

At seminary, my moral theology professor, Fr. Pat Boyle, made a lasting impression on me. When I was in the chapel praying, I would often hear Fr. Boyle, who lived on the same floor as the chapel, come into the back of the chapel. He would be there a few moments and then leave. I eventually asked him what he was doing. He said that whenever he left or entered the building, he stopped by the chapel to greet Jesus in the tabernacle.

We became friends and would sometimes go out to eat. On the way to the car, I would walk right past the chapel door without thinking, but Fr. Boyle would always disappear inside. And it wasn't just a perfunctory nod and dash. I learned a lot of moral theology from Fr. Boyle, but the greatest impact he had on me was not intellectual, but through his lived example, this new way of growing in my relationship with Jesus.

But my spiritual teachers weren't all on the faculty. For example, there was a fellow seminarian, Tim. He had been an attorney before

entering the seminary and was a very accomplished man. But he was also the humblest guy at Mundelein Seminary. 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 – ever! 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.

And then there was Ted. We used to drive into Chicago once a month for some spirituality conferences. The trip took about an hour. I thought of this time as the perfect opportunity to talk with a friend. But Ted, after 10 – 15 minutes of conversation, would suggest we pray the rosary. I did it, but I would rather have talked. Later, Ted said that he found that the longer he talked with fellow seminarians, the greater chance they would eventually start to gossip and judge the other guys, or the faculty. I had to admit he had a point, and his self-understanding and self-discipline made me stop and think of my own habits.

I could give other examples, and I certainly haven't followed those examples perfectly, but my point is that when I went to the seminary, I knew a lot about Jesus. And to be honest, I had more head knowledge than most seminarians. But there was so much I learned from my teachers and classmates about living like Jesus. Many knew Christ a lot better than I did. I grew as a Catholic as much from living with those brother seminarians as I did from the classes I took.

“Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.” In our Gospel today Jesus begins His Sermon on the Mount. This is His plan for true human living. And note well: all the Beatitudes are perfect descriptions of Jesus Himself. To be fully alive is to live as Christ – and to have Him live in us. The journey towards holiness is the process of that formation.

In the seminary, you don't just take academic classes. Just as much time is spent in what is called “formation,” as in intellectual work.

This formation includes spiritual direction, prayer, and ascetic practices such as fasting and simplification of life.

Today I want to preach about our formation. Who is forming us in the faith – for better or worse? Do you have any friends who are further down the road of discipleship than you are – who can teach by example as much as by imparting ideas? If not, then seek them out. At the seminary we all had to choose a spiritual director – a priest we would meet with regularly to discuss our spiritual lives. Out in the world priests don't have the time to do that. But I suggest everyone pick out some Catholic who is farther down the path and ask if you could buy them coffee once a month and have a 20–30-minute conversation about what's going on in your soul.

But also, how we are forming others by our lives – for better or worse? Think here of Fr. Boyle, Tim, and Ted's impact on me. In what ways are we modelling the blessedness of poverty of spirit, meekness, mercy, purity of heart, to people in our own circles?

Ask yourself, “What am I teaching about the faith to those I live with?” Frankly, it may not be positive. In fact, it could be very negative, but either way, inevitably, we are teaching something to those who know we’re Catholic. We may not think of ourselves as teachers of the Faith, but the fact is that our kids, spouses, co-workers are being formed -- or de-formed -- by us.

Observing other people’s simple virtues, deeds, and practices – such as those of Frs. Boyle, Tim, or Ted -- can change a person. They did me. None of them did anything that I couldn’t do. There are so many people who don’t know anything about Christ and His Church. By the way we act and speak, we can teach others the blessed life.

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 we live the Faith matters not only to ourselves, but to the many people

who right now are absorbing, for better or worse, the lessons on faith that our life is teaching.

Now – speaking of the seminary. Today in the pews are cards for the “Called by Name” project the archdiocese is running. If you can think of anyone 16 – 35 years of age who you feel might have a vocation to the priesthood or religious life, take a card and use the QR code to nominate them. The Archbishop will write to them, inviting them to consider the possibility, and possible next steps in discernment. I’ll give you a moment of silence to think before the Creed.