



FAITH: A *FRESH TAKE*



October 10, 2013

Defining God Through Our Experiences with God on All Days

“Who is God?”

That is a question I was asked recently in my theology class at Xavier. Everyone in my class was asked to write a quick answer to this question on a note card, and my professor then proceeded to collect all the note cards and read some of the answers out loud to the class. We quickly discovered that there was no clear consensus among the class, despite the fact that most of us shared a common Catholic faith. The more I thought about this, the more I realized that a better question to ask would have been “How have you experienced God in your life?” The answer to this question has everything to do with how you perceive who God really is.

For six straight years now, I have studied and received an education that is both Catholic and Jesuit, and I have been greatly influenced by the values emphasized in my education. When I think of God, I always follow the belief that God can be found in all things, an idea central to the spirituality of St. Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuits. This idea has been incredibly helpful for me in my faith because I always feel like I’m in God’s presence, as long as I make the effort to pay attention to the ways that God is working in my life.

One area where I see God is in music, something that has always been a big part of my life. I have played piano and clarinet since grade school, and in junior high, I decided to share my talents and play clarinet at Mass every week at my home parish of St. Clare. I have continued to play music at Mass here at Xavier, and this has been one of my most rewarding experiences in college. For me, it is so easy to feel God’s presence in a beautiful piece of music where all the musicians are in sync and the congregation is participating enthusiastically.

I was also able to see God in a special way in the Hands for Hoyleton service trips I attended with St. Clare Youth Group. Every summer, my youth group would spend a week in Hoyleton, Ill., and help the children’s home there in many different ways. We would do things such as yard work, painting, sorting through donations, and most importantly, interacting with

the kids, who, sadly, were living at the children’s home in Hoyleton because they had special needs and were abused and neglected by their parents. Despite the horrific things many of these

children had gone through, I could see God’s presence in each and every one of them in their joys, in their struggles, and in their remarkable ability to love.

God’s presence is not limited to special experiences like this, however. I see God in many different ways all around me every day, often in the people I encounter, including my friends, classmates, and professors. In addition to these people, God also finds a way of being present in the people who too often go unnoticed—the cleaning ladies, the janitors, the cafeteria workers. Often, these people model Jesus’ selfless love and humble service better than anyone else I know, and I can see God working through them as soon as I make the effort to notice and acknowledge them.

Making an effort to find God in all things has certainly made an impact on me becoming who I am today. I am forever grateful for all the ways God has been present in my life, and I will continue to search for God in everything I do.

I am from O’Fallon, Ill., and my home parish is St. Clare of Assisi. I went to St. Louis University High School and I am currently a sophomore at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. I am a double major in sports management and Spanish with minors in communications, business, psychology, and political science. In addition to my studies, I work as a Building Manager at Gallagher Student Center and I am involved in pep band and ultimate frisbee. I hope to one day work in the professional baseball industry, but that could definitely change, given my wide variety of interests.

— Nick Lampe



Nick Lampe

Allowance or No Allowance?

Recently, while helping unload the dishwasher, a task my 5-year-old has accepted as a normal responsibility since he was 4, he asked, “Mom, how much are you going to pay me to do this?” I stopped, placed the silverware down on the counter, and decided it was time for a chat.

I was shocked. Here I was talking with my little boy about the day’s events, assuming that the conversation would revolve around playing ball and a sleepover with a friend. Instead, I was going to have a conversation with Luke about the “value of the almighty dollar.” I asked Luke to go get his wallet, and together we counted \$89.00. He was very proud of the money he had saved, and I was proud that he knew where virtually every dollar of it had come from. He named the people that had gifted him with money. He knew why he had received it, and he seemed quite enthusiastic to save his stash. Explaining to him that his mom wouldn’t be contributing to that stash for his help in the kitchen, however, was met with very little enthusiasm.

Like many of my friends, I did not receive allowance as a kid. My parents’ decision not to give us allowance had very little to do with whether they could afford to do so. They could afford it, but there was some wisdom in withholding it. We learned early that monetary rewards are not the only form of payment.

I sat with my son at the kitchen table remembering my own disap-

pointment as a girl when my parents had thrown down their “no allowance” verdict. At that moment, I had to make a decision – would I relent and reward my son with money for his help around the house? Ultimately, there was one word that prevented me from backing down, and that word was entitlement. I think that this word describes many of the concerns parents face with children in today’s world. I don’t want my children to grow up thinking that they are entitled to a dollar every time they raise a helping hand. I want them to learn that service is an opportunity to give as well as to receive. My children will continue to do chores at home without being compensated. I hope as they grow, they will also choose a variety of opportunities to help others without expecting the reward of money. I believe that teaching children respect for work and service is an important lesson.

Shortly after the money conversation with my son, we visited the local mall to purchase a backpack for him and a birthday gift for his dad. My

son made a beeline for the Cardinals store. In Luke’s world, all things worth buying contain a Cardinals logo. He promptly found the Cardinals backpack of his dreams, a

box of Cardinals golf tees for dad, and some baseball cards that he simply could not live without. I looked at him and those eyes longing for the baseball cards as he pleaded with every ounce of determination in his little body, “Mommy, I need these cards. You have to buy them for me.” I took a look at him, a look at the cards, and said, “Luke, did you bring you wallet?” Indeed he had. And he proudly removed it from his pocket, and stretched as tall as he could to see over the top of the counter, looked at the sales clerk and said, “My mom is buying the backpack and the tees. I’m buying these cards with my very own money. I would like some change, please.”

Soon enough, my children will have to work for a living. At present, their jobs are to expand socially, emotionally, spiritually and intellectually. So my compromise – I decided that if they do that job well, receive a good grade, a compliment from a teacher,

lift a helping hand without being asked, I might allow a dollar or more to transition from my wallet to theirs. Hopefully, I can teach my boys that allowance doesn’t result from doing only what’s expected of you, but also by doing the unexpected act of kindness too. Payment comes in a variety of forms; how my children decide to spend that payment – well that part, for now at least, I’ll leave up to them.

— Emily Smith

Emily Smith lives in Fairview Heights, Ill., with her husband Kevin and their two young sons, Luke and Christian. She now works as the executive director of the Smith Family not-for-profit, Karla Smith Foundation. The organization supports families affected by mental illness and suicide. Through Karla Smith Foundation, Emily has recently launched a new campaign designed to inspire women to proactively care for their physical, mental and spiritual health: I WAS NOT BUILT TO BRAKE.

Email Emily at emily.smith@karla-smithfoundation.org or connect with her on Facebook at Karla Smith Foundation or I Was Not Built to Brake.

This page for, about and by young adult Catholics in the diocese

This is an online-only page dedicated to young adult Catholics, their interests, their needs, their challenges and their faith.

We’re tapping into young adults who have been active in their parishes and who have reached out in faith to begin lives of their own.

To make sure this page is about you and what you want to see, we need your input. Send us your story ideas, your concerns, your hopes and your stories of faith.

Email us at cathnews@bellevillemessenger.org with questions, suggestions or for more information.



Nick, second from right, with friends at Hoyleton.

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