



Catena Manco: Teacher Witness to Faith

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I have been involved with my parish, All Saints' Church, for many years. I can remember preparing for my Confirmation and it was at that point that I started realizing that I was part of a larger family. A turning point in my faith journey was when I was asked by my pastor of the time to be part of the parish World Youth Day committee in 2002. I remember feeling excited to be part of this event in any way possible. It was my first World Youth Day, and I wasn't sure what to expect. The committee worked tirelessly to help house over 200 Italian pilgrims that were expected to attend catechism at our parish and live within our community. I was absolutely amazed at how willing parishioners were to host these perfect strangers. The biggest lessons I learned during that WYD 2002 was that we are all part of one family. It was perfectly normal to declare yourself a Catholic, in fact we should not fear who and what we are. I learned that it was important to give of yourself to your neighbour. Any way that we could help accommodate and make the pilgrims' experience here in Toronto better, we did.

I was co-ordinator of our youth group for many years. Our events ranged from Christmas plays, Passion plays, Halloween activities for kids, feeding the poor etc. We were witnesses of our faith in our community. We were preparing ourselves for our journey to World Youth Day in Cologne, Germany in 2005. Like the wise men looking for the newly born messiah, we too were looking to renew our faith. I have also been involved in sacramental preparation and Vacation Bible School, a summer camp for kids. Both these experiences remind me that we should all have that childlike faith in Jesus, just as the children do. One of my favourite images of Jesus is that when he tells the disciples to let the children come to him. My vocation in life is to bring this image of the loving Christ to all those who are in my trust and care. As a Catholic teacher, I try to be a witness to my faith everyday, in my actions, in my words and model those who have inculcated the importance of Jesus in my life. My work through the parish has prepared me for my work at school as a Chaplain. I constantly remind students that they are the light of the world, our future as a Catholic community of faith.

What kind of difference do you hope to make in living a life based on Jesus' teachings?

My involvement at the Parish level allows me to work with children of all ages. It brings me joy to work with the young children who are so eager to listen to the stories of Jesus, to listen to what he has to teach us. Often, when preparing for Vacation Bible School, I require the help of many young adults. I see this as the perfect opportunity to invite teenagers back to church, and to tap into the gifts that God has given each one of them. I want each young adult to feel that same sense of belonging, as I did during World

Youth Day. I want each young adult to feel that their parish can be their second home, just as I do. I want each young adult to feel that the people of their parish community can be their second family. Jesus wants us closer to him, he wants us to have a relationship with him and I hope to help bridge the gap that sometimes exists, by offering opportunities to children and young adults a chance to rekindle their relationship with him.

What advice do you have for a young Catholic finding ways to express their faith?

I think that as long as they are using their God given talents to do good, this can be one of the easiest ways to express their faith. I would also tell young adults to get involved in their parishes' youth group or even at school with their Peer Ministry groups. These groups would give them a venue to speak to other likeminded teenagers that are looking to be a witness to their faith. However, if there are students who are not yet ready to take this step, I would remind them that kind deeds such as: offering to help someone in need, giving a friend a shoulder to cry on, offering a smile to someone who seems lonely, are all things that express our faith. Jesus loved us so much that he gave his life for us; he gave us new life in the resurrection. Every small action and kind word is a testament to our faith. I would tell young adults to start small, but think big and pray to Jesus, who guides everything we do.