

SELF-ASSESSMENT
for
Shaun Lowery
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"You formed me in my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb." - Psalm 139

Perhaps in every life there is a moment when what we know and what we believe collide. For example, I know that the Holocaust occurred. I have studied it and I have seen pictures of the atrocities that occurred within the concentration camps. And yet, it is difficult for me to believe that indeed it did take place. It is difficult for me to believe the humanity could be so evil and allow death to come so close to taking over the world. And yet it happened.

Up until I was fifteen years old, I knew God existed. God was a nice man with a white beard and he had a Son whose name was Jesus. Jesus was born on Christmas and grew up to be a special man who many people loved and many people hated. Jesus was everything that I wanted to be and Jesus was also everything I could not be. Jesus died but rose from the dead. And to top it all off, Jesus could be found in a neatly cut piece of bread and sour tasting wine. These things I always knew from the many people who told me: from my parents and grandparents, from my teachers and my parish. It was not until my mother died that I believed.

My mother's name was Grace. She suffered for about ten years from an aggressive form of Multiple Sclerosis. This disease took her from independence to the slavery of life in a wheelchair and eventually a hospital bed in a nursing home. When she lived at home, a lot of her care fell on me because I was the older of two boys. My younger brother, Ryan, was five years behind me and could not do much of what mom needed done. Neither could I really, but since dad was at work and the caretaker left at three o'clock, someone had to help.

Many of the things that I had to do for my mother I realize now embarrassed me as much as they did her. Mom needed help doing everything. If she needed to use the restroom, she depended on another to help her to the toilet or in the end to empty her foley bag. If she wanted to eat, she needed someone else to feed her. If she wanted her hair washed or brushed, she needed someone. She embodied what it means to be powerless. She did not embrace it easily but she did it nonetheless. She had no choice.

I do not know where God was in all of this. I do know that I am more mature because of the experience of taking care of my mother. I remember often wanting to just leave home when mom needed something done. It was a painful and stressful time for me. I, in many ways, was doing for her what she so badly wanted to do for my brother and me. I became responsible and dependable. I also became robotic. I did not stop to reflect on what I was doing or what was happening in my life. Looking back, I know that God was all I had helping me when mom needed me the most. I was just not connected with that Divine Reality on a personal level. I do not know how else I could have done all I did between the ages of ten and fifteen without a Higher Power giving me strength. Grace indeed was upon me; I just had not recognized it yet. Grace would overshadow me with many joys and strengths to come.

On February 9, 1995, I received a phone call at school from a cousin on my mom's side of the family. This I knew could not be good news because mom's family and my dad had a falling out and we never heard from them. All my cousin said was that mom was not going to make it through the evening and that Ryan and I needed to come. One thing led to another and I found myself with my dad and Ryan at the nursing home my mother had lived in for the past four years of her life. I was scared and at the same time I wanted to be strong for Ryan.

We knew indirectly that this moment was coming. My mom's family never told us that mom was dying. They did leave a Hospice pamphlet or two in her room. After seeing that, my eyes were opened and I noticed how thin she had become. It was like I was riding my horse and reality in all of its brilliance knocked me off. I could no longer deny the truth. She then told me that the doctors told her that she was too thin. This was because the M.S. had finally worked its way into the muscles in her throat making eating nearly impossible. Speaking and breathing had become a struggle for her as well. For whatever reason I thought that mom might want to receive communion. She was always faithful to her relationship with the Lord even though it seemed that God had betrayed her. She lost everything she ever wanted. She lost her husband. She lost the joy and trial of raising two young boys. She lost her independence and soon lost her dignity as her body started to shut down. I brought her communion the Sunday before I got the call. I was the last person who would ever do that for her.

