

Rev. Ricardo Escalante

Vocation Story



Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Parish
5020 Sherwood Drive, Regina SK

and V. Rev. Lorne Crozon, V.G. (Pastor)

WELCOMES

FATHER RICARDO ESCALANTE

Appointed as Associate Pastor
by Archbishop Donald Bolen
effective October 1, 2020

There's a wonderful kids' movie by Disney made a few years ago, directed by the famous Shakespearean actor Kenneth Branagh, and featuring the eccentric Helena Bonham-Carter as the fairy godmother, and Cate Blanchett as the evil step mother. I recommend it to all parents for their kids. It's the best kids' movie I have ever seen. By that I mean that it's message is extremely Christian, even though not overtly so. At the beginning of the movie, as Cinderella's mother lays dying, she calls Cinderella and gives her some advice, which is: "have courage and be kind . . . Where there is kindness, there is goodness, and where there is goodness, there is magic."

My vocation really starts with goodness: the magical and indeed seductive power of goodness!

I can't say exactly at what age, but I do think that I am correct when I say that, like all children, as a child I was struck by and indeed attracted to the people around me who radiated goodness: starting in my immediate family (my mother's example left a strong mark on me), and then moving on to the wider world. At some point I realized that "being good" was one of the most important things in

the world. Of course at that point I did not make the connection to God: that God is the source of all goodness. I just had the intuition that the world would be a better place if everyone was good. By goodness, I mean of course, kindness, gentleness, but I also mean honesty. At a very young age the idea of truth was important to me: insincerity . . . duplicity . . . hypocrisy have always been that against which I have rebelled.

Let me state that the people who I am referring to were not particularly "religious". My parents went to Mass on a Sunday, but not every Sunday. I suspect they only started going to Mass every Sunday to accompany us, their children. But my mother did have an uncommon sense of social justice: Trinidad is a multicultural and multiracial country, even more so than Canada, and my mother always insisted that we remember the poor, those who were less fortunate than we were. After life, it was her greatest gift to us.

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As I entered into adulthood, the importance of being good remained. Which is not to say that I am always good. But I certainly try to be so.

As a child I had always read a lot (my parents had a well-stocked library!), and at some point I started to read writers who were less than ideal. These writers (Carl Jung and Erich Fromm were two who made an impression on me), coupled with the sudden death of my mother when I was 17, and the imprudent decision of a priest after her death, led me to the conviction that, while goodness was all that matters, (it has been the one constant in my entire life), one really didn't need God to be good . . . One could be so by virtue of one's strength of will. Without knowing it, I had indeed become what today we now call a secular humanist.

My mother died when I was 17, and I was saddled with responsibilities that, at the time, were overwhelming.

But after a while I realized that this experiment was not working: not only was I not happy, (I also believe that we were created to be happy) but that I was not the better person that I thought I could be through my own strength of will. It was certainly the most difficult time of my life. With my mother's sudden death I had assumed much of the responsibility for looking after my younger siblings. I decided to give religion one more try, but this time in earnest, with the attempt to understand everything rationally.

With the help of a priest I started praying every day, attending Mass every day, and reading the teachings of the Church voraciously, and with an extremely critical eye. I needed to understand everything.

At that time, I was studying to be a lawyer, something I entered into because I just wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I worked as a lawyer for ten years, and never liked it. Completely boring!!! But I do not regret doing it, primarily because it gave me the financial means to fulfill my responsibilities towards my family.

It was during this time, first as a law student and then as a lawyer, that my relationship with Christ, with the church deepened. By that time I had left my country for a better paying job which enabled me to help my family. I remember clearly making a deal with God: I told him that if he would find me a job whereby I could make enough money to help my brother and sister, I would never ask him for any favours again. He fulfilled his part of the deal: I didn't: I still ask him for favours.

Being away from my family was at first very difficult for me. So I became much more involved in the church (preparing the kids for Confirmation, for example). I also began doing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius once a week every year, under the guidance of a spiritual director.

But perhaps the greatest gift I received was when the parish priest of the church I attended, knowing that normally I arrived at 6 in the morning to pray (I have always been a morning person), gave me the key to the church with the duty to open it every morning when I arrived. I was delighted!

It was here that my habit of daily meditation developed. This has become a necessity for me: an anchor without which I would feel lost. In fact, I remain faithful to the recommendation of a Jesuit priest who told me: "Ricardo, morning prayer for you is the key to your life. Keep it up, and everything will be fine."

And it was here, in the silence of the church where I was alone until 7.30, it's there where for the first time I heard a call to be a Priest.

"Ricardo, morning prayer for you is the key to your life. Keep it up, and everything will be fine."

I told the Bishop of the Diocese who knew me very well, and, since I was already used to doing the Spiritual Exercises a week every year, he recommended that I do the month-long Jesuit Spiritual Exercises, in Guelph, Canada. I did it (Just imagine: I could not read *The Economist* for 5 weeks!), And this confirmed my call to the priesthood.

