



July 2020

Worldly Mystic

Greetings! I am Father Patric Nikolas, and welcome to my website. Like many priests I am a member of a religious order, the Society of the Divine Savior, also known as the Salvatorians. Founded by Fr. Francis Jordan (1848-1918) in Rome in 1881, we follow John 17:3 as a foundational text: “And eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” Combining a desire to make the universality of Christ’s message known with an ability to discern the signs of the times leads to our commitment to proclaim the Gospel to all people, everywhere and at all times, through whatever ways and means the love of Christ inspires.

Before entering the Salvatorians and becoming a priest, I was a monk in the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance, or “Trappists.” While the Salvatorians are very active in the world and are known as “apostolic,” the Trappists are wholly ordered to living “contemplative” life. This prioritizes living in union with God, with all actions and thoughts ordered toward attaining that singular goal. Trappists do not run parishes or any external ministries, but live a disciplined life of prayer, work, and study. In order to support this lifestyle each monastery runs its own businesses, creating very high-quality and diverse products. The monastery where I used to live, the Abbey of New Clairvaux in Vina, California, is best known for its vineyards, award winning wine and tasting room, and its prune and walnut orchards.

There were many aspects of monastic life that I loved, especially the discipline. We prayed in the church seven times throughout the day, beginning at 3:30 AM and ending at approximately 8:00 PM. There was also daily mass, private prayer, classroom instruction, and manual labor. Every day was incredibly full, and during harvest season, the work was so

strenuous that it seemed to me like being at war with no guns. Yet one gets used to living like this, and it is even possible to learn how to rest in and be supported by contemplative life. It is a beautiful and worthwhile path to take for all who are called.

After a few years in the cloister, I discovered that my discernment began to change. I still felt called to be disciplined, yet simultaneously felt a call to reenter the world. This was due to the realization that in order to most fulfill the will of God in my life, I would have to be a priest. Priesthood would have been possible in the monastery, but I began to see monastic life as a foundation to build upon, and not an end in itself. I discovered a desire to be both contemplative and apostolic, and left the monastery in order to continue my vocation in a new way as a *contemplative apostle*.

Years later, after having entered the Salvatorians, after earning two master's degrees at Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology, after working internationally in Israel, Colombia, and Germany, after engaging in a multitude of ministries across the United States and becoming a deacon, I finally found myself approved for priesthood and sitting at my ordination mass with family and friends. At a certain point each of the candidates was addressed by the bishop, Jeffrey Haines, who provided words of encouragement. When it was my turn, he gave me a new title in front of the entire assembly, calling me a "worldly mystic." This designation seems to summarize my vocation as a contemplative apostle – to live a discipline of the heart for the sake of others, to be firmly rooted in the world while not attached to it, and to participate in the transformation of all life in God.

We are all called to transform life in God in our own ways, and I was called as a Roman Catholic priest in a religious order. At a practical level, this means working in new ministry assignments approximately every three to six years, possibly in other states or countries. Given

my superiors' and seminary professors' desire to have me teach theology, I was encouraged to find a teaching position for my first assignment. Thus I applied to and accepted a full-time priest chaplain and theology teacher position at Divine Savior Holy Angels High School, which is a private, all girls' college prep school owned by the Sisters of my order.

Although the coronavirus has drastically impacted how the school currently operates, I really love teaching. Being a priest in itself is incredible, though constantly being surrounded by energetic young people brings a balance into my life I had forgotten about. For so many years I was excessively serious and driven. These instincts served me well and allowed me to accomplish what I felt called to take on. Yet going from living with old men to working with young women has been very good for me, filling my days with joy and reminding me to remain open and relatable. I remember being a teenager, and have empathy for the types of issues they face. I love my students, and they seem to love me back.

My current subjects are Christology, Church History, The Bible, New Testament, and World Religions. I will admit that World Religions is my favorite, for it overlaps my primary area of academic interest, Comparative Theology, especially as it relates to Buddhist-Christian Studies. Along with so many other topics, that is a subject to be covered in a future post.

In the meantime, dear visitor, I am pleased to have made your acquaintance. I envision this website as a means of interacting with the world, and look forward to hearing from anyone who wants to reach out. God bless you, and peace!

©Fr. Patric