When Ryan and I walked into the room the scene was surreal. Some of mom's relatives were standing around the room and in the hallway. Some were crying, some just stood by. The Hospice nurse never said anything to Ryan or me. As we approached mom, I was frightened. She had caught pneumonia and could not recover from it. By the time we arrived, the illness had begun to strangle her. She was gasping for breath, moving more than I had seen her move on her own in years, striving to continue to breathe, losing the battle. I could see she was afraid. None of us knew if she could hear us, but I believe she could. She seemed to calm down when Ryan and I arrived to see her. As we approached her, we touched her arm and we told her that we loved her. Then we stood back and she delivered over her spirit. Her struggle was finally over and with that her pain, her tension, and her anxiety left her body. It was as if all the emotions in the room were lifted. A fever had broken and a cooling came over the room. Time simply stopped moving; and it actually seemed, that we had stepped out of time, for God was in the room and was making the Divine Presence known to everyone there. It was in mom's death, that I witnessed the Resurrection. The promise became a reality.

Everything that my teachers, my mom and dad and my parish had professed about God was true. Now, I not only knew of God, I believed in God. I was invited to see more of God. And I would see more in all of the people that gathered for mom's wake, in all of the flowers that flanked her body, in all of the memories of her healthy days and even days of joy within her illness, in the two mile long funeral

procession, God was there. This was greater than the pillar of fire or the burning bush. This was a tangible God visible in the faces of each person who loved my mother and, as I found out, loved me too.

The Divine Presence that overshadowed everyone and me that was with mom when she died was the most incredible moment of my life. It was a power that seemed for a moment to lift all the pain and all the sadness from that room. For me, as I would continue to see, it was an invitation to a deeper communion with God through the Incarnation and Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

It was after mom's death that I had a sense that I needed to pray. I not only needed to pray, I wanted to pray. I felt invited to pray. So I did. Each night after mom died, I would lie in bed and thank God for mom. Sometimes I would ask why all of this had to happen to me, to mom, to everyone. Other times I would not speak a word to God; and still other times, I would find myself not able to stop sharing with God. Never before had I entered into a conversation with God. I continue to see that the conversation does not end once we open ourselves up to it.

I should say that even before mom died I always had a sense of what it is to serve another. I think this gift was strengthened by my experiences serving my mother's needs. When I was in fourth grade I helped coordinate an all-school food and clothing collection. In sixth grade the idea of priesthood passed into my mind but I let it quickly pass out and never really gave it much thought. I really did not know why it would even come to my mind or why I would even be attracted to that option or what it meant. I just let it pass over me. I never really shared this passing thought with anyone. People would make cute comments to me on occasion about what a great priest I would be. Even mom before she died said that I would be a priest and a good one at that. I was embarrassed by these comments and ignored them. People always say nice things like that, but they don't really mean them, right? I had not yet learned that the Lord speaks through the People of God. I was not ready. I normally don't share these experiences with others. I guess in some ways I'm still embarrassed. I also know how skeptical I can be and figure that others will feel the same way. Yet, God's invitation is eternal. It is our responses to that call that is the key to unlocking the mystery of the Divine call.

Mom died on a Thursday. I went back to school the following Monday. I figured that sitting at home was not going to do me much good. I had to keep moving forward. And that is what I did. I received consolation and support from my uncle and Godfather, Jimmy. He had become the presence of a nurturing parent and friend in my life since I was fourteen when he came to live with Ryan, dad and me. He cooked meals, helped us with homework, listened to us, took us places and made life something magical and to be embraced. He filled our day with a love that both teaches and strengthens, that tears down barriers to wholeness and raises up the spirit. He continues to do this for me to this very day.

My father was dealing with his own struggles with his career, guilt over mom's death, his loneliness, and a drinking problem. He was not able to be present to my brother or me. These are not

excuses of course; these are reasons. I believe that the last time I hugged my dad was within the moments after mom died. He had waited in the lobby since he and mom's family did not get along. Actually they hated each other. I came to the lobby and was crying and simply said to him, "she died." He embraced Ryan and me. Again, this was a moment in which God's intense presence would settle upon us and make things as they were meant to be from the beginning without problems and weaknesses. It was dad, Ryan and I giving and receiving love, sharing emotion, united. It would never be this way again.

