

When it was requested of me several months ago that I write a “reflection” for this month’s meeting, for weeks on-end I kept asking myself “what am I going to write about”? My family and our ups and downs? My friends that are Christians and the few that SO are not? Current world events? Immigration? Politics? Our new life at St. Francis? Or our old life as “guilty” Catholics?

As you can see, many choices, some comfortable, some not. So in the following weeks I decided I would take a completely different approach & tell you about my own personal and ongoing struggles with my faith.

Yes, I’m going there, yes, it’s uncomfortable for me, but I’m considering it a form of “confession”

Being born and raised in a devout Catholic-Italian family, faith was always a daily part of life. My sister and I were sent-off to the local parochial schools, where we wore the rather ugly and uncomfortable green-plaid, wool uniforms. Sometimes I was “assaulted” by the nuns. When I say assaulted, I mean that I had far more than my share of wooden-pointers broken over my bare knuckles. I was also the victim of “bullying” during my time there and yet no matter who I told, they didn’t believe me, so it was ongoing. So where was the “Christianity” during those years? How was I supposed to have any faith?

After 8 painful years (and many scarred knuckles) we were sent off to Catholic high schools too. As a freshman, I attended Stamford Catholic High, now known as “Trinity”. I hated it...plain and simple. My classmates were rude, self-righteous, not very “Christian” and “clicky”. I was an outcast, and again, the bullying continued. After about 9 months of arguing with teachers, nuns, and fighting with several of the “jocks”, I was “invited to leave” as the principal so nicely put it. I remember my dad picking me up that morning, the silence during the ride home was deafening to say the least. That moment is forever etched in my mind. Again, where was the “Christianity” if any, during that year? How was I supposed to have any faith under those conditions? So that following September it was off to trade school, where all of the “bad” kids went.

So this was my second chance to be the son my parents expected me to be. It was a bumpy start at first, but it soon became my second home. To this day I am still friends with, and stay in touch with, most all of my classmates. It was rather strange, or should I say shocking to me after coming from catholic schools, to see how nice, respectful and down to earth everyone was. A literal polar-opposite. What was the problem at my old schools? Rebellious “Catholic” kids? Or too many spoiled rich-kids that had everything just handed to them without working for it? Wasn’t God supposed to be “present” in that Catholic school? Where was he? Why wasn’t he “on my side”? I really don’t know....

Fast forward now to my early twenties. Happily done with school, managing my families printing business, life seemed pretty good for a while...until my father suffered a massive heart attack and I had to take the helm.

Here I was, 21 years old and the “boss” of 20-some blue-collar men, a very difficult situation on a daily basis. Being threatened at times by “40-something” year-old union-guys who thought they were “untouchable”, and didn’t like taking orders from “the boss’ son”. And at one point, being threatened at gunpoint early one morning by a very drunk, disgruntled employee. So basically another form of “bullying”, but now from adults. To this day I still don’t know where I got the strength to make it through those times. Was the Lord standing beside me? ...or maybe he was standing in front of me that morning.

These are just a small portion of the reasons why I struggle so hard with my faith. I struggle with it daily, questioning why God has led me down what I considered at times a very difficult and uncomfortable path. Why did all of these past things happen to me? Why do they still at times? Am I a bad person? Am I a bad Christian for even daring to ask? I’m just not sure...

Why is the world so full of evil? Or as my wife puts it “the devil has taken over”. So where is God during all of this? Why are children dying from cancer? Why does cancer even exist? Why does the majority of the population live from paycheck to paycheck? And yet professional athletes get paid millions of dollars to throw a ball around? They obviously are not curing cancer...again, where is God to correct this?

Why is the world so divided in so many ways right now? Why does the media bombard us with negativity on a daily basis? Why are we still at war with other countries? Why do other countries problems become our problems? Why isn’t God helping and guiding them?

Why are the elderly struggling to just get by on social security when they clearly have earned AND deserve better? Why are today’s youth crazy enough to go into a school and shoot at all of their classmates? Why didn’t God protect them?...again, where was God? Didn’t he think they deserved better?

Some of you may know about the surgical ordeal that I went through 2 years ago. I had what was supposed to be a minor shoulder repair, but acquired a massive staph infection from the hospital and almost didn’t make it during the first 3 days. This was then followed by 3 more surgeries, 4 more weeks in the hospital in severe pain, with the final surgery being quite major. I then spent the next 3 months at home on an IV of heavy duty antibiotics. As bad as it all was, I wasn’t afraid of dying... I’m not sure why, but I never have been. But I was afraid that maybe I wasn’t “prepared” for the hereafter. How was I going to answer to God for some of the things I have done? Or things that I haven’t done? ...would it really matter?

Enter Father Mark. I don’t recall much about that day at the hospital, but I do know that we prayed, and I knew that he genuinely cared for me by the expression on his face. I also know that somehow, it gave me the strength to fight and not let this get the best of me...Was God there? Maybe he was...

I didn't want this to become a "Rant" so I'll finish now. If God is ever-present why is the world in the shape it's in and why is all of the "bad-stuff" continual and never ending? The bible teaches us to have faith, to believe in Christ's teachings & to believe that in the end evil will die and good will eternally prevail.

The bible speaks of the second-coming of Christ to end all of this...Where is he? When is he? Maybe he really isn't...Maybe I expect too much of him... Maybe I need to be a better Christian.

I try very hard to be accepting and believing of these teachings, but even after all these years I still continue to struggle.

I've lived my life always helping others, regardless of what the problems may be. My friends would most likely tell you that I'm the guy who will give you the shirt of his back and then some... I'm a firm believer in "karma" and hope that someday, someone would be as caring to me if I was ever in need...or should I instead be saying a firm believer in Christ? Well, I'm still working on it...

Will any of our good deeds matter? I don't know. Even though it might have made a huge difference for someone in need at the time, will we be recognized for it when our time comes to an end? Or will the Lord question us as to why we didn't act upon situations that were even more difficult or dire?

Or, is the end really the end... and nothing more?... I'm trying very hard to believe otherwise...regardless of my sometimes black & white opinions or my often times scientific view of things.

Maybe in the end, when I meet the Lord (or should I say "if") and he says to me "what were your reasons for thinking that I wasn't there for you? Now do you believe?"

Hopefully he will smile down at me, when I grin and answer him saying ... "I'm still working on it".