

HOLY CROSS

T H E C H U R C H D E S E R V E S O U R B E S T



“The function of faith is to give life to our prayers, in order to make them efficacious; to be our consolation amid the evils of this life; to be our strength in the persecutions, contradictions, and failures of our ministry; to clarify our doubts, guide our counsels, direct our undertakings, and lead us to the tribunal of penance; to accompany us to the Holy Table, where the mystery of faith is accomplished; in a word, to consecrate and sanctify every least detail of our daily life, all in the name of Jesus Christ.”

—Rev. Basil Moreau, C.S.C.,
Founder of Holy Cross
Sermon to seminarians,
November 1834



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Put Out Into the Deep

Rev. Patrick Neary, C.S.C., rector of Moreau Seminary, preached the following homily to the Holy Cross community at the opening of the academic year. It is based upon the call of Peter to “put out into deep water” in Luke 5:1-11. Prior to assuming the reins of leadership at Moreau, Fr. Neary was assistant rector for four years and worked for ten years in Campus Ministry at Notre Dame. He is a native of La Porte, Ind. In addition to being an avid golfer, he is known for his warmth, friendliness, and “Hoosier humor,” a glimpse of which can be readily detected in his reflections below.



YOU CAN LEARN SO MUCH from listening to someone’s vocation story. You can see so clearly how God put the right people in your path so that you might hear his voice and answer his call.

I thought that I might share something of my own vocation story. In seventh grade my best friend’s brother decided to enter the seminary. My friend and I were altar servers, and we really enjoyed getting to know the “cool” transitional deacon in our parish, who was soon to be ordained a priest. When my friend’s brother was making his first visit to that seminary, our deacon invited us to go with them. To be honest, I didn’t like it. I found it too isolated and imposing and vowed right then and there that I would never enter a seminary.

In high school, however, the thought of priesthood emerged strongly once again. Unbeknownst to me, my parents suspected as much, and contacted a friend of theirs who had an uncle teaching at Notre Dame. He was a Holy Cross priest named Fr. Herman Reith, C.S.C., who is now retired and resides at Holy Cross House. He wrote

me, telling me all about his life as a Holy Cross priest and teacher at Notre Dame, and he invited me to visit. I knew nothing of Holy Cross and had never heard of the community, even though I was a huge Notre Dame football fan.

Soon Fr. Andre Leveille, C.S.C., then vocation director, began to write me. I didn’t know anything about form letters in those days, so I replied to every letter he sent me, assuming each one had

been personally written just to me. I wrote a lot of letters!

When I look back at how I came to Holy Cross, I often joke about how my life today doesn’t look much different than my life at St. Joe Grade School in La Porte where my vocation was born. I would walk to school every day and attend Mass. I served often and was surrounded by four Franciscan sisters. I very much admired my pastor, Msgr. John Witte.

In first grade, Sr. Estelle would give us a mock spanking with a piece of wood that used to be part of a processional cross. And she always gave us one extra swat, and she would say to us boys, “And one to be a priest!” Four of her former first graders and two of her nephews are priests. This woman knew how to catch vocations. I still visit her to this day. She prays for me, and all the priests she knows, every night before retiring.

When we see the call of Peter and the other fishermen in the gospel, it’s pretty obvious that nothing that day happened by accident. Yes, it would appear that Jesus just happened to get in a boat and it just happened to be Peter’s boat. But I suspect Jesus did his homework. He probably talked to a few people who knew Peter and observed him fishing a few times—saw him

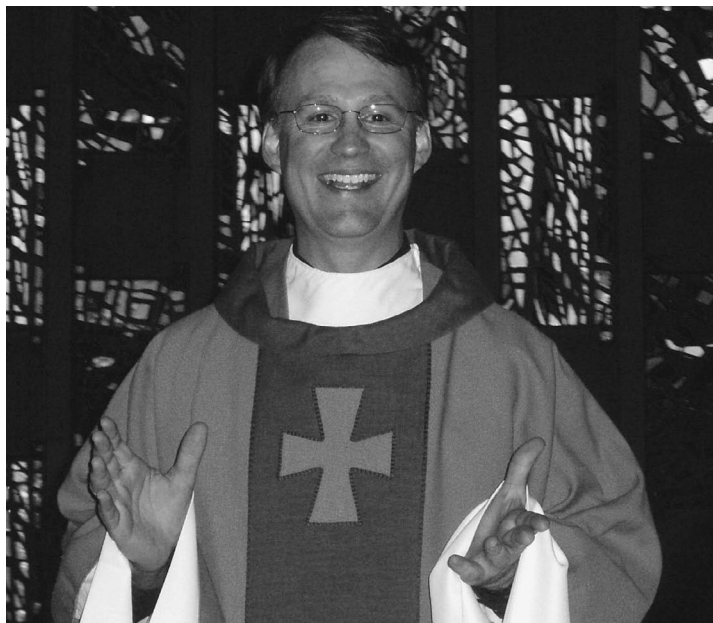
barking out orders and organizing the next fishing expedition.