Before my mother died, my dad, through participation with Ryan and I in a grief-recovery program for families torn apart by divorce or death, met a woman named Linda. Linda was a beautiful woman who kind of looked like my mom and she had two children. Linda was a widow. Her husband had died in a car accident. Linda was Ryan's group facilitator and Dad was Linda's son Joe's group facilitator. Ryan had fallen head over heels for Linda's warmth and caring. He told Linda in a group session that he wanted her to marry dad. Linda laughed at this and brought it to my dad's attention. One thing lead to another and dad and Linda were married about a year or so later.

Dad and mom had divorced before her death. I was always told it was because the way the laws are written that if mom had no spouse or dependents her medical expenses and nursing home expenses could be paid for by the government. I also knew that dad was lonely and wanting to get on with his life. I really do not know all the motivations for what my dad did. But I do know that like Ryan, I fell in love with Linda's nurturing love and the attention and care she showed toward me. She never replaced my mom, but she was able to be a mother to me. She was there with Ryan and me as we buried our mother and by God's grace, she and I are still a part of each other's lives to this day.

Dad and Linda ended up divorcing a year or so later. There were many reasons. I was actually glad that they did because it seemed in the end that all they did was argue. It was a scary time for me. I still had not learned to bring all of this pain to the Lord. Instead, I just kept moving on each day. I was a "human doing" and not a human being. But I was young. I had not learned that it was a good thing to talk about problems. I learned it was better not to talk about them and to just cover them up or ignore them completely. I would later grow out of this dysfunctional mindset.

After mom died dad's drinking got progressively worse. His relationship with me and Ryan was limited to just sitting in a room together, if he was home, and not really talking much at all. Dad had started to date a woman at work before mom died. I did not particularly like the woman he was dating. For some reason, when I meet a person, I get a genuine sense of who they are. This woman struck me as someone who did not want much to do with children. And, I would soon hear that she, and dad too, both really just wanted their own life and wanted to live it for themselves, not their children. Children seemed to have become a burden for both of them. I know now that both my dad and the woman who became his

third wife were and are people who had not healed wounds acquired through past experiences and struggles. They have not experienced the resurrection.

On my seventeenth birthday I moved out of my dad's home. Our relationship had fallen apart, partly because I avoided him (and in that avoided his outbursts of anger that followed his drinking) and did not talk to him; and partly because he wanted me to support him in his up-and-coming third marriage, and I just could not. Dad too could no longer relate to me. Our lives which had followed the same path until mom died no were going in opposite directions. I had been thinking and praying about moving out and maybe moving in with Linda again. One morning when he was driving me to school, he started yelling at me about my attitude and that he was going to get married and I just sat in the car trying to block out the pain that was clothed in words. Out of nowhere, he grabbed my arm and violently screamed some words at me. I felt as if I had been pushed off a cliff and was falling. I did not know what to do. I was scared. I was alone. Where was God? Once I got to school, I realized that I would not be able to keep my composure in class. I went upstairs and had an emergency meeting with my guidance counselor. In this meeting, for the first time in my life, I told someone the truth about what was happening in my life. Something was very wrong. I could not hide it anymore. I let it out and gave up my role in the dysfunction: the silence.

"The truth will set you free" (Jn. 8:32). This could not be truer. In the revealing of my struggles at home, that beneath the surface, there were problems and in admitting that I needed guidance and support, that I could not do it alone, I began to cooperate fully with God's ever-present Grace. In doing this though, I entered into the garden of Gethsemane with Jesus. I gave my problem over to the Father, but in that moment of faith, I gave up control too. I did not know what was going to happen to me. I knew God would be with me though.

And God was with me through it all. I moved into Linda's after staying with a fellow parishioner and friend for two weeks as part of my transition. I was granted self-payee status by the Social Security administration even though I was not yet eighteen - a gracious giving of my mother in death. My pastor said that the parish was going to pay for my remaining balance at school so I could save money and get a car. "Shaun, you're worth the investment," he said. God speaks through others. I graduated in the top of my class and was accepted to eight major universities both in and out of state.

I often look back and wonder if I made the right decision. I don't think I made the right decision. I made the best decision. After praying and consulting with others who supported me, I did what I had to do to take care of me. All of the details falling into place indicates to me that God played a significant role in supporting me. Like the Angel said, "nothing is impossible if God is involved" (Lk. 1:37).

