



Of Graces and Groaners

Reflections on Formation and the Road to Ordination

By Matt Walsh, SJ



As I approach ordination in June, I've become a bit nostalgic. Ten years of formation have passed: many classes in theology, philosophy, humanities and arts; ministry with homeless, addicted and poor people in the U.S. and abroad; and so many challenging experiences along the way. If I strung together all the words I've typed for classes, it would reach Mars, or at least the moon. If I brought together all the people I've come to

know, who have influenced my vocation, it would fill a stadium, or at least an NBA arena.

I must admit to apprehension and some fear along the way. Ordination is entrance into a mystery. But I have confidence that God and God's people will teach me what it means to be a priest. Throughout my formation, I've learned a great deal from books and papers, classes and research. The most important lessons, however, have been from people along the way. I'm confident that, as I've learned what it means to be a Jesuit and Christian from the people, so will I learn from the people how best to fulfill the role of priest.

Though formation in the Society of Jesus is always "ongoing," I have arrived at these milestones and they seem appropriate moments to look back and get some perspective on the journey. It all started at the novitiate in St. Paul. I had just come off of three years teaching at Nativity Jesuit Middle School in Milwaukee. I found the novitiate a wonderful time of prayer and self-reflection. I spent the last few months of novitiate in Honduras

assisting with the relief effort after Hurricane Mitch. I went with the intention of being of great service to the people, but ended up spending a good deal of time being tended by the people because of sickness. There was much disappointment and frustration for me, but as I look back on it this was a time of growing openness to my own limitations. I went with my own intentions and ideas about service and justice; I returned with lessons learned from the people who took care of me when I was sick.

Later in formation, as a regent at Red Cloud High School, I taught "sophomore theology" – the phrase may strike some as oxymoronic. I began each class with a "joke of the day". They were real "groaners" for the most part (Hey, you try to come up with a good, funny, appropriate joke for sophomores five days a week for 36 weeks!) As I look back on it, the students got me through. They had mercy on me when I needed it. They taught me more than I taught them, and by the end of each school year some of them even laughed at my jokes.

More recently, I found myself in the Tenderloin. As far as I can tell, this area, about 50 blocks in central San Francisco, is one of our national "epicenters" for homelessness, addiction and poverty. I had been attending mass at St. Boniface on Friday afternoons. The Tenderloin is a haven for the most marginalized people in

our society: homeless, addicts, mentally ill, and those alienated from family, friends and institutions. Many of these are so sick and fearful that they will not enter shelters to sleep at night; they end up walking the streets all night. St. Boniface is the Franciscan parish in the Tenderloin where they allow the homeless to sleep in the pews from 8am-noon each weekday.

After the 12:15 mass one day, I paused in the vestibule of the →



MATT WALSH (second from right) IS LOOKING FORWARD TO ORDINATION. WALSH AND FELLOW JESUITS (from left) BEN OSBORNE, JOE HOOVER, FR. TIM MANATT AND PHIL COOKE ASSISTED AT FR. MANATT'S ORDINATION IN JUNE.

→ FROM PAGE 1 church to speak with the director of St. Boniface's homeless project. As we talked, a man in the courtyard began to scream racial epithets and obscenities. The director walked out and told the man to be quiet and leave the courtyard, which he did. A moment later, our conversation ended and I walked out into the courtyard.

The man, now accompanied by a friend, had gone out onto the sidewalk and continued to yell. Usually in this situation I would avoid eye contact and move away, but this time, I found myself unafraid. As I looked at the man, there was something in my spirit that wondered what God would do in this situation. I had a sense that God wanted to work through me, and teach me something at the same time.

The angry man continued to yell. I followed them and looked right at him. Our eyes met – his were flashing with anger. As I continued to look at him, and he at me, a smirk came to my face – I even started to chuckle a bit. The two came over to me and began to tell me the problem. The angry man had been kicked out of a soup kitchen down the street. He felt angry and discriminated against. This was not the first time something like this had happened to him; he felt a conspiracy against him.

I told him I was sorry about all he had to deal with on the streets. We continued to talk and it came out that I was a seminarian and they had both attended high school seminary – they were in their 40s. In talking with the man, I understood why he was angry: he just wanted something to eat. But he also needed someone to listen to him and to feel like he was being understood.

As we walked down the street, I was about to offer to take them to eat

when they told me they were going to another soup kitchen in the area. As we parted on the corner, the storm of indignation seemed to have passed, though the man was still upset. He wrapped both his arms around me and put his head on my chest, giving me a hug for just a couple seconds. Then we said goodbye and they went on their way.

