

GIVING UP GOLD FOR GOD

THE VOCATION STORY OF DEACON JAMES BORIC

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In 2006, over the span of just five months, Deacon James Boric went from being a non-practicing Catholic to a seminarian for the Archdiocese of Baltimore. His is a story of overnight conversion, of near-miraculous signs, and the enduring power of friendship.

Deacon James describes growing up in a typical Catholic family, going to Mass every Sunday with his parents, brother, and two sisters. His father worked for Proctor & Gamble, and the family moved frequently. Beginning when James was 14 years old, they lived in Stockholm, Sweden for two years.

While in Europe, the family had the opportunity to visit the shrine of Padre Pio in San Giovanni Rotunda. “It was amazing to see the incredibly holy life that Padre Pio lived,” remembers Deacon James. “You see this guy who suffered joyfully, willingly. Even as kid that struck me,” he said. At the time, the idea of becoming a priest seemed attractive.

When the family moved back to the States, James enrolled in Calvert Hall College High School where he excelled as a student. It was there that he met a lifetime friend, Pat Peach, who, as it turned out later, would be the key to James’ vocation.

“In my later teen years, any passing thought of priesthood faded away,” says Deacon James. Not long after, he stopped practicing the faith altogether. He attended Indiana University, where he majored in history and minored in business.

Back in Baltimore after graduation, he found himself working for a small financial firm called Agora Financial. “Honestly, it was a great gig,” said Deacon James. In essence, the company researched small publicly-traded companies and published their results for investors. “It was a very entrepreneurial company. I started off as an editor’s assistant, basically doing research for these investment newsletters that we published.”

Then came his big break. “They were going to sell one of their underperforming newsletters, one that dealt with the metals markets. So I asked them to give me a shot at turning it around. Long story short, I did. I was a research guy, and saw the writing on the wall that silver and gold were going to rise.”

But even with a terrific income, a girlfriend, and a nice car, James wasn’t happy. “There was definitely something missing in my life,” he said.

While James had drifted away from the faith, his best friend Pat was moving the opposite way, becoming a seminarian for Baltimore and studying in Rome. “When he would come home, we would talk the whole summer. I was asking tons of questions; I was intrigued by what he was doing,” said Deacon James. “I’ll never forget, he pulled me aside one day, and said, ‘You would make a great priest.’” But James wasn’t interested. He wasn’t even attending Mass.

Then came Pat’s ordination day. “I was bored to tears during the ordination,” admits Deacon James. But God works in mysterious ways—and it was at the reception afterward when the Spirit struck.

“So the after-party was winding down and it was just me and Pat’s family members left at the house,” remembers Deacon James. “One of his sisters comes up to me and says, ‘No one has been to Fr. Pat for confession yet. We’re his family members, so we’re not going to him. So it’s got to be you.’”

A word of explanation is in order: there’s an old Catholic tradition that after a priest’s first Mass (normally the day after ordination), the new priest gives the stole he was wearing during his first confession to his father. But Fr. Pat hadn’t heard his first confession yet—and his first Mass was the next morning, just hours away.

“So I found myself in this rental car with my best friend, going to confession literally for the first time in five or six years,” said Deacon James. “It was horribly miserable and awkward. Believe me, he didn’t make it easy on me. It was just ridiculous!” But it was a genuine turning point.

At Mass the next morning, recounts Deacon James, he sat in the back of the church. With the organ playing the opening hymn, he turned around and saw his friend process down the aisle for the first time as a priest. “He’s a short guy, and his smile seemed bigger than he was!” he said.

At that very moment, James heard Christ speak to his heart. “Call me crazy, but I heard as clear as day, ‘I have been calling you for a long time. See how happy he is? Will you finally do it? Will you be My priest?’”

When James heard this, he made a deal with God that he would go to daily Mass if God would make it crystal-clear that he was called to priesthood. And that’s when things really started to accelerate.

“Starting at the very first daily Mass, the first homily was about answering God’s call,” said Deacon James. He was amazed. “It just kept happening, over and over again. I would have questions that I would ask God in my heart, and literally the priest in his homily would address that exact question. I mean, there’s no way to make this stuff up!”

Shortly after his friend’s ordination, they attended an Orioles game with Msgr. Joseph Luca. At this point, James had not breathed a word to anyone about the call he had received during Mass. At a delay in the game, Fr. Pat went to the concessions for refreshments, leaving James alone with Msgr. Luca. The older

priest turned to him and asked, “May I ask you a personal question? Have you ever thought about becoming a priest?” James, a bit flustered, responded, “I’ll answer that question, but not in the middle of Camden Yards!”

The brief exchange led to weekly meetings with Msgr. Luca—then, just a few short months later, to his acceptance as a seminarian. “I couldn’t believe how quickly things were moving. People thought I was nuts!” said Deacon James.

Accepted too late in the year to actually enroll in seminary, James moved into the rectory at St. Louis Parish, where he lived and worked with Msgr. Luca. “That was fantastic experience,” said Deacon James. “I thought the priesthood was easy, that you just said Mass on weekends and heard confessions. But when I saw how much Monsignor did, I was blown away. I mean, I thought of myself as having a strong work ethic, but Monsignor worked so hard it was amazing.”

After seven years at Mount St. Mary’s Seminary, Deacon James is just six months away from his own ordination—and hearing his own first confession.

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