I started my senior year of high school and things seemed to settle down. Living at Linda's was a blessing and my uncle had moved into a small apartment not far from Linda's home. I was working part-

time at my home parish, St. Cyril of Jerusalem in Taylor, Michigan. I made some brief contact with my mother's relatives to let them know what was happening in my life. I was excited about graduation. It was at this time that I met Fr. Gerard LeBoeuf, the new associate at St. Frances Cabrini where I went to high school. I had heard about Gerry from people in my parish who knew him. They all had wonderful things to say about him. He had been ordained a priest for about three years and was full of energy, sometimes to the point of being annoying for me. (They say that we are most annoyed by people who think and act as we do.) Little did I know that God was going to work through him to get me to open my eyes to an even wider horizon.

One day I was sitting in on a liturgy-planning meeting at school. We were going to have a pro-life service and were trying to figure out what to do. Gerry looked at me after I said something and said, "You're going to give the reflection." I thought he was joking and the meeting ended. I asked him as everyone was leaving if he was serious. He was. I was excited and nervous. I had never done anything like that before. A couple weeks went by and I gave my first public reflection. I spoke about how we have to set a foundation if we are going to call ourselves pro-life. We have to first treat each other with respect and compassion if we truly are a pro-life people. After the prayer service many students, friends and people I did not associate with told me I did a great job and how good it was to hear someone from the student body speak, someone they could relate to and someone who spoke their language; someone called from the community who knows the community and wants to encourage it and call it to do better. Not long after this I asked Gerry if he thought I should go on a discernment weekend, a weekend retreat at Sacred Heart Major Seminary for men discerning the priesthood. He encouraged me to do this. I asked my pastor and he also agreed that I should respond to the Lord's invitation to, "come and see..." (Jn. 1:39).

I went on that discernment weekend and found it to be overwhelming. I knew that I was not ready for seminary life when I arrived at the door. The ominous building that towered over me looked like a castle in the midst of an urban neighborhood long forgotten in dreams of decades past. The gothic structure, the darkness of the night, the chill of January, the cold wetness of a winter that was struggling to snow, all of these factors almost sent me back into my car to go home. But somehow I found the courage and strength to walk in the doors. The weekend seemed to take forever filled with meetings, prayer and interviews. I was very tired after it was over. I remember leaving having a sense that I was not ready to be there yet, but would come back one day. I went home to Linda's home, a girlfriend, a promise of graduation and going away to college on a scholarship to Eastern Michigan University. The seminary and the call to priesthood were set off in the far edges of my heart and soul.

In the fall after I graduated from high school I moved to Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti, Michigan. I had been awarded a significant scholarship and enough financial aid to pay for all

of my expenses. I planned on studying to be a high school English and literature teacher. From the moment I arrived on campus, I put myself fully into every aspect of campus life. I ran for resident student government and won the vice-presidency. I got a job through the university first at the student union and then in the department of admissions. I was learning a lot and my grades reflected that. I had lots of new friends and my future seemed to be set. In four or five years I would be teaching. Yet though everything was going as I had planned, my heart kept driving me into prayer and conversation about the priesthood. I became very involved in the campus parish and met another inspiring priest, Fr. Bill Lanphear, a priest of the Oblates of Saint Francis De Sales. Bill and I have become good friends. As I got to know Bill, he gently suggested I consider the Oblates, knowing already that I was heading for Sacred Heart that next fall. He gave me a folder filled with information about the Oblates. I tucked that folder away for a few years. Bill and I continued to meet regularly after I left Eastern Michigan University.

I drove priests, friends and my uncle Jimmy nuts with questions and speculations about the priesthood and where it would be in ten years and if I had a part to play in it. My heart and my prayer - my desire - led me to attend another discernment weekend at Sacred Heart. This weekend was different. I had a semester in college under my belt and a different sense of myself. The routine of the weekend was hectic, but in all the meetings and interviews I discovered a peace. I could picture myself studying at Sacred Heart. I could see myself as a seminarian. As I left the seminary I told my uncle, who came to pick me up, that I was going to apply for admission to the Archdiocese of Detroit's formation program. One thing led to another and in May of 1998, I was accepted. I was excited and nervous. I wondered again, "what am I getting myself into?" But I knew deep within my heart and through the affirmations of others, that I was doing the right thing.