In that moment, I understood again – and at a bit deeper level – what this vocation is about. I understood what ministry is about. At base, it's about being with people. It's about remaining with people in difficult circumstances. In my case, it seems to be about being with people who have been marginalized and alienated by our society. I also realize that this is basically what I have been searching for since entering the Society. I've been searching for the people to whom God has sent me: all the studies and work makes no sense without my people. These are the people who will teach me what it means to be a priest.

I realize that I need to spend time with the people to whom God has sent me and to continue to learn and make connections so that I may better serve them. Fr. Greg Boyle, SJ speaks of kinship as the heart of ministry. And now I know what he means. I intend to continue on this path and always search for ways to better help my people. But it seems that the best way to do that is simply to be with the people in good times and bad times. **E**

Matt Walsh is a Jesuit scholastic in studies at the Jesuit School of Theology – Berkeley, Calif. Matt will be ordained a deacon this fall, and plans to be ordained to the priesthood in June 2008 in Omaha.

Five from Wisconsin Province Enter Novitiate

Nine men entered the Jesuit Novitiate in St. Paul in August with five entering as members of the Wisconsin Province. The men now begin study and training to become Jesuit priests and brothers, a process that takes about 10 years. The Wisconsin Province novices are:



NEW NOVICES ARE (back row, left to right) BRYCE EVANS, MICHAEL ROSSMANN, BEN WILSON, SEAN POWERS, MICHAEL WYNAR, (front row, left to right) BEN ANDERSON, JOE WOTAWA, SHANE MULLIGAN AND THO VU.

Ben Anderson, 23, is a native of Chanhassen, Minn. and a graduate of Chaska (Minn.) High School. He earned a B.A. from Creighton University in Omaha, Neb. in 2007, with history and economics as his double majors. Anderson's academic interests also include theology and social justice.

This past summer, Anderson was an Interfaith Justice Intern in Minneapolis, and also lived in El Salvador with a Creighton theology class. While at Creighton, he lived with other students at the Spirit of Peace community, and was active on spring-break service trips. Anderson also taught religious education to seventh-grade students at Assumption Guadalupe Parish in South Omaha, and math to seventh-grade boys at St. Xavier High School's six-week summer program in New York City. His personal interests include reading, swimming and fishing.

Bryce Evans, 23, of St. Louis Park, Minn. is a graduate of Buffalo (Minn.) High School. He received a B.A. in theology in 2006 from Marquette University in Milwaukee. Academically, he is also interested in philosophy, Latin, mathematics and science. While

at Marquette, Evans was a resident hall assistant.

Evans has traveled to France and Germany for the 2005 World Youth Day. Most recently, he has lived and worked in Pine Ridge, S.D. as a volunteer at Red Cloud High School, serving as librarian and teacher. Evans' personal interests include golf, hockey, skiing, and reading.

Michael Rossmann, 22, of Iowa City, Iowa, is a graduate of Regina High School. He was the valedictorian of the Class of 2007 at the University of Notre Dame with a double major in economics and theology.

At Notre Dame, he was active in its Center for Social Concerns, and was president of the Peace Fellowship and the Faith and Justice Network. Academically, he is also interested in Christian mission science, resource and agricultural economics, and development studies. Rossmann has studied and taught in Uganda, Tanzania and Poland.

He has traveled throughout East Africa and Europe.

His personal interests include reading, running, hiking and cooking. →

The Radical Secret

I thought we were pretty radical in college. It was no secret that my roommate Sherman liked Elvis Costello music, or that we both liked to smoke a pipe. We used to stay up late at night arguing about politics, solving the world's problems like global hunger and international relations (you can see the results!), and debating whether the Packers could ever win another Super Bowl.

My roommate, Sherman, and I shared a secret – we were both thinking about being priests after college.

But, we rarely ever shared with anyone else our hope that someday we might be ordained priests. We rarely ever told people about our dreams of serving God in that way. It was just too private, and we thought it needed to remain secret. Sherman was ordained a diocesan priest for his home diocese of Wichita in 1992. I was ordained for the Jesuits a few years later.

The good news today is that young men and women are still thinking about the priesthood and religious life, and they seem more willing to talk about it. When I meet with a young man who writes or calls me about a vocation, I first tell him: “You are not alone. There are many young people who take vocation discernment seriously.” Recent studies have shown that the majority of young Catholic men and women have considered – at least for a while – the possibility of giving their lives to the Lord and the Church in a radical way as a priest, deacon, brother, sister, or lay ecclesial minister.

