

Someone holy in your life

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been caught up into heaven to see the throne of God. I have never seen Jesus appear to me. I have never experienced any apparitions of any kind. Most of the Christians I know would say the same thing. I have known few—only a dozen out of the thousands of people I have dealt with over the years—who have been blessed with heavenly visions.

St Paul tells us of his own experience: “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago ... was caught up into Paradise and heard words said that cannot and may not be spoken by any human being.” Throughout the centuries, other saints speak of similar supernatural encounters. While one is free to believe that these experience are truly genuine—and not just the raving of someone suffering from a mental disorder—we all know that it is a rare occurrence.

What is more common—and necessary—is getting to know someone who is holy, truly filled with the Holy Spirit. I would like to describe my own encounter with such a person. It may help you to reflect and see if there is anyone in your life who can show you what it means to live close to God.

Actually “encounter” is the wrong word. I got to know him quite well. I saw him all the time while living in a seminary in Rome for two years back in the 1970s. His name was Father Alvaro del Portillo. I was eventually ordained a priest and he was eventually ordained a bishop—becoming my bishop.

There was no one moment when I said to myself, “This man is a saint.” It was only later, looking back at all I learned from him, that I began to realize just how extraordinary he was. I see now how perfectly he

fulfilled those words of our Lord:
“Learn from me for I am meek and
humble of heart.”

I think Bishop Alvaro passed unnoticed as a truly holy person because he was so meek and humble. Don’t misunderstand. He wasn’t meek in any silly way. He had a will-power of steel. He talked to us boldly about faith and the love of God. The clearest memory I have of my bishop was the day, after I had become a priest, when he came up to me, looked me in the eye, and said, “Speak to them about Jesus.”

If you have never been blessed with ecstasies or visions, don’t count yourself unlucky. Look around you. You might learn more from an “ordinary” holy person, living in this world, than you can from any extraordinary visitation from the next world.

Joe Babendrier

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