God brought me to the seminary in Detroit through my various experiences, through my beginning prayer relationship, through the voices and love of others. God took me and molded me into who I needed to be to enter the seminary. And I did not go unwillingly. By the power of God's love poured out over me in so many forms, I was called; and I was drawn to respond. My soul's longing seemed to have been fulfilled. I was at peace even amid the preparation and transition that moving into the seminary brought me.

"It was not you who chose me, it was I who chose you." (Jn. 15:16.)

The fall of 1998 found me moving into Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit, Michigan as a sophomore in college. I was filled with many ideals, a sense of peace but also a feeling of nervousness and even some anxiety. As my friend Bob and I were moving my things in I ran into a few of the returning students and said a few quick hellos amid the chaos that the beginning of a school year brings. I quickly found my rooms - a bedroom and a study - and started to unpack as quickly as I got things moved into the building. I did not plan on leaving anytime soon. Seven more years of schooling and formation

lay ahead of me. I really did not know what to expect, but I knew that I was there because I wanted to become a priest; nothing more mattered.

It was in these first days that I met some of the men that have become my closest friends and supporters. The greatest gift God has bestowed on me - has graced me with - is the gift of friends, especially those of my seminary time. Some have come and gone, while others continue to persevere. These are the men who I shared the core of my being with, my vocation. Each of us, though different, shares in the one call from the Lord. Each of us brings his own story, his own varied experiences of life and relationships with others and the Lord, but each of us brings a desire to grow with the Lord through contemplation, liturgy and through community. As I look back on my time at Sacred Heart, having now two best friends who are ordained for the Detroit Archdiocese, I recall the words of the angel to John in Revelation:

*These are the ones who have survived the great time of distress;
they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the
Lamb. (8:14)*

This may seem like an odd quote to use in describing men who persevere and are ordained after any number of years in the seminary, but it is so true in many ways.

A senior Franciscan priest once told me, "You have to eat a lot of shit to be ordained!" My time at Sacred Heart affirms this statement. While at seminary, I heard and saw everything from bigotry regarding race and sexual orientation from both students and faculty, to raging alcoholism; from laziness and apathetic feelings on apostolic ministry to what I would call heresy because what is preached or believed by some is so far from being catholic; but rather it is very closed, ultra-conservative and rigid. I have heard gossip about everything under the sun. I have seen men come and go. Some come aspiring to be priests and discover that deep within God is calling them elsewhere. Some come simply because they want the status (if there is any left) of a priest and they think they look good in black. I sometimes tell people, if I had known all this before entering seminary, I never would have entered.

Yet somehow amid all the chaos, amid the storms at sea, God brings forth calm. God brings moments of intense joy to me in ministry and in the intimate friendships that I have developed and in the sense that I am moving toward my heart's desire each day: to do God's will. I am not here to make waves. I am not here to advance my agenda. I simply wish to give the gift that I have received as a gift to others (cf. Matthew 10:8).

At one point in my diocesan formation, I was led by the Spirit to discern a call to the religious life. After meeting Bill Lanphear and after attending the farewell liturgy of the Redemptorists who served at Holy Redeemer, Detroit, for over one hundred years, and meeting and becoming friends with a couple Redemptorists, I found myself caught in a deep admiration of their communities as I saw them and the

unique expression of ministry these respective religious orders offer the Church. (I also have a connection to the Redemptorists through my uncle and father who both studied to be priests in the Congregation, and through having two granduncles who are Redemptorists, Wil Lowery and the late-Daniel Lowery.) At this point, I simply felt that I was called to imitate the extraordinary models of priesthood that the Oblates through Bill provides me in his generosity of heart; and to model the compassion that the Redemptorist Fathers and Brothers offer the poor. I knew somehow the charism and perspective that religious life offers ministry would remain with me. I did meet with the Oblates' vocation director, Marty Lucas, OSFS, and he even came to Sacred Heart to meet me and we had a wonderful conversation while at breakfast at Detroit's Eastern Market. I got many answers to questions I had, and told him a great deal about myself. I just was not ready to take the next step.

