

“The Story?”

Men’s Conference at St. Peter’s III

With your permission Lord...

In 1995, **Oliver Stone** directed a biographical film on one of America's most controversial, past Presidents.

The movie opens with *a quote* taken from the Gospels. A quote that sets the stage for the life lived behind the man name **RICHARD NIXON**:

"What will it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul..."

Ten years later, in 2005, Director **Philip Groning** released a documentary film entitled:

"INTO GREAT SILENCE." This film also opens with a quote taken from the Scriptures. This one is from the Prophet Jeremiah and it’s a line that sets the stage for not only for **Carthusian Monks** residing high up in the **French Alps – but I’d say FOR MYSELF and for anyone else that has been tracked down by the Hound of Heaven...**

"YOU SEDUCED ME, OH LORD, and I WAS SEDUCED..."

There we have before us two extreme ends of the spectrum when it comes to examining the story that makes up who we are in light of what's at work – even at this very moment – what's at work inside each **one of our own hearts**.

In the life of **Richard Nixon**, we hear the story about someone *who fell pray to the SEDUCTION of power and wealth*. In the life of those who have embraced following the will of God for their lives, we hear stories of those *who fell pray to the SEDUCTION of forgoing the world* in order to “**seek God alone...**”

Here's the thing:

IN LIFE we will be seduced by one love or another... There’s an **age-old maxim among the saints that goes like this: WHEN IT COMES TO THE SPIRITUAL WORLD, WE NEVER STANDS STILL!!** Either we are advancing closer to God or receding farther away from him. Each and every one of us **at this very moment IS BEING SEDUCED** by either the *enduring Spirit* of God or by the passing *things* of this world...

St. Gregory the Great once said:

"Our Eternal Salvation depends principally on embracing the state to which God has called us". For the person who makes a mistake in their Vocation mistakes the way that has been set out for him by God to attain everlasting life...

In the end, I guess **ONLY TIME WILL TELL** if each one of us here in this room will have come to live out our lives following the right path – carving out the right story that was intended by God for us to live from the moment he conceived us within our mother's womb's. But at this very moment, one thing is certain: the Holy Spirit has been working in such a way so that **all of our paths might intersect at THIS POINT IN TIME**.

So why is it so important for a man to **PONDER HIS LIFE STORY**? Why should one seek out silence and contemplate the passages of life's events that we, as men, chose to walk through – **chose to experience things, places, events, and people** – who have all contributed to shape and carve out our individual story?

Why is this **SO IMPORTANT**?

I've asked myself this question many times throughout the course of my own life story and the answer that keeps popping up over the radar of contemplation is this: **"My son - what is it that's ultimately at stake..."**

What's ultimately at stake is what is revealed to us by means of **the encounter that Jesus had with The Rich Young Man**. Just to set the scene for you, were told that Jesus was setting out on a journey when this man ran up to him now down before him and asked him this question from a position of submission and worship:

"*Good Master, what **must I do**, to have Eternal Life?*" (Notice the question, the "I", not "We, or 'all people'") Jesus takes the time to run through the list of the commandments with him only to have the young man reply: "*Master, I have kept all of these since my earliest of days.*"

We are told that at that moment, **Jesus looked steadily at him and he was *filled with love for him!***

"You need to do one more thing... Go and sell what you own, give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then **COME and FOLLOW ME...**"

Our Lord, rather than go through each of the commandments and invite the young man to sell his possessions, could have shortened up his answer and simply replied, "**For you my son... for you to have Eternal life, YOU MUST COME and follow me...**"

How many times throughout the course of your life – of my life – have we, just like the young man, asked our Lord to give us a sign: "***O God, if you could just somehow tell me what I'm supposed to do with my life, tell me what my vocation is, tell me what I'm supposed to do – then I'll do it...***"

If there's one truth profoundly revealed to us by means of the gospel passage or just referenced, it's that **EVEN IF GOD HIMSELF WAS TO STAND BEFORE US**, as he did in the person of Jesus Christ in front of that young man nearly 2000 years ago, and tell us **exactly what we MUST DO to have eternal life** - many of us would follow in the footsteps of the young man and go away sorrowful; for we have many a great possessions...

