

Last week I preached about a priest from my seminary days, Fr. Pat Boyle, and how I was impressed by the way he made a visit to the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel every single time he left or entered his building. That prayer-practice taught me, by lived example, a new way of growing in my relationship with Jesus. But my spiritual teachers weren't all on the faculty.

A fellow seminarian, Ted Dudzinski from Indiana, became a good friend while I was at the seminary. I remember that one of the main chances we had to talk deeply was on the once-a-month trip into Chicago that the two of us took to attend some conferences on the spiritual life. The drive took about an hour. I wanted to talk with my friend the whole way. But Ted, after 10 – 15 minutes always suggested that we then pray a rosary. It didn't take all the remaining time – but it took up a lot of it. I could have skipped the rosary. I wanted to talk, but I did it because Ted wanted to. The truth is that he wanted to pray the rosary, not only because it was his daily practice, but because as

seminarians, cooped up in the seminary most of the time, we always seemed to drift into gossip about the faculty or fellow seminarians after a while. Ted knew that if we limited our talking we could keep it focused on good things, but if we let ourselves natter on for a full hour it probably would end up going negative. That was a good lesson in the spiritual life for me – there can be too much talk, even among friends.

Another friend at Seminary, Tim O'Malley, was from a prominent Chicago family. He had been an attorney before entering the seminary and was a very accomplished man. But he was also the most humble guy at Mundelein. Over the five years I spent at the seminary it gradually dawned on me that what seemed different about Tim was that I never heard him speak uncharitably about a single person – nobody! I started watching him to see if I could catch him at it, but I couldn't. That was a true practical lesson in Christian living for me.

I could give other examples, and I certainly haven't followed those examples perfectly, but my point is that when I went to Mundelein I

knew a lot of things about Catholicism. And, to be honest, I had more head knowledge than most of the other seminarians. But there was so much I learned from my teachers and classmates about living with Jesus. Most knew Christ a lot better than I did. I grew as a Catholic as much from living with those people as I did from the classes I took.

“Behold, the Lamb of God.” In our Gospel today John the Baptist acts as much as a teacher as a prophet. His whole point is to make Jesus known. “A man is coming after me who ranks ahead of me . . . the reason why I came baptizing with water was that he might be made known to Israel.” Today I want to preach about the ways we are to say to those people in our own circles, “Behold, the Lamb of God.” By our own baptism that is our job – to point out Jesus, to make Him known, and to teach others how to live with Him.

Ask yourself, “What am I teaching about Jesus and the Catholic faith to those I live with?” Frankly, it may not be positive. It could be negative, but inevitably we are teaching something to those who know

we claim to be Christian by how we live and pray – or not. We may not think of ourselves as teachers of Christianity, but the fact is our children, spouses, co-workers are learning something from us – even if it's that in our opinion Jesus isn't very real or very important.

We just taught new altar servers this week. We always tell them, “You are so important because by your reverent, or bored, squirrely behavior to signal to the adults, subconsciously, whether what we are doing is worth their own attention. Little kids, by their attention or lack of attention to the mass, teach you about the faith.

Observing in other people simple virtues, deeds, and practices – such as those of Frs. Boyle, Dudzinski, O'Malley, or today's altar servers (I hope) -- can change a person. They did me. None of those people did anything that we all couldn't do. There are so many people who don't know anything about Christ and His Church -- and we can be their teacher. Our lives can say, “Behold, the Lamb of God.”

Here I just want to plug one chance for parents to grow as teachers of prayer for your families. On Saturday, February 25 we're going to be hosting two Dominican nuns, Sr. Mary Emily and Sr. Maria Christi, who are coming out from Nashville and giving us a retreat on Praying as a Family. It will last from 9:30 – 2:30 in the Social Hall. You need to RSVP because there will be a free book and lunch. Put the date on your calendars. See the bulletin or website for details.

But even beyond that one opportunity – think about how you learned to live the faith. I hope there were people in your life – as there were at my seminary – who taught you how to be a Disciple of Jesus by their lives. But even if there weren't - you could do that for someone else! How you live the faith matters not just to you, but to who-knows-how-many people who right now are absorbing, for better or worse, the lessons on faith that your life is teaching.