those years, God has invited him to be a bold father. He has been with his parishioners at the birth of their children and by their side when they lost loved ones. He has been a powerful spiritual father to them even though he grew up most of his life without a father of his own. He finds peace in showing empathy and mercy.

“Our heart is restless until it rests in you oh Lord.” St. Augustine

Appropriately this athletic priest emphasizes fitness and shares.

Please do not underestimate the importance of living a balanced, healthy life. God created us to have happy, holy, healthy lives. We can only be truly happy and joyful if we are truly holy and healthy. The health of our soul is greatly affected by the health of our body and vice-versa. Time spent working on our physical well-being is never wasted time. Intentional discipleship requires attention and dedication. Dropping our nets does not require much physical exertion but following Christ will take a lot out of you. Our bodies will all pass away, but our souls will live on. The healthier we are, the longer we will likely live. This will give us more time to love and to be the hands and feet of Christ, more time to be his disciples here on earth so that we may be with him for eternity! Fr. Stephen

His favorite saints and heroes reflect his youth and fitness.

- St. Joseph, because he likely lifted heavy stuff while working
- Blessed Fr. Stanley Rother, because of his pastoral determination, zeal, and selflessness.
- Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati and Servant of God Frank Prater, because of their youthful zeal and joy.
- St. Sebastian, his patron saint from Confirmation as well as the patron of athletes.

“A story can change people’s lives.” Fr. Stephen

He has shared his story in a video documentary and now in this book. How would you tell your story? How does it reflect God's great plan for you?

"I believe in the power of the story." Fr. Stephen



Faith Challenge:

- Learn and contemplate the Corporal Works of Mercy and find time to watch *The Making of a Catholic Priest* on YouTube sponsored by **Word on Fire**.
 1. Feed the hungry
 2. Give drink to the thirsty
 3. Clothe the naked
 4. Shelter the homeless
 5. Visit the sick
 6. Visit the imprisoned
 7. Bury the dead

Works Challenge:

- Choose one of these corporal works of mercy and put it into practice. Start living the life God has called you to live so your story is part of His great library of stories. To start, consider the 90-day challenge that Exodus offers.



- **Exodus 90-** Is a ninety-day spiritual exercise for men based on Christ's roadmap to freedom: prayer, asceticism, and fraternity. It was founded by James Baxter in 2015 and has reached over 50,000 men in more than 70 countries. Those who take on the initial challenge and subsequent exercises find the freedom to be who God is calling them to be.

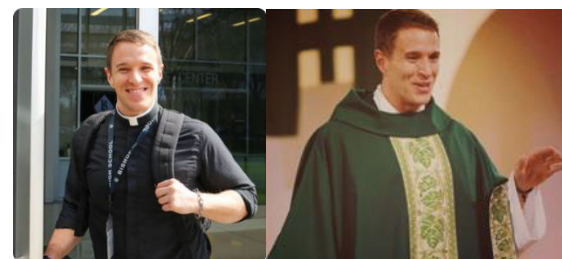
"During my workouts, I am praying almost non-stop, talking with the Lord" Fr. Stephen

Chapter 12

Fr. Edwin Leonard: A Cross-fit Instrument for Christ

"I will give you shepherds after my own heart" (Jer. 3:15)

"Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach" Fr. Edwin



Appropriately the last priest shared in this book is one of the youngest. Although Father Edwin Leonard was a young child when Saint Pope John Paul II shared, *I'll Give you Shepherds* encyclical in 1992, his ministry has been greatly influenced by the vision.

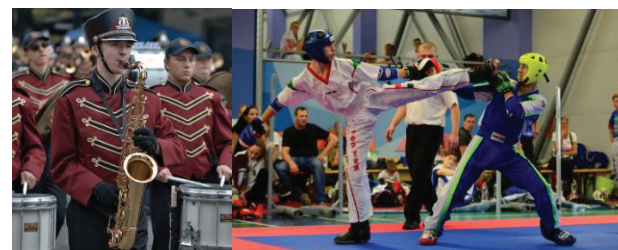
"Priests exist and act to proclaim the Gospel to the world and to build up the Church in the name and person of Christ the head and shepherd." *I'll Give you Shepherds* Encyclical

As the pastor of St. Ann Parish in Coppell, Texas, Father Edwin grew up in the very parish he now leads! Since he was greatly influenced by the youth and teen ministries of this vibrant parish in a suburb of Dallas it seems appropriate that he now leads this parish of nearly 20,000 members.

The Leonard family has always been active members of the parish, and his mother Mary was the strong Catholic influence. His father Ed converted from Episcopalian in 1999 and has led many ministries including a large group of “construction dads” who support the parish’s annual teen mission trip for over two decades. His example of service along with Mary’s enduring faith laid the foundation for Edwin’s discernment. Fr. Edwin considers his Dad his role model, but before discerning for the priesthood around the age of 23 one of Edwin’s passions was music.

