

SO, WHO AM I?

Q: DEAR FATHER FRANCIS, WELCOME TO *PARABLE*! WE ARE GLAD TO HAVE YOU JOIN US! OUR READERS ARE CURIOUS ABOUT WHO YOU ARE – COULD YOU PLEASE TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF?



A: Dear friends, I am honored to join the *Parable* family! As an avid reader of each issue since I came to New Hampshire nearly nine years ago, I have appreciated the beautiful reflections, insights and lessons in these pages. I only hope I can match the quality of my new colleagues. I also pay tribute to my predecessor in this column, Father Michael Kerper. When I told folks I was taking on this new ministry, many asked if I was replacing Father Kerper, to which I politely said to them that he is irreplaceable. However, I aspire to imitate his clarity and pastoral sense.

So, who am I? That is an excellent question and one that has many answers. My favorite instance of this question is found in the *Book of Exodus*. Moses encounters a bush that, though it “was on fire, it was not being consumed.” From the bush comes the voice of the Lord God. Moses is given his great commission to go into Egypt and free the Israelites from slavery. Moses, anticipating the skepticism of his people, and likely curious himself, asks the Lord, “If I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what do I tell them?” The Lord replies saying, “I am who I am.” Then he adds: “This is what you will tell the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.”

At first, this may seem like a non-answer. Imagine it, for example, on someone’s nametag. But the Lord is not speaking in an idiom for the sake of being deliberately confusing. His reply provides a deep and profound

answer to His identity. With the words, “I am who I am,” He is telling Moses and us that his essence is being itself. In a sermon about this passage, St. Augustine writes, “O God, O Lord of ours, what are you called? ‘I am called He-is,’ he said. What does it mean I am called He-is? ‘That I abide forever, that I cannot change.’”

So who am I? Allow me to respond with the first two words our Lord spoke to Moses. I AM . . .

A Son and Brother. I am the son of Phil and Rita and the brother of Margaret, Connor, Moira, Maeve and Philip. I grew up in Manville, Rhode Island, in a home built by my great-great grandparents when they emigrated to the United States from Quebec in the late 1800s. Manville is a small village, about a square mile, in the town of Lincoln. Our home was in the shadow of our parish church, St. James. Much of our lives involved our parish community and surrounding neighborhood. Growing up in that tight-knit community, I realized that the Church is composed of all different kinds of people, each with their own role to play in the plan of God’s providence. Our home was indeed a “domestic church.” My parents made it a point to ensure that their six children were intellectually educated in the faith, but they were determined that in addition to being able to “talk the talk,” we were willing to “walk the walk.”

An Educator. I received my high school diploma from Mount Saint Charles Academy in Woonsocket, Rhode Island. Never in my wildest dreams would I have thought I would return there five years after graduation

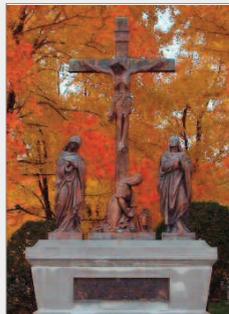
to join the faculty. I taught theology and computer science to outstanding students in grades seven through 12. In the 4½ years teaching there, I discovered just how important Catholic education is to me. During that time, I also began to discern seriously my vocation as a Benedictine monk and Catholic priest. As a teacher, I learned a lot about myself, about pastoral ministry and about the importance of education.

A Benedictine Monk. I entered the monastic community at Saint Anselm Abbey in Manchester in 2015. I am a proud 2010 alumnus of Saint Anselm College. After some years away from Saint Anselm, I discerned that the Lord was calling me back there, this time not as an undergraduate student but instead as a member of the monastic community. I live in a community with 30 other men, all of us called by God to live according to the Rule of Saint Benedict and to serve the Church and our local community. Our community's apostolate is Saint Anselm College, which began when monks from Newark, New Jersey, came to New Hampshire at the invitation of Bishop Denis Bradley, the first bishop of Manchester. I serve at Saint Anselm College as the Assistant Director of Campus Ministry, assisting our students in their own search for the Lord.

A Catholic Priest. One of the best days of my life came on Sept. 3, 2022, when I was ordained a priest by Bishop Peter Libasci in the Saint Anselm Abbey Church. My two confreres, Titus and Basil, were ordained deacons alongside me. While that day was the culmination of much study and prayer, it also marked the beginning of a new chapter of service to the people of God. I love being a priest. For me, the priesthood is a vocation best summed up as a ministry of servant leadership. Priests serve the people of God by leading them toward our heavenly homeland, not just by pointing the way, but walking the way alongside our fellow pilgrims; trying, as Phil and Rita would have it, to walk the walk, to lead by the way we live our lives.

A Columnist. A new part of my identity! Dear readers, I sincerely hope that my first column for *Parable* has given you an insight into who I am and the faith that we share. I look forward to your questions, and have titled my column a question I often hear: "Hey Father, do you have a minute?" Yes, I do. Let's walk together. And while we start our journey together, let me share my favorite Latin phrase that I hope will define our relationship: "Oremus Pro Invicem," which means "Let us pray for one another." Until next time. ■

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