For indeed, every man in this church here tonight is **BLESSED BEYOND BELIEF!** For here we are: **living in Canada**, without a doubt the greatest country of this planet, not only that, but we also **live in the richest province of that country**, and in the '**fastest-growing opportunity filled**' city of that Province...

What that means is this: *whatever desire you have burning in your heart at this time – be it good, evil, neutral, or charged with passion – whatever your heart's desire may be: at any time of day or night, it simply there for the taking...* Scientifically speaking, Calgarians ought to be the happiest people on earth!

But that's not so now is it. And that's because as St. Augustine has captured so eloquently:

"Our hearts are restless O Lord, until they rest in you..." 2x

.....

As for me, the way life turned out, I ended up moving out from home at 17 years of age and entering the workforce straight out of High School. While I had no idea how the story of my life was going to work itself out, the one thing I did know back then was at the next chapter of my existence in this world was entitled: "**ACHIEVING SUCCESS - NO MATTER THE COST**" and I emphasize, '*no matter the cost!*'

I mean, I'd even conjured up my own Definition of Success by which I lived by – "**To Have The Strength And The Courage To Finish, To Arrive, And To Continue...**"

By the time I was 24 years old, I had gone from working for Public Works in Canmore, to being a Personal Trainer, to being part-owner manager of a gym, to operating heavy equipment, to selling cars, to being the foreman of a construction company, to establishing a fund-raising company. **OH YEAH, and by the way I was also engaged for nearly a year and a half before realizing that our relationship was a façade with no foundation for the future...**

From 17 to 24 years of age, that's seven years of life... The one thing I did do year in and year out was **take a pause in order to enter the world of contemplation and reflection**. And while I sure wasn't making it to Mass much during those days, I would still ask our Lord in prayer: "***Is this it Lord, have I made it? Am I where I am supposed to be for the rest of my life?***" Every time and without fail: this emptiness would fill my heart and mind. The one thing I knew for certain at the age of 24 was this:

For the more I sought "success in the world", the more I found "*emptiness in my heart...*"

And so it came to pass during my 24th year in this world living in a small apartment on the Red Mile, after realizing that I was nowhere near accomplishing what I thought I should have accomplished by then in life, that I figured it was time to have a "one on one" with our Lord.

And so one night, I did what I call a "**REVIEW OF LIFE**". It's where you take stock of who you are, what you've accomplished in the world, and how that reality registers with who you believe yourself to be.

Disappointed and somewhat disheartened by the reality of how things were, I turned to our Lord in prayer and I said to him out loud:

"You know what Lord, I don't know what it is that you want from me. All I know is that I've been living this life for myself long enough without ever finding where it is that I'm supposed to be, and I'm tired. So here's the deal, I'm giving my life back to you to do with it whatever you want. After all, this life was never mine to begin with since I didn't create it – it's always been yours. So do with me whatever you want, all that I'm asking you is this, ***you just get me there***, wherever it is that you want me to be..."

That very moment, a PEACE I'd never known or experienced before came flooding through my entire being...

Over the course of the next three months something **very confusing** began to take shape deep within me. By way of reflecting on those early months, I guess if I had to spelling out in words what was happening within me I would simply call it is some type of 'SPIRITUAL AWAKENING WITHIN.'