God gave me the chance to study in Rome, which I had never imagined in my wildest dreams.

How I arrived in Regina was after I was living and working in Vancouver, and went to Rome to study philosophy. Eventually, the rector of the college where I lived, an old Dominican priest, asked me to be his assistant. It meant that I would only have to pay a quarter of the rent.

During that time the Auxiliary Bishop of Toronto, Daniel Bohan, was appointed Archbishop of Regina. He had come to Rome to receive the Pallium, but unfortunately there was an error with the reservations at the place where he was supposed to stay. Since he knew the rector of my college, called him in desperation for a room.

My rector offered him the guest room, and he spent a week at my college. Since I was the rector's assistant, it was my job to see that all was well with him. The rector told him about me, and eventually he asked me to become a seminarian for the Archdiocese of Regina. This (the fact that the rector suggested to him that I would be a good priest for his diocese) the Archbishop himself told me only before his death. Archbishop Bohan also introduced me to the then Fr. Donald Bolen, who was working in Rome at the time.

Let me return to the movie *Cinderella*: there is perhaps the key scene in the movie, when her stepsisters and step mother are particularly cruel to her, and she exclaims in tears to her mother that she can't, that she no longer has the courage to be good . . . She does not "believe anymore!!!" In other words, being good is too difficult for her. The viciousness, the cruelty of the world has crushed her innocence . . . Has momentarily broken her resolve. The scene is reminiscent of Jesus and the agony in the garden, when he asks his Father, that, if he can, take this cup from me, but, he adds, not my will, but thy will be done.

And while *Cinderella* is crying, an old, stooped, troll-like figure interrupts her and asks for a cup of milk. *Cinderella* initially recoils in fear or perhaps even in disgust, because the figure that asks for milk is not beautifully attired, does not look like a Hollywood movie star, but instead is what some might call ugly, certainly filthy.

But *Cinderella* is good, is kind, so she steadies herself, and goes and gets the old woman the cup of milk. That is, she comes out of herself, from the self-absorption with her own problems, which admittedly are quite grave, to serve, to encounter the other, to help someone less fortunate than she is. And it is precisely here, it is in going out of herself, in serving, that she finds her true self. And as she hands the old woman, who is in fact her fairy godmother, as she hands her the cup of milk, the old woman asks *Cinderella*, "why are you crying?" And *Cinderella* replies, "it's nothing." To which the fairy godmother replies, "indeed: what's a bowl of milk??? Nothing! But kindness, kindness makes it everything!"

Life is not easy!!! The cross is not easy. But God helps us to carry our crosses!!!!

God is more generous than we can imagine. Yes, it is true that my mother died when I was 17, and I was saddled with responsibilities that at the time were overwhelming. But let's be honest, I was only doing what God expected me to do, and, with His help, I got through it.

And God gave me more than I asked for. All I asked was for a job whereby I could help my family . . . He did that, and, in addition . . . He gave me the chance to study in Rome, which I had never imagined in my wildest dreams. Yes: 10 years as a lawyer, in a job I didn't like . . . But over 15 years studying philosophy and theology in Rome . . .

How many people have that privilege??? I would do it all over again! And, perhaps most important of all, he led me to the two thinkers who have shaped my thinking, the English historian and philosopher of history Christopher Dawson, and Pope Benedict XVI, on whom I was writing my doctorate.

For someone for whom truth is so important, it's a priceless gift!

Allow me to end with the words of wisdom of Pope Benedict XVI. He asks the following question: given that the church in the past has said things which have proven to be false, and done things which embarrasses and even scandalizes us (the pedophilia scandal, for example), how then can we have faith, how can we believe in the truth of what she says.

He answers his own question by directing us to the lives of the saints, the splendor of holiness of the people within the church . . . This is the real justification of the truth of our faith, more so than any of the theological or philosophical reasons our mind can construct.

Certainly it was this that sustained me in my journey: reading the lives of the saints, those men and women who, despite it all . . . Despite the crosses they had to bear . . . Despite the injustice they may have received at the hands of the very church which they loved so much . . . They persevered . . . They refused to let themselves be separated from the guiding hand of Jesus . . . In the end they continued to believe in the magical and seductive power of goodness . . .



Archbishop Daniel Bohan instituted Ricardo Escalante as Lector and Acolyte, the first two steps on the road to ordination at St. Michael's Retreat, Lumsden (May 8, 2015). Archbishop Bohan died January 15, 2016.

*The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Regina
will gather in joy and Thanksgiving for the*

Ordination of

Ricardo Escalante

*to the Sacred Order
of the
Priesthood*

**7:00 p.m.
Friday, November 30, 2018
Holy Rosary Cathedral
3125 - 13th Avenue**