In my last three years of college, many more events took place and much growth. I began to go and see a counselor when I started seminary. This was a wonderful experience for me. Duane helped me understand my father and in that understanding, I let go of anger and resentment that I was holding inside the depths of my being. I do not feel angry anymore when I talk about my dad. I do feel sad. This is not what God intended for my dad. But I believe that even if I never see him again, and even if he never changes, Divine Love can make dad in the next life, what he could not be in this one. "With him there is plenteous redemption" (cf. Ps. 130)! I also started to take care of my own issues through God's moving grace.

In October of my second year of seminary, I started to attend Al-Anon meetings. Out of respect for the traditions of Al-Anon I will not say much about it. But I will say that it has helped me see that while I do not have the problem of alcoholism to deal with, I do have the problem of unhealthy dysfunctional learned behaviors to become aware of and unlearn over time. I originally learned to deal with people from how I dealt with my alcoholic father. I learned fear and in that fear, gave my father control over how I behaved and how I responded to situations and people. I try not to allow myself to do that anymore. Along with God, I am in control of my life and my feelings and my behaviors. I admit when I am powerless and try to take action when it needs to be taken.

Taking action for me in college meant that I had to reconnect with my brother Ryan. It had been nearly four years since I had seen him or heard from him. I was allowing fear of my father and of Ryan's possible anger and rejection of me to keep me from calling him. But love is a power that conquers all fears, all darkness and all absence. Love fills. It was Love that moved me to call Ryan shortly after one college Christmas break and start calling him on a regular basis to let him know I was thinking about him. It was Love that brought me and Ryan together after four years for an ice cream and a walk in the city he lived in. It was Love that did all of this and conquered the fear. Granted, Ryan and I have not told our dad that we meet on occasion and we do not plan on it. Instead of letting his disease keep us apart, we

work around it. I cannot let another person's inability to grow and change to keep me from growing and changing. It is painful at times, but Love endures; and with that Love comes Grace. Our relationship has grown in this Grace and has led me to see him as often as we can, and to meet his fiancée. I am sharing in his life and this is a gift.

Taking action took a new form when I decided during the course of my senior year of seminary to leave formation. After earning my bachelor of arts in philosophy, I decided to live again with Linda and to try living a "normal" life. I worked in a restaurant, hung out with old friends and just relaxed. In doing all these things I felt I would gain a better sense of where God was calling me. Throughout my senior year I had felt that pursuing a teaching certificate was something I would want to do along with graduate studies in theology. After exploring this avenue, I realized I would not have the time. I discovered a graduate program at Madonna University in Catholic School Leadership which incorporated many of the courses I would already have to take to earn my Master of Divinity. I presented my path of discernment and my desire to be more involved in Catholic education and how I had concluded that the Catholic School Leadership degree was a route I could handle and which I felt would satisfy my desire to learn more about Catholic Education and Catechesis and give me an additional resource in parish life. The administration did not consider my proposal and denied my request. Taking this and other things into consideration, I decided to leave the formation program for the Archdiocese of Detroit and pursue a job in high school faith formation. As I was moving my things out of Sacred Heart, I received a call from Notre Dame High School's principal in Harper Woods and was hired at my interview the next day.

I spent two years teaching theology at Notre Dame. It was an amazing experience that gave me many insights into the need for enthusiastic educators and catechists. It was an incredible amount of energy and time spent but it was worth it. I was happy. I met many wonderful and devoted colleagues. I also learned that no matter where I go, no job, no place, no community and no institution are perfect, but great things can happen within the imperfection. I was now earning a salary. I was soon enough living in my own apartment in downtown Detroit. I had a life of my own. This was everything I thought I wanted. Yet somehow the God of surprises had something else in store.

