

MY Farewell Column

By Father John Catoir JCD, -1/18/15

As a young college student I found myself drifting away from the Church. I had a thousand questions, and I found institutional religion unappealing. If it were not for a piece of writing that spoke to my heart, by Cardinal John Henry Newman, I don't know where I'd be today.

“God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me, which He has not committed to another. I have a mission; I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons; therefore I will trust Him, wherever I am, I can never be thrown away.

If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve him; in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him; if I am in sorrow my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about.”

This prayer made me realize that we all have a God-given purpose in life. It brought me back to the Church. My experience of God can be expressed in the image of a sculptor molding his clay. We are putty in the hands of a loving God.

At first I resisted this outside spiritual force, which was mysteriously moving me in a direction I did not want to go. Then one day after six years of a prayerful agonizing struggle, all my doubts and hesitations evaporated. I made my final decision while serving as a draftee in the Army at the end of the Korean War.

I soon entered the seminary, and four years later was ordained a priest on May 28th 1960. Not long after, in 1967, I began writing a column for my home Catholic Newspaper, ‘The Beacon,’ of the Diocese of Paterson, NJ. The inspiration for this came from the words of Jesus, “If you love me, feed my lambs.”- John 21:15. The whole experience of writing is like a vocation within a vocation, for which I am most humbly grateful.

You the reader have given me a lot of heart-warming feedback over the years. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. I hope I have served you well. I always tried to write as though you were the only person receiving my love. And now after 50 years of writing articles, 20 of them in syndication with Catholic News Service, having reached the ripe old age of age 85, and I am leaving behind the deadline drudgery to slow down a bit.

I will still dabble with Twitter (#JohnCatoir) and Facebook, so that any future columns I decide to write at my leisure will be posted there, in the public domain, free for one and all to see.

From 1988 to 1990 I was the president of the Catholic Press Association. In that capacity I made many friends throughout the world of spiritual journalism, and I want to thank them for all their support and friendship over the years.

I will leave you with another favorite quote of mine, this one from the Blessed Julian of Norwich: “Life on earth can be a prison and a penance. The Lord wants us to rejoice in the fact that He is with us, protecting us, and leading us to the fullness of joy. Jesus is our protector while we are here on our way, let us flee to Him and be comforted; let us touch Him and be made clean.”