

Take the Time to Pray, Take the Time to Listen

Written by Jonathan Jensen

I had the great pleasure of visiting All Saints Academy for the first time in many years in January, and it gave me a chance to reflect upon how my life had changed over the past several years and what role my education has had in that change. I am now finishing my third year of College Seminary as I prepare to one day become a priest. The past three years have been an immense blessing and a time of rapid growth in my life, both as I grow into adult life, but also as I am drawn by the Lord into the depths of His heart in prayer. As I look back, however, and see the many changes I have undergone since walking through the doors of ASA for the first time in 2nd grade, I see that the course of my life has forever been shaped by those earliest times of my life.

I remember praying before bed every night when I was a child. I don't really remember how I started, but I remember that I was never able to fall asleep until I had told Jesus about everything that happened over the course of my day. I was really able to hear the Lord's voice in those days, and it was always a voice of love. I always knew that Jesus wanted to hear about my day and that he wanted what was best for me. When I stopped praying later on, however, it was because prayer ceased to be a pleasant thing, and began to make me feel guilty as I told Jesus about the sins that I began to commit as I matured. Instead of asking Jesus for help there, and

asking for his forgiveness, I instead decided to ignore God, to ignore my guiltiness, because I didn't want to pray when it was difficult.

Now, the reason that it was difficult is because God was trying to bring me out of my sinful habits, by showing me the harm that they cause, but not knowing this, I naturally took the easy way out.

I still loved learning about the church, and I still went to church, but my heart ceased to be in it; it was like going through the motions. The one thing I always enjoyed was altar serving, but anything beyond that was a bit of a chore. I knew a lot about God because of my education, but I decided that I didn't want to know Him, because it meant that I would have to do difficult things. Then, suddenly, Jesus broke into my life and woke me up to reality. I heard an impassioned speaker preaching on the truth that Christ wishes to set us free from sin, to make us happy, because we are truly happier without sin in our lives. I asked Jesus for forgiveness on that day in 7th grade, going to confession, and my life was transformed. The opportunities for prayer and learning at ASA gave



me what I needed to excel in my faith, and that life of prayer I had as a young boy began to return. Living the life of faith was truly difficult, and it definitely had (and still has) its ups and downs, but I had changed the path I was on, turning around to walk towards Christ.

From that day, I began living for Christ. When I got to West Catholic, then, I naturally found myself in a group of other boys who were trying to live in the same way that I was, the Discernment Group. About 20 of us would meet at lunch time to talk about Vocations, something I had learned about at ASA. Now, however, it felt very real as we were only four years away from entering adult life, and the decision of what to do with my life after school was the most important one I knew that I would make. I began to pray daily, asking the Lord what he wanted me to do. As I began to pray more, I found the grace to keep diving deeper into prayer. I began to love prayer and see it as necessary for my own

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happiness. Through this prayer, the Lord began to speak into my life what it was he wanted me to do: to be his priest. I realized this while serving my cousin, Fr. Rob's, First Mass. Through his joy, I saw what a vocation truly was - the state of life that makes us the happiest, because on that day he was the happiest man I had ever seen.

I've spent the past three years at Saint John Vianney College Seminary in St. Paul, MN, and they have been the three happiest years of my life. What we do here is not easy, learning how to pray is not easy, living far from home is not easy, but it's the most worthwhile thing I've ever done, because it's what God has asked me to do, and because he always helps me to do it. The most difficult days here are always the ones in which I don't say my prayers, or I only go through the motions; when I try to do things on my own instead of asking Jesus to help me every step of the way. When I allow Him to help me, then my life is joyful, my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

One of my favorite things that I get to do is teaching. Whether it's Religious Education or visiting schools like ASA, I love to teach about Jesus. The Lord has given me such an amazing gift in my vocation, and he has made me so happy, that I always want to help others to find that same happiness, to give them the gift of a relationship with Jesus. I love sharing the Truth with everyone I can, because it is the Truth which sets us free. The Christian life is not an easy one, but it's the only chance that we have at happiness

in this world.

None of this can happen if we aren't aware of God's presence in our lives, if we can't hear His voice speaking to us. Two pieces of advice I have, especially to students, are, first, to always keep learning about Jesus, to pay attention in class, to ask good questions, to always seek answers, and second, that prayer is about relationship with God. Jesus

already knows everything about you, but he wants you to tell Him everything that you can about yourself, because that's what you do with your friends. Jesus loves you infinitely, but you can't know that until you take the time to

look for where He is currently loving you. We have to take time to pray to Jesus, but we also have to take time to be in silence and listen for His voice. It often doesn't come as human words, but rather movements of the heart, and graces received in your life. A sense of happiness on a difficult day, or energy when you're tired. A feeling of being loved when you pray. A friend who helps you when you really need it. These are the simplest signs of Jesus' love to see in your life, but they are not seen when they go unlooked for. Taking time for silence is so important in our world of technology and noise today. Everywhere we go is filled with sounds and lights and stories vying for our attention, but Christ

is not going to be found there, but in the silence. If we want to find Him, then we have to build into our schedules time away from TV and video games, and even from homework and reading, so that we can simply listen for Jesus' voice. Pursuing the Christian life, the life of interior silence, is difficult, but it is the most worthwhile thing we can do.

