

SITTING AT THE FEET OF GREAT TEACHERS...



I love the commercial that airs this time of year showing a joyful Dad accompanied by sad-faced children singing “It’s the most wonderful time of the year,” as he pushes a cart through the school supply aisles.

At this time when formal education resumes for the year, it might be worthwhile to think about the teachers who most affected your life—and perhaps to take yourself back in time to teachers you wish you had had...

One of the ones who first come to mind for me is Dr. Donald King, my college Latin professor who instilled in me a love for language and culture centuries ago. Father Louis Ryan, a Dominican who taught me theology with St. Thomas’ *Summa* as a textbook, was another one who made a deep impression. In those heady days of Vatican II, not only did we learn what Thomas had to say, but we also studied contemporary theologians and learned about social justice and non-violent protest. He was a breath of fresh air like Pope John XXIII who called for the church to open the windows and let the Holy Spirit in.

Jim Shea, my editor when I worked for the *Catholic Telegraph*, believed in me and let me take on important assignments. He taught me about integrity in journalism and the ministry of writing. At the end of editorial meetings, he would close with “let’s bind up the nation’s wounds.” He really saw what we did as important in the growth and healing of the church—and it was.

There was Sister Marie Emmanuel who first told me I was a writer when I was a high school freshman and Sister Margaret Agnes, my journalism teacher, who expected the best and taught us about accuracy and balanced reporting. Though a tough task master, she was a softie at heart, and had a sweet tooth we all enjoyed. I think of her every time I eat Russell Stover candy (her favorite).

As I think about teachers who made a deep impression on me I find myself wondering what it would have been like to have been in the presence of Jesus, the greatest teacher of all and in my imagination I go back 2000 years to a mountain outside Galilee. It’s a warm sunny day and a gentle breeze is blowing. I’m sitting with the disciples and women and families who have been following this amazing man who has been curing diseases and inviting people to leave what they knew and follow him.

I feel the attraction, though the call to let go of what I know is unsettling. He begins to speak. “Blessed are the poor in spirit... those who mourn... the meek... those who hunger and thirst... the merciful... the peacemakers... those who are persecuted.” He’s got things upside down, I think. The wealthy and powerful run the kingdom and own the land. No one wants to be grieving or hungry and thirsty or persecuted. You have to look out for yourself or no one else will.

Or maybe not—maybe he is right. I know sometimes that when I let go of control and ask for help, it surely feels good to be supported and I feel richer though my circumstances haven’t changed. I’ve had my share of mourning and though I wouldn’t choose it, my grief is lessened when it is shared. I know what it’s like to have deep hungers and have them satisfied, to have received mercy or been in the presence of the truly humble and those who work for peace. I wouldn’t choose persecution, but not being understood gives me compassion for others and strengthens my deep beliefs. I sit with these thoughts and for a while I just am quiet and still in the presence of Jesus.

When I do come back to the present, I find that like Mary, the sister of Lazarus, I enjoy sitting at the feet of Jesus. I realize I can go back there in prayerful imagination any time I wish. Ignatius of Loyola suggested this as a way of meditation. As things begin to get hectic with back to school demands—or any time—it’s renewing and refreshing for one’s spirit to go back in imagination to a Biblical scene and listen and learn at the feet of the greatest teacher of them all.

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