Although now built like a football linebacker or tight end due to his passion for cross fit exercising, Edwin played the saxophone for years. With his musical talents, Edwin was a welcomed addition on his High School’s marching band. In North Texas, high school bands are a big deal as they are in other parts of the country. One of the extra challenges in North Texas is the start of band practice in early August, coincides with the hottest days of the year. As the temperatures surpassed 100 degrees Fahrenheit, Edwin and his band mates started learning the songs and steps each year.

The endurance and discipline required to perform and march in unison provided a good foundation for Edwin’s vocational journey as well as his fitness interests. Before he became an instrument for Christ, Edwin dabbled in some other interests including karate, video games, science fiction and driving fast.



Young Edwin Leonard was still learning the basics of the martial arts when his Dad signed him up for a karate tournament. For any who has seen *The Karate Kid* movies released in 1984 and revised in 2010, those tournaments can be brutal. Unlike the other boys, Edwin only had a few months of preparation and no Mr. Miyagi to train him. Still, Edwin entered each match with little fear and a simple strategy.

While other contestants tried various moves like round house, side snap, and back thrust kicks, Edwin focused on a good defensive position and an onslaught of front kicks. He was not the most elegant fighter, but after winning multiple matches with his simple strategy he took home a trophy that was almost as tall as him.

Like most young men growing up in the latter years of the 20th century, Edwin enjoyed playing video games. One of his favorite games was *Halo*. For those less familiar with the game, which is now a franchise of games, it is set in the twenty-sixth century, with the player assuming the role of a super soldier. Players battle aliens as they attempt to uncover the secrets of a ring-shaped artificial world. Clearly, it’s not the halo many Catholics picture above the head of saints, but for

a teenage Edwin it was even better or “awesome” as he would say back then.

One might not think playing video games would provide much training for a priest, but it certainly created some relatable stories. Just as the journey of the super soldier gets tougher as he gets closer to uncovering the secrets of the fictitious Halo world, a Christian’s journey gets more difficult the more closely one follows God’s path. As Fr. Edwin would later share in a homily “when the journey gets tougher you know you are going in the right direction.”

Some may move along their journey faster than others, and in Fr. Edwin’s case he tends to move very quickly on his journey while driving. He put the fast in Fast and Furious before it became a blockbuster series of movies. He freely admits in his homilies that one of his habits is driving fast, and he has the tickets to prove it.

Although he has become more careful about his speeding since his teenage years, he still puts the pedal to the metal at times. On one trip to Houston for the baptism of a friend’s child, Fr. Edwin was running a bit late. An early wake up required a coffee stop and the coffee stop required an illegal short cut. Unfortunately, a local police officer happened to see him take the short cut. Fortunately for Fr. Edwin the police officer was a recovered alcoholic who credits a Catholic nun for helping him. The priest collar helped, Fr. Edwin resume his journey to the baptism, but not until he heard the police officer’s story and a reminder to slow down and pray.



As he evolved from a young man to a teenager with an afro to a priest ordained in 2012, Fr. Edwin’s interests and habits offer the following lessons for all Christians.

1. **Band**- God’s followers need discipline and endurance
2. **Karate**- A simple plan of prayer and penance is an effective strategy in our faith journey
3. **Video Games**- when the journey gets tougher you know you are going in the right direction.
4. **Science Fiction books**- Fun, but the Bible is his favorite book. God’s word is even more powerful.
5. **Driving fast**- even a priest needs a reminder to slow down and listen to God

After his ordination, Fr. Edwin served his first two years as the Parochial Vicar at St. Rita Catholic Church in North Dallas. In 2014, he was assigned as the Director of Vocations for the Dallas Diocese and during his 7 years in the role the diocese accepted over 80 new seminarians!

In addition to vocation work, Fr. Edwin served as the Chaplain of Bishop Lynch Catholic High School in Dallas

and interim Pastor for two parishes from 2018-2021. He also served as Vice-President of the Executive Board for the National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors.

In 2021 he became the pastor of his home parish of St. Ann. He uses his strong enthusiasm for CrossFit, movies, sporting events and music festivals to connect with the youth and young adults of the parish. Fr. Edwin “enjoys sharing his love for the Gospel with the youth and teaching the next great generation of saints.”

As pastor of a large parish, Fr. Edwin finds time to continue his connection with youth and teens. He joins the High School Ministry (HSM) group on their annual mission trip to Laredo, Texas at the U.S. border with Mexico. There the teens, his Dad and other parents and ministry leaders help with various construction projects for an entire week. From rebuilding homes to adding a new roof or building a shelter at a Catholic Charities center, the Laredo mission trip includes hard work during the day and Mass, prayers, and fun activities in the evening. Fr. Edwin even joins the teens and their ministry leaders in some of the evening competitions and excursions after the trip.



