

Reading from the Book of Matthew Chapter 13 Verse 15

This people's heart has grown coarse, their ears dulled, they have shut their eyes tight to avoid using their eyes to see, their ears to hear, their heart to understand, changing their ways and being healed by me.

Wow! I can't believe how nervous I am ... I often speak to reasonably large gatherings in my work environment but in all of those settings, I typically speak to people that I really don't know about things that really don't matter ... Tonight is very different ... I am speaking to many of you that I really do know about things that really do matter and I am nervous.

I should also caution all of you at the beginning of this talk about my new found tendency to get emotional ... As our oldest son Tim mentioned to his younger brothers on a recent trip home, and I quote ... "Dad never used to cry when I was little. Now he seems to cry at the drop of a hat. I am not sure what they do to you on

those Cursillo weekends but stay away from them ... I think they pump you full of estrogen while you're on them."

Jeff called me just last Thursday about witnessing tonight

While I have been a Cursillista for over six years now, beyond my sharing at the end of my weekend, I have not talked about my faith experience before a group like this ... My initial reaction to Jeff's request was that I would be out of town and unable to speak ... truth be told, I was afraid of doing this As I talked with Jeff, it became clear to me that he was struggling to find someone to witness ... I said to Jeff ... "Hey, you're a new guy. How did you get stuck with being the facilitator?" ... His response, which was typical Jeff, was simple, but powerful ... He said, "I went to a meeting, people were asked to sign up to facilitate and I saw that no one had ... so I did ... isn't that what we are all called to do?"

With an ask like that, how could I say no?

So, I quickly set about thinking what I could possibly speak about that anyone might find even remotely interesting ... Now, over the course of this past weekend, I spent a fair amount of time watching college lacrosse ... I am not a big lacrosse fan but my alma mater had surprisingly made it to the quarterfinals of the NCAA tournament ... Watching on TV, I learned that the team had adopted as its motto “Pound the Rock” ... Apparently the coach’s mother had passed along a quote about a stone cutter hammering away ... where one blow finally breaks the rock but one hundred others made it possible ... For the team, Pound the Rock focused them on their commitment to discipline and persistence ... For me, Pound the Rock, focused me on the transformation of my own rock ... my heart.

As you might be able to tell by my accent, I am originally from New York ... Born in the lovely South Bronx and raised in beautiful Long Island ... My parents, both children of Irish immigrants, introduced my three siblings and me to the Catholic faith at an early age ... As a “public school kid”, I attended

religious education taught by very friendly nuns and memorized questions and answers from the Baltimore Catechism ... As a child, the Catholic faith seemed to me like a collection of rules and rituals ... The faith I heard about in religious education class certainly wasn't alive in our house ... While my parents required that we attend church every Sunday, they themselves did not ... For a variety of reasons, one of the most damaging being alcohol, my parents faced many of their own personal struggles that I didn't fully understand at the time ... Those struggles led to many anguished nights and painful memories throughout my childhood and adolescent years ... Not knowing what to do or who else to turn to, I turned to God ... I prayed nightly for peace in our house ... My prayers went unanswered, or at least that is what I thought ... By the time I was about fifteen, I had lost faith in pretty much everything ... My parents, my friends, our neighbors, our local police and even God did not seem to want to intervene on our behalf ... I stopped praying and turned away from God.

The lesson that I took from my early life experience was that I couldn't rely on anyone else in this world other than myself ... At this point, my rock had become fully hardened ... Recognizing that I had to fend for myself, I enrolled in the Church of Me ... I immersed myself in my studies at school and focused on achievement ... From all outward appearances, everything was fine ... I was admitted to a selective college; earned good grades; got a plum first assignment; bought a very cool Pontiac Trans Am and by my early 20's was living in a nice apartment in Monterey, California ... It all seemed so good but only I knew that I was carrying around a boulder in my chest.

In 1983, God answered the many prayers that I had offered years earlier ... I met Maura when she visited her sister, who was then dating my roommate ... I was, of course, taken by her looks but as I spent more time with her, I was actually most impressed by the depth of her faith ... At Maura's urging, I started to attend Church again, at first, just when she visited but increasingly on my own after she had left. To my surprise, I actually enjoyed it ...

Initially, I think that I liked the quiet time, the opportunity to just sit and think, not necessarily about God, but just to sit and think without distraction ... We were married in Maura's parish on Long Island in September of 1983 and were very quickly blessed with healthy children ... As our children grew, I regularly attended Mass, enjoyed the quiet time and even tried to listen to the message but for the most part, I was simply going through the motions ... I remained stuck in this rut for many years.

Maura began her Cursillo in the fall of 2004 ... She asked me to attend the closing and I did ... Not knowing what to expect, I was shocked by the emotion and the witness of the new Cursillistas ... Maura gushed about her experience when she came home but frankly, the thought of attending a weekend was terrifying to me ... While I wasn't sure exactly what took place over the course of those three days, it seemed far too frightening to me.

Months later, Paul Kuehner and John Hannigan approached me, in their very quiet, non threatening way, about attending a

weekend ... I, of course, said no ... Conveniently, I had a credible excuse ... I had already made plans to travel to Germany to ski with my college roommate who had just returned from Iraq ... Gregg had just finished 18 months in combat where he was responsible leading over 3,000 soldiers in the initial invasion ... As I sat in Kennedy Airport about to depart, I realized the weekend that I was invited to attend could actually work with my ski trip ... My return flight was scheduled to arrive on Thursday at 1:00; the afternoon the weekend began ... For some reason, I called Paul from the airport and said yes.

As it turned out, my ski trip was a perfect lead in to my Cursillo weekend ... Gregg talked openly and often about his reliance on his faith in his everyday life and particularly while in combat ... On our trip together, he took time each day to do a daily reflection on a passage from the Bible ... I actually joined him ... We attended Mass together in Austria and even invited the pastor of the small church back to our hotel room to talk about God ... over a few drinks of course ... I was very moved by Gregg's witness ...

At the end of my weeklong trip to Europe, I was ready to begin my Cursillo.

God broke open my rock on my weekend ... With Ray Bordeaux as the coordinator, Kevin Briody and Big Mitch ... I still can't pronounce his last name ... as table leaders, I began to recognize God's presence in those around me ... I began to understand that our faith was not a faith of rules but a faith of love ... Over the course of the weekend, it finally sunk in ... I came to learn that what our faith calls all of us to do is actually quite simple ... to see Christ in others and to be Christ to others ... I returned home a changed person.

I have been grouping regularly ever since ... I see the world very differently today ... Our group meets every Friday morning at 5:30 across the street in the barn ... My faith has brought me into an intimate friendship with guys that I never would have expected ... a small subset of our larger community of the unexpected ... In our group, or "My Boys" as Maura calls them, we have many

different personalities yet we all share a love of our faith and our love of one another ... Each week, we inspire each other, challenge each other, laugh with each other, console each other and hold each other accountable ... I have learned that we all share many of the same struggles as we try to stay on the path.

In hindsight, God, our stone cutter, had been pounding away on my rock for many years ... I was just too focused on me to notice His persistence ... Today, I'm only in the very early stages of my journey ... I've still got a very long way to go ... I am thankful to God, my family and "My Boys" that I am now at least trying to walk along the right path.

Des Colores!