

Fr. Nagel's Introductory Homily, July 9-10, 2022

This is my first weekend at Sacred Heart and in this homily I want to briefly set out my goal as Pastor. But I'll begin by telling you a little of my own story, and the stages of my spiritual life—so far. I was born in Oregon, but my family moved up to Bellevue in 1974, during the summer before my 8th grade year. I graduated from Newport High School (worked at the Bellevue Shakey's Pizza Parlor!) and then from the UW (although I did spend one year at WSU). I appreciate both the Huskies and Cougars! My Mom is a Catholic. My Father was not (he died in 1995), but he insisted we kids go to mass with Mom. So, I was a cradle Catholic, but growing up, the faith played little part in my life or imagination. I went to mass every week, but when I went off to Pullman for my freshman year I immediately stopped going to mass, as I began exploring the world and questioning what I believed.

In fact, I soon left the faith, buying the line that the Catholic Church was an obstacle to my freedom (although I had never actually been told NOT to do much of anything—as far as I can remember the homilies at St. Madeline Sophie). I at first dabbled in Zen Buddhism, at least as much as a freshman in a frat in Pullman can, hoping for enlightenment without the need for obedience. But that didn't last long, and soon I was an atheist. In my sophomore year, having transferred to the UW, I had begun what was to be my career for the next twelve years, studying to be a history professor. The academic environment is very secular, and I picked that up. The second stage of my spiritual life was this rejecting the faith.

But in my mid-20s I was working on my M.A. in history at the UW when I came across the thought of C. S. Lewis. I was a Tolkien fan and was reading around his life, and Lewis was a close friend of his. But Lewis was also an Anglican Christian and noted apologist. As with many other reverts and converts, Lewis, and in my case, several English Catholics, such as John Henry Newman and Ronald Knox, convinced me that Christianity wasn't so stupid after all. In fact, these Oxford professors (just the kind of person I wanted to be) were smart and Christian! I began reading furiously. I remember it was a Wednesday afternoon in December 1985. I was living in Kirkland with three other guys, when I was reading a book by Lewis or one of the others, and I suddenly realized I was reading, not to discern if Christianity was true, but as someone who believed it. I knew I had to do something about that. So the next Sunday morning I snuck into the back pew of the closest Catholic church, St. John Vianney on Finn Hill. This was the third stage of my spiritual journey. I had come to believe in Jesus and His teaching, and devoured books, trying to learn about Catholicism.

It was during my doctoral program in Colonial American History at Johns Hopkins that I began to discern a vocation—first to monastic life, but by my last year in Baltimore to the diocesan priesthood. I entered Mundelein Seminary in Chicago in 1992. It was during the last two years of seminary that I entered the fourth stage. I learned how to pray. You might think someone going to seminary would already know that, and, sure, I knew something about prayer. But it was only at seminary that Jesus became a real Person who acted in my life. It was with that relationship established that I was ordained a priest on June 7, 1997. In the last 25 years I have served in Tacoma, Port Angeles, Forks, Port Townsend, Holy Family Kirkland, St. Monica, and now Sacred Heart.

The fifth stage on the spiritual journey began in Kirkland. My relationship with Jesus is not just about me but must be shared with others, and I became convinced that happens in and through the Holy Spirit. In my time at Holy Family, I tried to foster a spirit of evangelization and

a missionary attitude towards our world of western Washington. It's our mission to introduce our families and neighbors to a Jesus they may never have heard of, or think they know and have rejected (I can relate to that!).

And, at last, that brings me back to today's Gospel. We can hear the parable of The Good Samaritan and assume Jesus is speaking about caring and loving those who are different, or even enemies. He certainly means that. But Jesus has just finished speaking to the 72 He had sent out to proclaim the Kingdom of God. There are those who physically need our care, but also those of us who are spiritually wounded, half-dead. Are we concerned about them?

My own life's story is an account of me on the road to Jericho, being ambushed by the world, and Jesus finding me and healing me. But I also now see myself as that scholar of the law whom Jesus wants to challenge to a new way of seeing the wounds of those who need the power of Christ in their lives. I must stop and help them.

Jesus wants us to go out and seek, serve, love, and bring Jesus' healing to others. The fancy word for that is "evangelization." But to do that we must first ourselves experience Jesus' healing love. And that is our mission as the Catholic Church. Jesus is inviting everybody to be healed, and to become a healer. That is what the Eucharist, confession, scripture, acts of charity and service, worship, is all about: communion with God Himself and with one another through Him, in eternity—and even now.

That is our project at Sacred Heart, to let Jesus heal us, and go out with Christ's wine and oil to others still lying on the road. That means change. Jesus is not done with us yet. There are so many more stages of life He wants to show me, and you, too! We're meant to journey to Christ together and that's exciting to me and, I hope, to you. I promise that I'll pray for you—and ask for your prayers in turn as your Pastor, as we respond together to Jesus' grace on our journeys.

Fr. Kurt Nagel
Pastor