

THE INVITATION

Dan Vimont, 4 December, 2011

When Father Pat introduced the Faces of Christ topic this Advent, I immediately thought of two different conversations that I had toward the end of high school.

The First Conversation

The first conversation occurred a couple of weeks before I was to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. I was talking with my Uncle, a Jesuit Priest and my Confirmation Sponsor. I was having trouble with what I'll refer to as "the Invitation". This is the point in the Gospel where Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, and

... he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen. He said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Matthew, 4:18-19

So this is the Invitation. And, keep in mind the context of the conversation – I'm about to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation, and felt like I was in Peter and Andrew's shoes. What's remarkable about the passage is the response (bold added for emphasis):

At once they left their nets and followed him.

Matthew, 4:20

This is a remarkable amount of faith and foresight for Peter and Andrew, right? I mean, here's Jesus walking down the beach. He calls to Peter and Andrew, and Peter turns to Andrew and says "that sounds like a good idea, we're outta here!" They just drop EVERYTHING and follow this guy walking down the beach? Who they've NEVER MET?!? This is amazing clarity of vision! I felt like in Confirmation, I was being asked the same thing. I knew I didn't have THAT kind of clarity of vision, or courage of my conviction, and I was worried.

My uncle made a comment that I've thought about a lot since then. He reminded me that the Gospels had been written years after Jesus's death and Resurrection. He said, "maybe after seeing all that Jesus did, after witnessing the Resurrection, after realizing who he IS... Maybe after all those years the writer looked back at this initial meeting with Jesus, and that invitation gained a whole new significance."

The Second Conversation

About six months later I was at a birthday party for my grandfather when I ran in to Father Phil Boroughs, who was friend of my uncle's. I had received the Sacrament of Confirmation, and was now having a lot of trouble making decisions about college. On the one hand, I had a passion for jazz piano, and on the other, I was very interested in pursuing Physics. (Yes, I was confused). He asked me the question that all seniors in high school hate (paraphrased): "What are you doing with the rest of your life?" I started talking with him,

and indicated that I was pretty confused. On a whim, he said “why don’t you come on over to my office and we’ll talk about college choices”.

A couple of weeks later I found myself at Father Phil’s residence at Seattle University – I remember it was dark outside, and it was raining. Then again, it’s always raining in Seattle, so that didn’t necessarily distinguish the day from any other night. Phil and I sat down and talked in his office, and I told him about my interests in Physics. He asked me if I had considered Gonzaga University, and said “I’ve got a friend, Father Brian Ulrickson, who teaches in the Physics department at Gonzaga, and he has his doctorate in Meteorology. Let me call him up and set up an appointment for you two to meet.” He picked up the phone, and twenty minutes later I was walking back to the car with an appointment to meet with Father Brian. It was still dark, it was still raining, and I still had no idea what I was going to do for college.

I met with Brian on a campus visit, and ultimately I ended up attending Gonzaga University. The rest is history. I developed my interest in Physics and conducted research in Atmospheric Sciences with Father Brian. My interest in Atmospheric Sciences grew, and I ultimately continued pursuing that interest in graduate school at the University of Washington. At Gonzaga University, I met Mandee and we became good friends. During our senior year, Mandee really helped me realize in myself the importance of my Catholic identity, and we were married a couple years after graduating. In 2003 we moved to Madison and I took a job in the Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences department here at UW.

Now, I look out at Mandee and our two boys, and realize we’ve come a long way! And, I realize that a lot has happened in the twenty years since the birthday party at my grandfather’s house where Father Phil invited me over for a conversation. As I consider all that has happened since that meeting, I have a new understanding of the response to Jesus’s invitation – Peter and Andrew’s perspective on Jesus call.

But there’s the first part of the verse as well – the Invitation. This is the more important part, of course. And here’s where I love thinking from Phil’s perspective. This conversation between the two of us has taken an entirely new significance in my mind. I look back at the last twenty years, and everything that has happened, and see this conversation as a major milestone in my life. But I wonder if Phil even remembers it? (I’m sure he does). This was a simple invitation that Phil extended to me, almost on a whim.

And that’s really the point, to me. Jesus called Peter and Andrew to a LIFE with Christ. Not just the big events. Everything. Even the little things. And in my mind, as Phil invited me over for a conversation, in a very small way, he continued to affirm *his* answer to *Christ’s* invitation.

So that’s what I’m thinking about as we head into Advent. I really liked Kara’s talk last week, and the way she ended with a wish for all of us. I’m going to shamelessly steal that idea, and say that my wish for Advent, for myself and for all of us, is that I’ll see Christ’s Invitation not just in the big things, but also in all the little things that people do for me, and that I can do for others. Because I never now how a small act – a simple conversation – could change someone’s life. And even if a simple conversation ends as just that – a simple conversation – that’s OK. There’s Christ in that too.

Even the small things are part of a life with Christ.