

CULTURE OF LIFE

Back to School, Faithfully

BY Lauren Walter

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I've never seen my guardian angel and I can't claim to be a mystic. Most of the time, I don't even see how God is working in my own life.

But one Friday night last spring, I finally realized that God is working great miracles in the ordinary lives of young people like me. With back-to-school time upon us once again, I find myself reflecting on that evening once more.

That night, I found myself sitting around a table in a gym with 50 other Catholic young adults and Christopher West, the speaker, author and expert on Pope John Paul II's theology of the body.

Three years prior, when I set out on my college career, I would have laughed at the suggestion that I might find myself in such a setting at a secular school of higher learning. At the time, I was wrestling with my decision to attend Bowling Green State University, a public university.

After going through 13 years of Catholic education and finally experiencing a springtime of faith at age 18, I figured my spiritual life would come to a dead end at Bowling Green.

God's plans were bigger than mine.

Much to my surprise, I have learned something I wasn't taught in a classroom: how to be a Catholic Christian. First I was introduced to a vibrant Catholic student organization called Creed on Campus, where I found the perfect outlet to learn about my faith. That's also when I came to appreciate the late Holy Father's beautiful, timeless words on God's plan for sexuality and what it means to be human.

It feels good to say that now. But when I first heard of "this theology of the body thing," I didn't appreciate what a treasure it was. God showed me the only way I would allow myself to be shown — the hard way. I eventually found myself in situations where my faith was under assault. Every time, it involved the Church's teaching on sexuality.

Imagine being in a sociology class watching a so-called "documentary" on the pornography industry or being told homosexuality is a culture we should accept as normal and healthy. What about seeing contraceptives passed out like candy? Or witnessing students being saturated with moral relativism in classrooms every day in countless ways?

These are just some of the situations I and many other Catholic college students around the nation will be facing while classes are in session. By God's grace, these challenges helped me see how theology of the body's simple message of authentic love can empower us to stand up for the truth.

I could hear the Lord's words, "Be not afraid," so often repeated by John Paul, as the Holy Spirit gave me the courage to finally raise my hand when my faith was being challenged in class. I could feel the Spirit move me to speak in circumstances that, in the past, would have reduced me to silence. I was no longer timid about this message; I was now eager to proclaim it.

I saw that young people want the truth, as was shown when 500 students left Christopher West's talk that evening inspired and motivated by what they'd heard.

All of it came together that Friday night. I could finally look back and see a glimpse into God's infinite wisdom. I could see how he's been working in my life. He brought me here for a reason. I'm so grateful he did.

And the most beautiful part is that there are countless other young people gearing up in this fight for the Kingdom. I know this, because I have seen it with my own eyes — right here on a secular campus.

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