

“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...  
that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:16-17)

Eighteen years ago, I was an up-and-coming business lawyer in Paris, France. I had a lot of things going for me: friends, money, a nice apartment, and a regular faith life. But deep below my busyness, God was beckoning. The Savior was calling out to me, clear as a bell, time and again, tender and unrelenting. I heard Him call me to something greater, to a simpler, more radical life, built on His love for me. But what exactly was he calling me to?

To find that out, I got myself a Jesuit spiritual director. I knew he would help me discern my calling. After a while of going back and forth, only two options stood in front of me: to become a Jesuit priest or a Dominican priest. How was I to choose? To make up my mind once and for all, I took a weekend off from work and went to “neutral ground”, to a beautiful medieval Cistercian abbey in Provence, the sunny Southern part of France. Once I got there, I prayed and prayed with the Gospels, but nothing clicked; God now seemed silent.

Lost and frustrated, I went to the abbey library and browsed the shelves. One book title caught my eye: “A Short Discourse on Hell”. A grim topic, granted, but it attracted me: freeing folks from hell and getting them to heaven had fascinated me since I was a child. As I flipped through the pages, suddenly, two lines stood out. My heart stopped beating and tears came to my eyes. I read, as if for the very first time: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.” God... loving... giving... sending His Son... not to condemn... but to save.

And I knew at once, finally and certainly, through those words that leaped off the page, that God was calling me to be a Jesuit priest. This may not sound logical to you: what was the connection? I had heard those two verses many times before. But that day, finally, they really spoke to me and became Good News: I knew for sure that God has a plan for our sick, old world: He yearns to save it. His love for us in our brokenness and failure is so great that He cannot resist giving His all to save us, to bring us home to His warm, healing embrace.

And perhaps the most amazing part is that God calls *us all* to be part of His saving plan. He will not do this alone. He called me, a sinner, to help save others. He calls you, brothers and sisters, to do likewise. We are in this together, one family coming back to God the Father, led by the Son, spurred on by the Spirit. All of us are called by God to this concert of love; and each of us is called to find his or her own voice in this harmony, through a particular vocation. Will it be marriage? Will it be the priesthood? Will it be religious life? It might be through a

reshuffling or a trauma in our lives: widowhood or divorce. Through all of this, through the haze of our fears and confusion, God is calling all of us to help him save the world, which he has tried and found wanting in love.

Some folks call John 3:16 the “Gospel in a nutshell”. It sums up the core of our faith: God is calling us to confess the saving name of Jesus, through the saving grace of faith and the power of the Holy Spirit. When we realize how strong God’s love for us is, how powerful His embrace, how delicate His care, when we taste and see how good God is, then we can rejoice with all our heart; however tough our life may be right now, we can sing and dance and exult and praise. We can then truly live out what today’s opening antiphon sings: “Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who love her: Be joyful, all who were in mourning; exult and be satisfied at her consoling breast.”

May Mary, the mother of mercy, help us to live that joy as we approach the celebration of the Paschal mystery!

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