Jesus saw something special in Peter, thus the “accidental” but strategic preaching right near Peter’s boat. Peter didn’t have a chance. Jesus had him and he knew it. Jesus disregarded Peter’s feeble protest of unworthiness. He had greater things in mind than Peter’s small sense of himself.

But you can say this much for Peter. He had guts, and he was a gambler. He had caught nothing all night long but at Jesus’ command was still willing to put out into the deep. He took a great risk in leaving his boat and his livelihood behind. He left it all to follow the Lord.

All of you have left something behind to follow the Lord too. Christianity is not for people who want to play it safe. It is only for those willing to put it all on the line, to take a risk, to be gamblers. It was a lot easier for me to take the risk to explore Holy Cross in 1981. With all the bad media surrounding the Church and the priesthood, all of you have had more courage than I needed to answer Christ’s call and to enter the seminary.

And if you look closely at your own vocation stories, you will see that certain people were placed by God in your life’s



path to catch you for Christ. None of them or events that awakened your call to explore the priesthood and religious life happened to you by accident any more than they did when Jesus called Peter. No, Divine Providence was very much at work in your life, and we know that our founder, Fr. Basil Moreau, C.S.C. believed strongly in Providence.

Now a word about fishing, since it was Peter’s livelihood. I was up fishing at Land O’Lakes, Wisconsin this past June, and the fish were really biting. I caught my limit of walleye—five keepers two nights running—my best ever. But I received reports from the Holy Cross crew that went up there in August that Plum Lake, where I caught all my fish, was more like the Dead Sea. Let’s face it. Sometimes the catch is good, and sometimes it isn’t.

What it comes down to really is a fisherman’s skill in attracting the fish. Now there is the occasional city slicker who gets lucky and catches a big fish once in awhile. But then there are fishermen who simply know how to attract the big fish when others can’t and luck runs out.

If we want to capture people for Christ, we must learn how to become people who are skilled in attracting people to him. We do this by becoming transformed people. Only transformed people attract and transform other people, like Jesus did with Peter and the other disciples. And how do we transform ourselves? We simply cannot do it by ourselves.

It happens, however, when we have the courage of a risk taker and a gambler, the ability to face our inner demons, our weaknesses, our “issues,” if you will, and invite God’s grace to rush in. Oh, yes, when we take a long, hard look at ourselves, we want to cry out with Peter, “Leave me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.”

It’s like the alcoholic who says, “I cannot overcome this without your grace, O Lord.” God is not going to touch us where we are strong, but grace will enter in where we are weak, lonely, discouraged, and afraid. People begin to see that

we are different, that we have something, God’s love, God’s Spirit, and they find it irresistible.

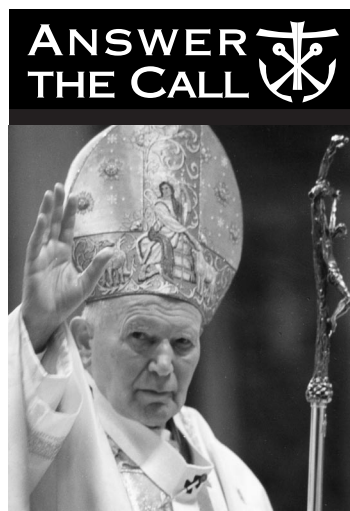
But our call is not only to attract people to Christ; we must catch them for him. We all must be vocation directors in catching men for Holy Cross. We do this by being the best seminarians, brothers, and priests that we can be. In Holy Cross, we do not and cannot settle for the minimum and the mediocre.

We must be the best students, the best educators in the faith, the best preachers, best parish priests, and the best missionaries—not in any prideful way but out of a zeal to give our very best for the Lord. It’s the zeal that Jesus sensed in Simon: “Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets.”

Finally, the Lord draws us, attracting us to this table. Like Peter, we are gamblers and risk takers. We are willing to leave the safe harbor and continually put out into the deep at his bidding. We too have all left something behind to be here.

Still, we find that no matter what we left behind, everything is given to us in return. God is given to us in his absolute fullness sacramentally whenever we share his Body and Blood together. We who are willing to risk, to gamble, to take a chance on Christ without really knowing what lies ahead, receive everything we ever desired in him so long as we have the courage, like Peter, to heed his call and put out into the deep.

CONGREGATION OF HOLY CROSS



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