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"Sermon-in-a-Sentence"

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My name is Father Paul Nicholson. I am a diocesan priest, in the diocese of London, Ontario, Canada. I am a pastor in a small rural community. I

have the care of two churches, St. Joseph's and St. Mary of Perpetual Help.

I was ordained in 1997 at St. Peter's Cathedral Basilica in London, Ontario. I received my seminary education at St. Peter's Seminary, which is also in London. I come from a devout Catholic family. I'm the youngest of six brothers and I am an associate member of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross.

Faithfully, each year, my mother would go to the famed shrines of Quebec to pray and petition, St. Anne, St. Joseph, and Our Lady for assistance in the never ending problems that seemed to afflict our family. In my grade eight year, I accompanied my mother on her pilgrimage. At the beautiful basilica of Mary, Queen of the World in downtown Montreal, I encountered a small book display. I was then, and

even more so now, captivated by books.

One book stood out, because it was the smallest. Tastefully designed, I placed my outstretched hand on my first copy of “The Way”. I was immediately transfixed by the simple “sermon-in-a-sentence”. I’d like to say the book provoked a major conversion. Alas, I’m still waiting for that to happen. I did not have any mystical experiences with the book. It just met a real spiritual need in my adolescence. I used it all through high school; seldom going to church without it. Funny as it sounds, I had no intellectual curiosity about its author. I made no inquiries about its publication or anything. I simply ate and was satisfied.

There was no center of Opus Dei in my small town where I grew up. In fact, Opus Dei, was totally unheard of. There is no center of Opus Dei in

London, Ontario (yet). The Work had only arrived in Canada in 1982. I entered St. Peter's Seminary in London in the autumn of 1989. Subsequently, I also started going to a small center in Toronto, and I quickly became acquainted with the priests. My first encounter with a chapel of Opus Dei still fills me with emotion. Upon entering the small oratory of Ullerston center, I felt a profound Presence. Here I could see what work was meant for.

The care and the custody of the tabernacle and the altar led me to exclaim: "See how they love Him!" Against the annoying obstacle of distance, I began frequenting the activities of the Work. There, the little book of "The Way" took on flesh. I felt no urge to join Opus Dei. I knew from the start that I was meant for the secular priesthood in the diocese of London. I understood that I could be "part" of Opus Dei without

leaving my obligations or duties as a diocesan priest.

Opus Dei has brought such joy and meaning to my priesthood, that I can literally say; “a day within your courts are better than a thousand elsewhere”. Opus Dei is the original ‘accountability software’. The struggle for sanctity in the priesthood can remain a very high ideal to which regular daily lip service can be offered. However, through regular spiritual direction with a brother priest who is really determined to love God and serve others, the path to holiness becomes visible and possible.

Opus Dei has put me in touch with my fallen self; not to leave me there, but push me to aim higher. It has also unlocked my creativity. Through my relationship with Opus Dei, I’ve been forced out of my isolation and compelled to be a friend to my

brother priests. I'm nudged to dig up priestly vocations, and I'm challenged to expand the horizon of the laity to embrace their baptismal call

Being part of Opus Dei has made me more adventurous in dealing with souls. I've taken young people to the World Youth Days, worked in orphanages in Romania, helped incredibly generous families in catechizing youth and conspired to bring young couples together.

St. Josemaria opened a new path in the Church for the laity; but he also stirred the waters of the secular clergy. I'm deeply grateful he invited me in to splash around.

(These are excerpts of an article that originally appeared in <https://www.opusdeiblogs.org> and is presented here with permission of the author.)

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