

Two-Minute Testimony: Dcn. Andrew Sanchez



*Two-minute Testimony
...a brief faith witness
by a member of the SCS community*



Family has always been and continues to be a very important part of my life. My parents were a constant reminder of God's presence in my daily life. They always held my siblings and me accountable for our actions and guided us with gentle discipline and love, a love rooted in Jesus and His Church. I learned from an early age through his explanations and actions that my father corrected me because he loved me and was concerned about my development into a well-rounded man. In this way and in many others, my father modeled God's love for me. In her own way, my mom also modeled God's love for me. I will never forget the time that I didn't feel like kneeling during Mass and my

mom reminded me that if Jesus could hang and die on the cross then I could kneel for a short while. For my family, Mass was a "must" on Sundays and holy days of obligation. Another constant was family dinner, before which we always thanked God in prayer. To this day I still witness the love of God in my parents through their loving commitment to each other in marriage and their constant love for and support of my siblings, my nieces, my nephew and me.

Although the call to priesthood was always there I was often hard of hearing. As I look back at my youth I can now say that I was aware that God was calling me to something special. Although I would not have been able to articulate it then, I definitely felt gently drawn to the transcendent realities of our faith by God. I was quite involved in the liturgical life of the Church from as early as I can remember. I was an active altar server and I even played the role of Jesus for our living Stations of the Cross. Although I desired to serve God, I can't take credit for my active involvement since most of the time I was involved due to the fact that I was unable to tell a certain demanding but loving religious sister "no." I think that she recognized my desire to please God with my life and that He was calling to me to do so in a way that I could never imagine at such a young age.

I continued to actively serve God until I decided that it was no longer the "cool" thing to do. I think this was the beginning of my slow but definite departure from practicing my faith. As I moved into high school and college, living a life that put myself, instead of God, at the center became more and more the way I lived. Deep down I knew that I was turning my back on God, but my cycle of selfishness became harder and harder to break. It was only by the grace of God that I was eventually able to turn back to Him. My journey back home to God and His Church began when I moved away from home after college. In return for an Army scholarship for dental school I served for four years as an active duty Army dentist. The Army thought that it would be funny to send the Louisiana guy to Alaska (in all honesty it was #8 on my list of choices, so I was actually pretty excited about it).

From 2012-2014 when I lived in Fairbanks, Alaska, it slowly became evident that God has always been calling me to consider serving as a priest for His Church. This was the first time in my life that I really took ownership of my faith life and practices instead of just going through the motions. Being 4,000 miles away from home really forced me to assess my relationship with Christ and His Church. A deep desire to grow in my faith began to arise in me and as a result

of an active, close-knit Army parish community I grew closer to our Lord and lived my life more fully according to Catholic teaching than at any other time in my life. At the same time I grew close to a beautiful, loving, and caring young lady. She was someone whom I could have imagined marrying. However, as she and I began to discern marriage it slowly became evident that God had a different plan for my life. The more she and I talked and thought about marriage, the more my uncertainty and anxiety about the future increased. There was an Army priest whom I admired for his devout life of holiness and selfless service of God's people. One day at Mass, this priest gave a homily on Matthew 16:13-23 where "Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly...and be killed," to which St. Peter responded, "God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you." Jesus responded to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do." This last part is what the priest homilist related to discerning God's call in our lives. He said that sometimes in life we think about what we want and not what God wants for us. We can be an obstacle to God when we think as human beings and not about what God wants us to do with our lives. I felt like I was the only one in the church. I met with the priest later that week and he gave me some really good advice about discerning God's will in my life. He told me to stay close to the sacraments of the Eucharist and reconciliation, and to pray in front of the Blessed Sacrament whenever I could. As I did these things it became evident that God was calling me to seminary to discern more thoroughly a life dedicated to Him as a priest. I decided I had to break up with my girlfriend in order to discern priesthood more seriously, and this was a time filled with great sadness and loneliness, but at the same time it was a time



filled with a great peace, the peace of knowing that I was doing what God was calling me to do with my life. Over time my sadness and heartache subsided, and the peace remains, the peace and joy of striving daily to become the man God created me to be.

Where in your life is God calling you to think as God and not as human? Where are you being an obstacle to the work of God in your life? Where is He calling you to more deeply love Him and serve him through the offering of your life? Together we are all called to a life of holiness, a life of surrender to the loving, peaceful will of God. Let us continue to pray for and support each other in our walk towards holiness.

If you would like to share your testimony, please contact Joni in the church office.

"What the world is in particular need of today is the credible witness of people...capable of opening the hearts and minds of many to the desire for God and for true life." — Porta Fidei 15