Following these experiences, the only thing I knew for certain was that somehow, the one thing which I had breathed and lived for, "**SUCCESS**", I **no longer cared for... all I desired was Internal PEACE and I could find it nowhere...**

And so I called up my parents and I asked them if I could come home for maybe six months or year to just figure things out. To get my feet back on the ground... **I packed up my stuff and moved back in to my parents mobile home in Canmore in the Restwell Trailer Park**. As I was unpacking some boxes in my room, my mom walked in and said: "*You decided to come back here of your own free will.*"

I responded: "***Yeah, and so what?***"

"*You know the rules to this house – you live underneath this roof – you're coming to church on Sunday.*"

"YEAH MOM, yeah..." By the time I was 24, I'd also learned that it was just easier sometimes to go with the way things role with mom and dad. **By then, it'd been approximately 4 months since I've had that talk with Jesus in my mind was consumed in the daytime with trying to understand who the Holy Spirit was... Trying to comprehend the meaning behind the man Jesus...**

My mind was BENT UPON THESE THOUGHTS and questions every waking moment. Meanwhile, while I slept that night, for weeks on end I had been dreaming of biblical scenes unfolding before my eyes. It was as though I stood sometimes upon a hilltop and watched as events unfolded before me. I told no one of this for I just figured it was part of growing-up.

That SUNDAY MORNING: the moment I walked through the doors of that little Sacred Heart Church in Canmore, a deep peace settled within me! I thought to myself: "**I don't know what it is, and I don't care – it's just good for me to be here...**" Now the priest presiding was from Ontario and he was replacing our Pastor for he was having heart surgery. I had never seen him before, nor had he seen me.

The following week I ended up returning to Mass by myself! Cause it was the only place that I felt any peace. The replacement priesthood given a great homily so as I was walking out, I shook his hand and thanked him for the message. He looked me straight in the eyes and said: "**You and I have to talk, you can come see me this week, or next weekend after mass. Either way we need to sit down and talk.**"

I said – "**OK, I'll see you next Saturday night.**"

That week, the unceasing thoughts and dreams of biblical realities escalated to a whole new level of intensity. So much so that I remember the Thursday night before that Saturday waking up at about 3:30 in the morning – and I was mad – as I was walking to the kitchen for a glass of milk I said out loud: "**GOD – JUST LEAVE ME ALONE!!! That's enough... Just go!**"

From the moment I fell back asleep to when I woke a few hours later, **DEMONIC PRESENCES** filled my dreams in ways that I still remember to this day... upon waking out of that state, I humbly asked – **or I should say, I begged** – our Lord to come back... From that day onwards I realized that either one Master rules over us or another. Either we are under the rule of Jesus Christ or we are under the rule of Lucifer.

.....
The following week after Mass, we met outside the church, we walked over to his car. He unlocked passenger door for me, I got in, he went around the other side, opened his door got in and sat down. Then, he turned to me and said; "**So, when did it start?**"

I answered, "Well I guess I'm supposed to be here now talking to you aren't I?"

Then he goes on to drop this on me: "**The moment you walked into church a few weeks ago when I looked into your eyes, I knew exactly what was happening – but I wanted to wait just to make sure – God has allowed to reveal himself to you in a very powerful way... And I'm not can it tell you what you need to do with that, I'm just gonna help you deal with that.**"

And so we drove around town for about 40 minutes while I what on to tell him what I had been living through for the past four months.

.....
Thus began my CONSCIOUS AWARENESS of a call from our Lord being made present within my life.

Well let me assure you, that as I started becoming consciously aware that whatever was happening to me was not stopping – as I began to realize that **WHATEVER THIS WAS, it was gonna demand something from me... I began to fight it!!** When even the thought that perhaps I was being called to even contemplate the possibility that perhaps I might have to discern the priesthood, the feelings I experienced, I cannot put into words.

Because you see, as far as I was concerned, becoming a priest was the **GREATEST FAILURE that a man could embrace with his life**. Here's what I mean by that – when I was 16 years old I remember once watching Easter celebrations on the news. And as they were showing priest at mass flying incense and parading around I thought to myself:

"Look at these guys! What ever happened to these guys to make them want to quit? They couldn't make it in life – couldn't make a name for themselves in the world, couldn't find some woman to marry them – and so now here they are hiding behind the robes!! Quitters!"

