Fr. Nemeth

Theological Foundations: CC

19 December 2013

The Jedidiah Event

As many of us “sheltered Catholic school kids” did, I grew up in a Catholic family, attending Catholic schools surrounded by Catholic people, which, frankly, I am not complaining about. I really enjoyed my faith as a child. I even went so far as to tell people that I wanted to be a priest when I grew up. I also said I wanted to be a trash man but that is irrelevant. I can remember getting so excited about my first Eucharist, and getting so nervous about my first reconciliation. After my first Eucharist, I would even set up an altar in my bedroom and do my own imitation of the mass, using a mass book that someone had given me as a gift. But while I loved my faith, it was the kind of ignorant love that children have for characters like Santa Claus. I knew all of the lines that we were fed in religion class and I would even pray, but the fact was that there was no way for me at that point in my life to even begin to truly grasp what it was that I believed.

Over the years, my view of God has been constantly evolving. In eighth grade I went on a Luke 18 retreat and started attending youth group. While the youth group experience was not necessarily teaching me much about my faith, it was definitely strengthening my sense of community within the church. It was during this period of my life that I first began my true contemplation of God and what it is that I believe and know about him. Instead of being Santa Claus, God became the great puzzle in the sky. I began to seek out my own answers and test my own beliefs. Which I believe has been a necessary part of my spiritual growth.
I began to really listen when a youth minister, priest, or religion teacher would talk about our faith. It became imperative for me in high school to figure out what it was that I believed. With so many influences around me, I understood how important it was for me to find my own answers so that I would not get lost in the answers of others. This curiosity and urgency has formed the beliefs that I now have today, which are still developing.

My beliefs at this point in my life are growing ever closer to those held by the Church. As I read more and listen more, I discover that there are so many truths held by our faith that I whole heartedly agree with. I have so much appreciation for the way that the Church is able to bring us together as a community, constantly encouraging us to live better lives that are more spiritual and uplifting. But aside from these things, the Church has also become my most major outlet for transcendence. As I have become more educated, I have been able to more fully understand the mass, the symbolism and the prayers that we have, and also the other sacraments. In my understanding, I have found a much fuller appreciation for these things than I ever had in the past. They have been changed from an obligation into a beautiful opportunity for me to grow spiritually.

I am still searching for answers on a daily basis, but I think that one should always be searching for the truth. Whenever I find a difference between my beliefs and that of the Church, I have to educate myself on the reason for our stance and then make a decision for myself. For this reason, I do not have many discrepancies with the Church at the moment, since I usually research them as they come to mind. This, I believe is one of the biggest roles for the Church today. We ought to be a source of truth, educating the world, and then allowing those who have been educated to find truth for themselves. Aside from that, the Church should be a unifying force that draws us closer to one another and thus, closer to God. We should be a Church that serves the world, always moving forward but never losing our foundation in truth.
As I move on in my life, one of my biggest goals is to be a member of this ideal Church of which I speak. I know too many people who have been turned away from our faith because of ignorance, bad experiences, and poor Catholics. I know that I cannot be perfect, but if I make a sincere effort in my life to share and live by the truths that I have come to know, I will hopefully be able to lead others to find that same truth. My biggest obstacle in this, as in many things, will be myself. Selfishness, apathy, and hypocrisy are easy. But in order to truly portray what I have come to know, I have to make a conscious effort every day to live a life rooted in selflessness and love. The most fundamental truth that I have come to know is that God is love, and the opposite of love is selfishness. This truth will hopefully be the rock on which my life is built as well as the life of the Church for the future.
Fr. Nemeth

Theological Foundations

16 December 2013

Final Paper

As a child, I never questioned my faith. I didn’t give a single second glance about anything that I was being taught to believe. I accepted it, and was ready to learn more. Now, that’s not too groundbreaking or anything, kids’ minds are basically sponges in grade school, and we hunger for more information. Sure, I questioned how Jesus did some things. I specifically remember being extremely impressed that He was able to feed an entire crowd with a few loaves of bread and fish. The teachers would tell me something along the lines of, “He can because He is the Son of God.” Back then, it didn’t matter that the idea was very far-fetched. My child mind didn’t take into account that the food portions would be barely existent, or that it just wasn’t possible. I imagined all of these people happy that they all had food. Thinking back to my childhood, I was never pessimistic about anything. I always wanted to know about possible positive outcomes. Never would I be sad when a teacher referred to Jesus dying on the Cross. I knew the end of the story, and that He came back.