Jesus said: “What you hear in the dark, you must speak in the light.” My advice to discerners is often: you don't have to keep this a secret. You may not want to shout this in the streets, or proclaim it to strangers in the cafeteria. You should always be careful to share personal information only with people you trust. You don't want people to spread rumors that you are trying to be the next Pope! But, if you



Fr. Tom Lawler, SJ

DIRECTOR OF VOCATIONS
WISCONSIN PROVINCE

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feel that the Lord might be inviting you to consider a possible vocation, talk with someone about it. Your parents, local pastor, or a teacher, can offer helpful guidance and encouragement. Do some investigation on the web, send an e-mail to a vocation director and get the ball rolling.

In this issue, Jesuit scholastic Matt Walsh admits that he felt some “apprehension and fear along the way” of discerning a vocation. Matt's experience is normal. He explains that a vocation is “entrance into a mystery.” A vocation is a mystery. Like any mystery, discerning a vocation involves some uncertainty and questions, but there is no need to be paralyzed by fear or uncertainty. Fear is a normal feeling when faced with a future that is not yet complete or certain. (For a helpful article read, “Fear and Discernment”, at www.thinkjesuit.org).

The Millennial generation has seen many frightening things in its lifetime which would make any of us hesitant to share our inner hopes and dreams. This generation has seen wars raging overseas, friends and family fighting in Iraq. They have seen marriages end in divorce, and families split apart. They have seen trusted authority figures – politicians, business leaders, church leaders – misuse their power, abuse the vulnerable, commit crimes, and fall in disgrace. They have seen war and disasters like earthquakes, hurricanes and collapsing bridges wipe out innocent lives.

All of these things could lead one to believe there is nothing lasting and stable in this life, that no one can be trusted, or that long-term commitment is a thing of the past. This is why we need courageous young people to stand firm against such obstacles, and follow the way of Jesus. The late Pope John Paul II was an extraordinary example of fidelity to Christ in the face of a world spiraling into chaos, drifting farther away from the Christian values of love, peace, and forgiveness. He strongly encouraged young people: “The Lord has given you a heart open to great horizons; do not be afraid to commit your life completely to the service of Christ and his Gospel! Listen to him as he says again today: ‘the harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few.’ ”

Go ahead, be a radical. Do not be afraid to show the world that faith, hope and loving service can overcome the fear and uncertainty of this age. You are not alone.

Go ahead and share your secret. Sherman and I finally did. We'd be happy to talk with you about it!

You can contact Fr. Sherman at frorr@resurrectionwichita.com at the Church of the Resurrection in Wichita, Kan. You can also read a little more by going to www.kansas.com/194/story/168711.html.

You can chat with Fr. Tom at www.thinkjesuit.org

Tho Vu, 23, was born in Bien Hoa, Vietnam, and moved with his family to Omaha as a child. He graduated from Benson High School, and in 2007 from Creighton University in emergency medical services and is a licensed paramedic. His extra-curricular activities included EMS work, medical librarian and researcher at Creighton's Medical Center.

He has taught youth religious classes, mentored, tutored, and coached youth tennis and soccer. His personal interests include tennis, soccer, chess, origami, traveling, piano and exercise.

Ben Wilson, 23, of Omaha, graduated from the University of Notre Dame with a degree in philosophy and minors in theology and anthropology. He is a graduate of Creighton

Preparatory School in Omaha.

At Creighton Prep he was active in campus ministry, service programs, cross-country and as a retreat leader.

After graduation, he returned to Creighton Prep as a volunteer, teaching high school philosophy and theology. He has traveled to Rome, Russia, Uganda and the Dominican Republic. His personal interests include playing and composing music,

running, reading and traveling.

Joining the Wisconsin Province men in the novitiate from the Missouri Province are: Shane L. Mulligan, 19, of St. Louis; Sean M. Powers, 20, of Omaha; Joseph D. Wotawa, 19, of St. Louis, and Michael I. Wynar, 24, of Denver.

UP COMING EVENTS

OCT. 19-21

COME AND SEE WEEKEND at the First Studies Program at Loyola University in Chicago. This is for inquirers who are interested in learning more about Jesuit life and training, and in meeting young Jesuits in-training.

DEC. 31 – JAN. 4, 2008

DISCERNMENT RETREAT at Creighton University Retreat Center in Griswold, Iowa. Participants will spend the days in prayer and silence, meeting with Jesuit directors once a day. Jesuit priests and scholastics will be the spiritual directors. There will be daily common morning and evening prayer, daily Mass, holy hour, and a reconciliation service.