Add to that thought, which by the way is still predominant in secular circles, the idea that all PRIESTS **MUST BE GAY** for why else would you choose not to get married? And we're not done just yet, add to that the **clergy sex abuse scandals** whereby now, according to the worldview, priests are pretty much **ALL LABELED AS PEDOPHILES** – and there you have it!

My worldview at the time – a world view that is shared by many people of today: to be a priest **IS** to be the ultimate failure – **the ULTIMATE WASTED LIFE...**

And so I fought – and **I fought hard to extinguish the anguish within!!!** When at home, I would pace back-and-forth from the kitchen to the living room staring at the floor thinking about how I could make all this go away. Just then, my mom walked in and said: "*Jerome, what are you doing?*"

"Mom, if I could grab my lower jaw with one hand and my upper jaw with the other, I just want to pull my jaws apart over my head and throughout my entire body so as to break out of myself screaming! So that all of this could just end!!!"

She then responded: "*Well Jerome, it's not hard to figure out, God has come to claim you...*" looked at her. **"What are you talking about?"**

Mother - praying for children, two years, candle at mass, 2 boys three years apart... 1st one belongs to you... As history would have it, I'm the eldest of two boys in my family; my brother is three years younger than me. My parents never used birth control and as much as they tried, the never conceived another child because my mother developed a condition within her womb that made it impossible for her to conceive ...

GOD HAS COME TO CLAIM YOU...

So.... **WHAT'S YOUR STORY???** The reason why I shared my story with you is because remembering our stories helps us put things in their proper perspective. And the proper perspective when it comes to any human life whatsoever is this:

...My life is not about me...

For you see, on my mother's side of the family, for the past four generations we have had Vocations to the religious life. They had been blessed with four nuns and one brother, but what they really wanted, was for someone to receive a vocation to the priesthood. It is not that I am any more special than anyone else in the family, but rather that the prayers of the **faithful people of God stormed the Heavens** to the point where our Lord granted their request ...

...My life is not about me...

YOUR LIFE – despite what the world, media, FB, Twitter, your friends, your parents will tell you – **YOUR LIFE is NOT ABOUT YOU!!!** It's about **how we bear witness to the one who breathed us into being with the time that we have allotted on this earth.**

A very **SELECT FEW** of us will bear witness to him through the Priesthood while most of you men out there will bear witness to him through the way you live out you're married vocation as a **HUSBAND** and a **FATHER.**

To all of you out there who are married, I offer you the advice that my Father wrote to me in the last birthday card I received from him before he died with regard to my own Vocation: "**Son, be like a freight train – for there is no going back to yesterday: only forward to tomorrow.**"

In other words, those of you who have boarded upon the 'Marital Train', just as I have boarded upon the train of Holy Orders: **WE ALL MUST NEVER LOOK BACK!!**

We shouldn't even bother to look sideways at the exit tracks that are continually popping up before us that lead into **a foreign town** – a town and an experience that was never meant to be on your destination map in the first place!

For the only DESTINATION MAP that matters in your life is the one you were handed on the day of your marriage as you took your vows before God, the Angels, and all the Saints in Heaven as you stated:

**"I take you to be my wife.
I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad,
In sickness and in health...
I will love you and honor you all the days of my life..."**

Those PROMISES my brothers, like the ones I made on the day of my Ordination, are promises that we all will be held accountable to on the day of DAYS! Those promises have set the parameters for how **YOUR STORY** is meant unfold throughout the course of your day's on earth.

As for me, it took well over a year and a half of **pondering, struggling, discerning**, and flat out *questioning* God and the manifestation of His Will for me in life before I he mustered up enough courage take the plunge and enter into the Seminary...

Looking back now, if I had to boil down **everything I've learned and experienced** over the chapters of my life story since the time I was 24 – which means over the last 16 years – I would sum it all up with the **awe-inspiring words** from Hebrews 10:31

"It is a Great and a TERRIBLE THING to fall into the hands of the living God..."

