

The best confession I've had in a long time



During two summers in high school, I was a missionary in the Diocese of Rockford, Illinois, for its Totus Tuus summer program. For six weeks, myself and three others – two men and one other woman – traveled around the diocese providing Catholic education and fun to kids entering first grade through recent high school graduates at different parishes.

Both years, I was placed on a team with two seminarians. Often during our car rides from parish to parish, we would talk about their vocation stories and what they most looked forward to when, God willing, they were ordained priests.

During one car ride in particular, I remember one of my seminarian teammates making a comment about looking forward to offering confessions when he was ordained. In a slightly sarcastic comment, I said, “Well, now that you know me so well, I don’t think I could ever go to you for confession.” When he took offense at this, I tried to explain that the idea of confessing my sins to a priest I considered my friend would seem too personal as the penitent. Misguided, I know, since everything about confession is and should be personal. But that was the issue. In short, I didn’t want my friends – even these people I had traveled and ministered with for weeks on end – to really see me, to know me, gunk and all.

Fast forward to the Saturday before this most recent Christmas, and I was waiting in line after Mass to go to confession – with a priest and friend who was [ordained this past May](#). He was not one of my four seminarian brothers from my former Totus Tuus days. Rather, he was one of the first people I met when I moved to my current diocese.

Since his ordination, this priest has been assigned to the parish nearest my apartment. Often when I'm available, I try to make time for their Tuesday evening and Saturday morning Masses. And over and over again, I've been blown away by the love this young priest has for God and his vocation. While I knew he would be a priest who preached with conviction, I could not have expected to be moved to tears when I saw for the first time how he looked at the Eucharist and the chalice during the consecration, and the reverence and love with which he receives Our Lord during each and every Mass. I've been blessed to know many, many great priests, but I can honestly say I've never seen anyone more in love in my entire life.

So, after months of attending Mass with him as the celebrant, I decided I needed to go to confession with him. Who better as a confessor than one who radiates love?

After Mass concluded, I made my way to his confession line. And it was so, so good.

I walked through the doors, and he just looked up to me and said, "Hello friend." First of all, to be recognizable under both a mask and a veil is, well, not always the easiest thing. But to be called friend by the one whom God was using to release me from the burden of my sins ... that feeling of being seen and known was one that would linger with me for days.

And the confession itself, well, there was a lot of grace. I've had good advice from priests before, but this friend commiserated with me in my pain and emboldened me to fight the spiritual battle in a way I hadn't experienced in a long time. He didn't sugar coat anything. He gave me a penance that drew me out of myself to pray for others. And I left not only feeling forgiven and cleansed but more confident in myself as God's beloved than I had in some time.

Looking back on my conversation all those summers ago with my seminarian brothers, I now can see why they would have been

sad to hear I wouldn't want to go to confession with them after they were ordained. And I realize now that it's not only them who would miss out on the ability to minister to a friend, but I would be deprived of an opportunity for God to reveal his love to me in a unique way. Because, in the end, that is what all our interactions with one another should be – revelations of God's love to our brothers and sisters in Christ, and opportunities to let another person be truly seen and loved for who they are, imperfections and all.

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