When away from the parish attending a baseball game, traveling, or starting a parish 5k race with a prayer. Fr. Edwin usually stays in his priestly attire to remain a witness for Christ. With the priestly attire he is almost always in his cowboy boots to remain a “witness” for Texas.

On a recent trip, he had a chance to explain the Catholic faith and his role as a priest to a Jewish woman sitting next to him on a flight. After he finished explaining how the Catholic faith and his role evolved from her Jewish faith from the old to new testament, she exclaimed, “That’s awesome!” He simply replied, “I know!”

He loves the bible and in particular the books of Genesis and the gospel of John. When asked for one of his favorite verses he quickly shared.

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." - John 16:33

His love for the bible may only be surpassed by his love for the sacrament of reconciliation and the Mass. His homilies are filled with personal stories and many memorized bible verses. Appropriately, his favorite saint is Thomas Aquinas, a Dominican friar and priest who was a renowned thinker of the medieval period and had a great influence on Western thought particularly in the areas of ethics, natural law, metaphysics, and political theory.

"Stay where you are. Find your own Calcutta. Find your sick in your home." Saint Mother Teresa

One of those personal stories involved his niece. She was only a few days old, and doctors didn't think she would live much longer. His family called him to the hospital to perform an emergency baptism. Fr. Edwin and his heavy driving foot made it to the hospital quickly. After performing the baptism and adding some special prayers, Fr. Edwin hugged his siblings and hoped for the best. A few days later he had a story to support his belief that miracles don't just happen in the bible. His niece fully recovered and is now a vibrant 8-year-old and a perfectly healthy young lady.



Before communion at each Sunday Mass he adds a simple reminder that not only summarizes a key belief of our faith, but also reminds mass attendees of their responsibilities prior to receiving Christ in the Eucharist.

Brothers and Sisters as a reminder we do believe as Catholics that the Eucharist is the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus Christ. That's why our children go through a whole year of preparation to be able to receive, and so therefore it is only open to Catholics. If you are visiting with us from a Protestant church or just beginning your relationship with Jesus or are a Catholic for some reason is not prepared to receive holy communion this week you can come forward for a blessing.

This reminder is simply that- a reminder of our shared Catholic faith. It does not judge nor go into unnecessary details. He guides just as a shepherd should guide on a topic that some like to criticize or question.

His advice for dating and discerning the priesthood is the same, "Don't text, talk in person." He advises and

preaches in the same straightforward manner he took in his karate days to ensure the message is clear and aligned with the teachings of the Catholic faith.

At a recent talk at a Catholic men's conference in the spring of 2022, he shared more straightforward advice, and reminded the attendees, **"Jesus came for one reason- to forgive us."**

Hence, his favorite sacrament is Reconciliation, and appropriately spends countless hours each week hearing confession and administering to those in need of God's healing power of forgiveness.

During the same lecture, Fr. Edwin shared that the Lord teaches values and virtues, and we need to discipline ourselves and form good habits. If we continue to choose evil, you form a habit. So, he encouraged a simple strategy for our prayer life to stay on the path even as it gets tougher.

Carve out time each day for prayer and use the following guide:

1. **Review** your day (blessing and failings)
2. **Plan** for the next day (God where do you want to be in my schedule?)
3. **Pray** for the people in your life.

He emphasizes the final step since friends can carry us to or away from Christ. Fr. Edwin loves grabbing a beer and watching a sports game with friends as much as anyone, but he's also willing to invite a friend to Mass or simply to pray. He emphasized that when we gather together in worship, we are strengthened.

They came bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. Unable to get near Jesus because of the crowd, they opened the roof above him. After they had broken through, they let down the mat on which the paralytic was lying. (Mark 2:3-4)

Do our friends carry us to Christ? If we were paralyzed or struggling, would they carry us to Jesus? One of the greatest stories in the gospels is the paralytic who is carried by his 4 friends to Jesus in hope of being healed. Not only do they carry him, but they open a hole in the roof and lower their friend. Would you be willing to do that for a friend? What about a friend who is "paralyzed" in his faith?



With an eclectic interest in music ranging from Christian music to Chance the Rapper and country music artist Chris Stapleton, Fr. Edwin is a modern-day power priest and cross-fit instrument for Christ. This Texan graduated from Franciscan University in Ohio and studied in Rome, Italy before returning to his home state. He couples his global studies with his strong knowledge of the bible and Catholic faith to deliver strong and straightforward homilies. His charisma and passion for Christ helped increase the number of seminarians in the Dallas Diocese. His direct approach to fundraising and modern thinking of using QR codes

on offertory baskets for online giving has helped grow a vibrant parish.