JAN. 2 – 10

DISCERNMENT RETREAT at Loyola House Novitiate in Berkley, Mich., sponsored by the Detroit Province of the Society of Jesus.

SPRING 2008 (TBA)

WEEKEND AT THE JESUIT NOVITIATE in St. Paul, Minn. This weekend is for all inquirers interested in learning more about Jesuit life and training. You'll spend the weekend with the first-year novices in St. Paul, who will share their vocation stories and experiences of Jesuit life and formation. The novitiate is the first stage of Jesuit training.

JUNE 6, 2008

JESUIT ORDINATIONS at St John's Church in Omaha, Neb.

SUMMER 2008

SIX WEEKS A JESUIT program. This is an opportunity to live in a Jesuit community and work in a Jesuit ministry with other men considering the Jesuits. It is an excellent way to get a better feel for what it might be like to be a Jesuit.

JUNE 20 – 25, 2008

VOCATION DAYS at our Jesuit vacation spot on the Chain of Lakes near Waupaca, Wis. These days are for younger candidates (ages 16-20). We'll have presentations on Jesuit life by young Jesuits in training, daily Mass, small group sharing, and plenty of time to swim, water-ski and canoe.

AUG. 16, 2008

FIRST VOW CELEBRATION in St. Paul, Minn. Join us for the joyful celebration of the First Vows of our second-year novices.

There is no charge for any of these events. Please contact Fr. Tom Lawler, SJ.

Catch Us on the 'Tube'

Seeing and hearing Jesuits talk about their life and calling is only a click away on YouTube. Christopher Johnson and others talk about their vocations along with Jesuit priests discussing their lives in the Society of Jesus. You can view these videos on YouTube by searching "Jesuit vocations."

Or take the simplest route and view the videos on thinkjesuit.org



Want to Talk?

Fr. Tom is always happy to talk about life and vocations.

You can chat live when Fr. Tom is online at thinkjesuit.org or drop him an e-mail, vocations@thinkjesuit.org. And, you can always give him a call at (414) 727-5231.



IGNATIUS SAYS

"Love ought to show itself in deeds more than in words."

CALLINGS

A NEWSLETTER ABOUT VOCATIONS

Fr. Thomas Lawler, SJ
Jesuit Vocation Director
Upper Midwest States
3400 W. Wisconsin Ave.
Milwaukee, WI 53208.0288
(414)727.5231
vocations@thinkjesuit.org

THE CALLINGS QUIZ

The Sporting Life

While many minds are occupied with football at this time of year, it is more important to shift our thoughts into something, well, more Jesuit. Basketball!

Last year 11 (that's more than two handfuls) Jesuit colleges made it into the NCAA Tournament. There were seven men's and four women's teams.* Making you guess which schools made the tournaments would be too easy.

Instead, if you want to wear the "Classic" thinkjesuit.org basketball cap to your next courtside outing, take on this question.

How many NBA MVPs have come from Jesuit institutions of higher education?

Hint, there should be eight total Most Valuable Player titles.



STEVE NASH IS A SANTA CLARA GRAD AND TWO-TIME NBA MVP.



We will send the first winner the coveted "thinkjesuit.org" baseball cap. Next 20 will receive our set of three Ignatian bookmarks.

BONUS

If you can name more than half of the Jesuits pictured on our thinkjesuit.org banner, we will be happy to send you the excellent *Finding God in All Things: A Marquette Prayer Book*.



SEND YOUR SOLUTIONS/GUESSES TO VOCATIONS@THINKJESUIT.ORG

* These are the 11 Jesuit schools which made the NCAA last year:

MEN

Boston College
College of the Holy Cross
Creighton University

Georgetown University
Gonzaga University
Marquette University
Xavier University

WOMEN

College of the Holy Cross
Gonzaga University
Marquette University
Xavier University

Last issue's quiz answer

Congratulations and a tip of our baseball cap goes out to Daniel Napolitano (*below*) who matched the Saints with their patronage. Danny is a Marquette grad living and working in Washington, D.C. He knew that:



St. Genesius is the patron of actors

St. Julian the Hospitaller is patron for clowns and festival workers

St. Vincent of Saragossa is patron for wine makers

St. Aloysius Gonzaga is patron for teenagers

St. Augustine of Hippo is patron for brewing

St. Columbanus is patron for bikers