And yet for all of that, I wouldn't trade a minute of **MY LIFE STORY** for any other experience out there because at the end of the day, to live walking – and sometimes stumbling – RIGHT alongside the edge of the precipice that cascades countless souls into the Depths of Hell while keeping one's eyes focused in Hope on the distant horizon seeking to guide souls towards the Shores of Heaven – TO WALK THAT RAZOR'S EDGE EACH AND EVERY DAY – is as good as it gets for any man seeking to live a life of incalculable purpose and meaning.

One more thing I want to share with you...

A few months after I had arrived in seminary, this one night, **I had a dream**. In this dream, which to this day I remember clear as day, I found myself running as fast as I could up the stairs that led to the library when suddenly, other seminarians stopped me in my tracks and they asked me:

"Hey, where are you going in such a hurry?"

Without even having to think about it, an automatic response came out of my mouth: **"I'm going to the Library to read the Rule of St. Benedict. I'm going to read it – and I'm going to know it."**

Without even giving them the time to respond, I quickly turned around and continued running up the stairs...

Suddenly – I woke up like a bolt of lightning sitting up in bed and I thought to myself. ***What a strange dream!***
And then of course, without missing a beat: I went back to sleep.

Well by the afternoon the following day, as I was looking over the readings that had to be done, I realized that I had to get myself over to the library in order to photocopy what I needed. I went over there, pulled off the necessary material from the Reserve Course Shelf and began making my way through it.

As it turned out, one of the articles that I was supposed to research was taken from the **"Rule of St. Benedict"**. With lightning-like speed, ***the entirety of the dream I had just had the night before rolled within my innermind...***

With one of the strangest feelings flowing through my body, I cracked open **The Rule** and read the following words...

“LISTEN CAREFULLY, my son, to the Master’s instructions,
and attend to them with the ear of your heart.
This is advice from a Father who loves you;
welcome it, and faithfully put it into practice.
The labor of **OBEDIENCE** will bring you back to Him
from whom you had drifted through the sloth of disobedience.
This message of mine is for you; then,
if you are ready to **GIVE UP YOUR OWN WILL**,
once and for all,
and armed with the strong and noble weapons of obedience
to **DO BATTLE** for the True King, Christ the LORD...” Saint Benedict

Listen Carefully... Obey.... Give Up Your Own Will... Do Battle...

And as I read each word of the PROLOGUE: I could literally feel within me, within my soul what seemed like an invisible three-pronged fishing hook with the barbs still attached to it – **being ever so slowly drawn by an invisible line that reached into the heavens** – as I spiritually felt the hooks penetrate and embed themselves within the heart of my soul in such a way that I knew then, like I know now, that those words were not only meant for me at that very moment – but that **they would FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE serve as my Grounding Anchor...**

Listen Carefully... Obey.... Give Up Your Own Will... Do Battle...

Those words my brothers, **will mean different things for different hearts...** One thing’s for sure, those words are applicable to every man, in every life situation, living out every Vocation: Religious life, Married life, the Single life...

Because like it or not, every day, **we’re all walking along the edge of the precipice that leads to the depths of eternal alienation from God while keeping our eyes focused upon the shores of the kingdom in the distant horizon...**

Like it or not, **each and every day**, you and I are building up in writing for ourselves: **“Our Story...”**

In the end, we have been warned and we have been told that the day of the Lord's return is imminent. On that day we will see:

"A Great White Throne and the ONE sitting on it. In his presence, Earth and Sky will vanish without a trace. We will see the dead, great and small alike, standing in front of his throne while the books are opened...

On that day of DAYS, another book will be opened, **THE BOOK OF LIFE**, and we will be judged from what is written in that book - as our deeds deserve.” (Revelation 20: 11-12)

If there's just one thing to walk away from this talk with, it's this: live out your lives doing what you know you must to make sure that **YOUR STORY** is written in such a way that it will be found in the **Book of Life** by the one who is to come to judge the living and the dead.

But in order for that to happen, we all must heed the words of St. Benedict:

Listen Carefully... Obey.... Give Up Your Own Will... Do Battle for the TRUE KING Christ the Lord...