He does not expect perfection on the journey and pointed out that even Jesus physically stumbled along his journey while carrying the cross and fell three times. We too should expect to stumble and fall, but with friends, a strong daily prayer base, and frequent confession we can stay on course.

“Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach” Fr. Edwin

Faith Challenge:

- Learn the act of contrition and find time for a thorough confession.

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee,
and I detest all my sins because of Thy just punishments,
but most of all, because they offend Thee, my God,
Who are all-good and deserving of all my love.
I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to sin no more
and to avoid in the near occasion of sin. Amen.

“It is better to confess one’s sins than to harden one’s hearts.” Saint Clement of Rome

Works Challenge

- Join a mission trip sponsored by your church or neighboring parish. It can be a day or a weeklong one that supports someone in need.

Chapter 13

Wrap Up

Just as we began with a prayer, please end with a prayer. In this picture, St. Michael the Archangel is pictured in the colors of Ukraine, a predominantly Christian nation under attack by Russia when this book was published. Please pray with them.



Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil; May God rebuke him, we humbly pray; And do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly Host, by the power of God, cast into hell Satan and all evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

After researching and/or interviewing these priests, a few themes consistently repeat in their lives.

1. They all had a good relationship with their mother and a strong devotion to Mary.
2. Their favorite saints were a mix of men and women.
3. Daily prayer (particularly the Liturgy of the Hours) and bible reading gave them strength.

4. They regularly share(d) personal stories about their faith journey.
5. They believe in science and the protection of life from conception to natural death.
6. They honored priestly celibacy and obedience with the latter often more challenging.
7. Believe in graces from the sacraments, and the power of frequent confession.
8. They recognize the real presence in the Eucharist & celebrated the Mass daily.

For those who struggle focusing while in Mass try 5 areas of emphasis:

1. Early- Focus on asking for God's for mercy "Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy."
2. Midway- Understand the reason for worship **"May the Lord accept the *sacrifice* at *your hands* for the *praise* and *glory* of his name, for *our good* and the *good* of all his holy *Church*."**
3. Later- Before Communion and after the Our Father- Reminder where the Power truly belongs - **"For *thine* is the *kingdom*, and the *power*, and the *glory*, forever."** Matthew 6:13
4. Focus on the context of the readings- after studying the Bible they will make more sense
5. Pay attention to the words in the songs. They can be powerful and often pull from scripture.

They follow 3 steps from the gospels which we can all follow:

1. Do these 3 things daily that Jesus asked of us:
 - Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me. (Luke 9:23)
2. Follow the two great commandments:
 - You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind (Matthew 22:37)
 - You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Mark 12:31)
3. Be not afraid (John 6:20)

To wrap up in the theme of Dr. Seuss' *Oh The Places You Will Go* we honor our priests.

Oh, The Graces a Priest Shall Bestow

Oh, the graces you shall bestow!

There is much to be done!

There are souls to be saved and hearts to be won.

And the amazing things you can do with God's call will help bring His mercy and message to all.

Amen!

You'll be as powerful as a man can be, with many

followers watching you on the internet or TV

You have brains in your head.

You have feet in your shoes.

God can steer you any direction He or your Bishop may choose.

And when you're guiding your sheep there's a very good chance

you'll pray often to God and wear out the knees of your pants

Today is the Lord's day!
His people are waiting.
So please get on your way!
Out there, things can happen, and frequently do,
To people as trained and holy as you.
And when things start to happen, don't worry, don't stew.
Just lean on your faith, you'll start happening too!
Your mission is to show God's mercy
And forgiveness to those who repent
Through Jesus's example of love
His only son, through Mary, He sent.

After your journey in this life
By God's grace you will be old
May you come to a place where the streets are of gold
and the holy choir of angels will be much to behold.

With the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
His followers in heaven will be as one
Thanks to a shepherding priest they learned
Through Jesus and the cross, the battle was won.

Greg Hendry June 2022

If you enjoyed reading this and would like to share
another priest, nun or Catholic to share in an
upcoming power book, please reach out through
fromheavenbooks.com website.

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About the Author

Greg Hendry is a nobody trying to tell everybody about the Catholic faith and these priests empowered by the Holy Spirit to be God's witness to the ends of the earth. He founded *fromHeaven books* to first honor his late wife, Allison, who passed from this earth shortly after giving birth to their son in 2002.

He is a father of 5 children, brother of 5 siblings and son of 2 faith filled parents, Glenn and Carolyn who raised him and his siblings in St. Louis, MO. So, the number 12 continues to be significant in his life.

He hopes this will be the first of many books featuring powerful Catholic leaders. He encourages readers to reach out with feedback and ideas for others to feature in future books at fromheavenbooks.com.