During the fall of my second year of teaching, I proposed that we hold a vigil liturgy in honor of the first anniversary of the terrorists' attacks of 2001. I put together a liturgy, got students involved in all aspects of the vigil and served as the presider and preacher. Nearly one hundred students came and even neighbors and parents came for this event. As I was preaching and praying with the people who gathered, I could see a genuine need for the gentle, reassuring presence of God in a time of uncertainty. After the vigil I received many compliments and I believe I received them simply because of the energy I exerted in wanting to fuel a time of prayer when and in a way it was needed. It was during this time I again felt and heard that the Lord was calling me to do more with the talents and energy I had been given.

I considered first that perhaps I should look back to where I had been. Perhaps I should reapply for Detroit? But in talking to friends who studied at Sacred Heart and in having the experiences of teaching, living on my own, being involved in parish life again, I knew I could not look back. I felt in my prayer and in all I did that God was calling me to look forward. As I continued to pray more deeply over this call, I looked back at where I felt most fulfilled. I discovered in the past two years I loved teaching. I also knew from involvement in my home parish that I loved parish life. I have also developed a great love of working for the poor and with those who serve the poor through my summer work and volunteering at Crossroads. All of these things seemed to point in a different direction. I talked to many friends and came to the conclusion I should explore religious life more deeply. This led me to contact the Oblates again in February of 2003. By March I was an associate already feeling I had the intention of requesting postulancy and hoping to take a more serious move in discerning religious life as an Oblate. The Oblates offered a love of education and faith formation, as well as a diverse apostolate outside of the academic setting that resounds with me and what I feel called to do with the creative energy God has given me. I informed my parish community, my colleagues and my students of my decision to pursue Oblate formation. The affirmation was and is overwhelming.

I was in spiritual direction all through college and beyond. My first year of spiritual direction was really an introduction to it. I did not know what I was looking for in a director, but found a great director my second year of seminary in Fr. Jim Bilot. After a year with Fr. Bilot, I had to find a new director because of Fr. Bilot's new assignment. Fr. Bilot recommended his director, then-Msgr. John Quinn. John was and is a gifted director. He – perhaps without even realizing it – is Salesian. He helps me see how often the fire of love permeates the most difficult situations and experiences. John Quinn was my Spiritual Director from 1999 through the present and has asked me to stay in touch with him. He was ordained a bishop when I moved to Toledo to begin living with the Oblates. He told me he wants to continue to walk with me on the journey the Lord is leading me on, even if from a distance. I have a great deal of affection and love for Bishop Quinn. He has been a tremendous gift in my life, not because of his position, but because of his willingness to be present in my life.

My time in college and thereafter has also made me grow in my own understanding of my sexuality and how I am present to others. I see sexuality more now as a way I am created in the image of God. I have a drive to share love in order to bring life and love to others. I have learned to love myself more, though sometimes that is more difficult than others. I have had to learn to do this because if I want to love others and love God, I have to be able to love myself for who I am with all of my faults and talents. God loves me unconditionally so why can't I? Continuously growing in love and the unfolding of my call to religious life has moved me to deeper love of myself as well. I have learned not to repress my sexual feelings. They are normal. They are a gift. I am not embarrassed of them. I am still growing

in my relationship with God and myself but I do know that this does not mean that I have to become a man lacking passion. I have within me a drive and a love that can move mountains if I let it and channel it into ministry and studies. This is not always an easy path to follow. There are challenges, temptations and falls. God has blessed me though with a gift of fidelity and patience toward my vocation and with myself. I take comfort in Francis' de Sales words when he reminds me constantly that, "our victory does not lie in not feeling temptations, but in not consenting to them."

When I sin, as Martin Luther said, I "sin boldly." I celebrate God's mercy and perpetual help. I know that nothing I can do can ever separate God's love from me. I may stray from God, but God always welcomes me home. I have chosen to love God. This is not an easy choice. I have chosen to discern my call to love God and others as an Oblate and as one who desires to serve as an ordained priest. Again, this is not an easy path. There are many joys, sorrows, triumphs and failures lying ahead in my future. But I am confident in the Lord Jesus. I am confident in God's abiding presence which not even the powers of Hell could dispel. The light shines on in the darkness and the flame of Grace burns deep within my heart!
Live Jesus!