Unfortunately, my optimistic side has not stayed with me as I have aged. While I, and everyone else I know, can be extremely pessimistic at times, I consider myself more of a realist in most situations. I am not an overly positive person when it comes to myself or any problem I have to deal with, and I find the super upbeat people in my life annoying a lot of the time. For a long time, I associated their optimism with ignorance. The happy people that I knew seemed to
be ignoring their issues. That doesn’t fly with me. I dwell and overthink everything. Decisions and conclusions are very hard for me. My view on optimism has affected my faith over the years.

I honestly cannot say that I was ever religious. I was born and raised Catholic and received all of my sacraments without thinking too much about them. But I do remember caring less and less about going to mass and singing all of those religious church songs. This occurred probably towards seventh or eighth grade, right around the time I was preparing for my Confirmation. I started questioning things then. The feeling of regret I experienced from never really asking why certain things were the way they were in the Catholic faith was overwhelming.

*Why do we have to go to mass every Sunday? How is it possible that Jesus rose from the dead? How did Jesus walk on water? Who is God? Is “he” even real? How was Jesus able to give enough food to thousands of people with a little bread and fish? Why have I just been “okay” with this faith my entire life?* It all hit me like a brick to the face, and it was an awful feeling. Ironically enough, my Catholic high school ended up turning me away from Catholicism. I realized that the only reason I was a “Catholic” was because my parents pegged me to be one and assumed I would never have an issue with it.

It took me a long time to really figure myself out, and it’s still an ongoing task. In these past couple of years, I have really gotten a handle on my beliefs. My parents were reluctant to accept that I didn’t want to follow their faith anymore, but they have learned to accept that I’m my own person with my own beliefs. Sure, I was influenced by others a bit in my decisions and opinions. On one hand, you have the overbearing religious fanatics that like to rub Jesus and all of his glory right in your face every second they can get. And on the other, you have the people who are completely against any form of organized religion or thought. Surprisingly enough, I had never had to deal with anyone who was completely against Catholicism until I came to high
school. At first, the “atheists” and “agnostics” were just as overbearing as the Jesus-promoters. I realized that I had fallen in between the two categories basically my entire life. My indecisiveness really started getting to me. I don’t like being in the grey area of anything. So it was in high school that I started taking in everyone’s opinions openly. From these opinions, I formulated my own. I found which beliefs appealed more to me. Again the Jesus-is-so-fantastic-OMG optimism brought back the ignorance feeling again. It was these religious fanatics that I found to be the most judgmental people I had ever met. Everything anyone was doing was being analyzed and critiqued through these people, and I did not like that. On the other hand, the religion-free were constantly watching and mocking these Catholic people. I was stuck between two things, and neither one was appealing. I felt trapped. I knew that I didn’t believe in a lot of Catholic teachings anymore, but I didn’t want to be pegged as some judgmental, unforgiving atheist.

Eventually, I realized that I needed to do my own thing. Not everything has to be figured out right now. I have enough on my plate with my education and college plans. Honestly though, I truly envy those who are happy with whatever religion they choose to follow. How they balance that in with their already busy life, I’ll never know. All I know is that having a religion isn’t particularly important to me at this moment in time. Maybe someday, I’ll have a revelation and realize the path I need to follow.

I took Theological Foundations because I knew I wouldn’t hate it. I knew it wouldn’t be like a regular religion class where I have to force myself to look interested and pretend that I believe in all of the things I didn’t. It’s no secret that I may have looked disconnected from Theology class more than a few times. Honestly, though, I listened with an open mind. I found that Theology is actually based on facts that my scientific mind thoroughly enjoys. For the first
time, I didn’t dread going to a religious-based class. Truly, I appreciate the experience I’ve received from Theology class. It wasn’t taught with one-sided beliefs. It was a diverse subject open for debate and discussion, and I wouldn’t have wanted it any other way.