

Holy Fire Transcripts:

Witness Talk during Proclamation Movement: Taylor

Hello, my name is Taylor Schergen and I am a sophomore at De La Salle Institute. I am a Lasallian Youth Leader, I play basketball, run cross country, and I'm a member of student council and SADD club.

A personal relationship with God can be very important to people. This personal relationship with God has made my life more full by knowing God will love me for the good and the bad parts of my life. I know that God will be proud of me for the good that I will do in the world, but I also trust that he will love me just the same when I make mistakes.

This deep realization has changed the way I view things in the world. When I was younger I did CCD, and I did not believe in anything they said. I actually thought they were getting paid just to tell us a bunch of lies! I thought it was insane that they thought I could believe in that stuff.

But then, eventually, I felt like I was having a conversation with God. And this made me change the way I felt about my religion, and even dig deeper into my religion. I was able to change how I felt about God, and about how he loves everyone for the good, and even the bad. Knowing I will be loved by God, no matter what, helped me to realize that I need to live in the moment and do the right things because I am living in his love.

You might wonder, "How is God with me? How do I know God really loves me?" With my experience with God, I know God is with me and will be there for my good times and bad times. And I know that God is with you through all your good and bad times too!

My great Uncle George was the best uncle out there. He always took my younger brother and I out on these funny days; he got us food and took us to the park. Sadly, he was diagnosed with cancer. When I found this out, I was very sad. I always thought to myself, "What if he leaves? What am I going to do? How is my family going to react to this?"

Then, one night I was praying to God. I was praying for him to help my family get through this hard time with my uncle. I then heard a voice; I was hearing God! God was telling me that I should keep living my life and everything is going to be okay. I heard him say, "You and your family are going to get through this together. You will all be okay." A feeling of comfort rushed over me and I felt that God was being very caring for my family. It felt like I was having my own conversation with him. I felt a touch of love coming from God. It is an experience I will never forget.

My uncle sadly passed away from his battle with cancer, and it was so hard on my family. I was praying again one night, and I heard God again. He told me, "You and your family are going to get through this, and I love each and every one of you. I will be with everyone in your family making sure everyone is going to be okay." Once I heard him say this, I realized God will be there and that he truly loves every single person in my family. I was relieved when I heard this from God because I wanted to be there for everyone, but I couldn't. There are a lot of people out of town, so God said he would take care of the people out of town so I could focus on the people in Illinois.

I see God in my own life all the time, but mostly this last year and a half with COVID -19. It has been hard on everyone and we all need help. I went through my first year of high school during

COVID. I was not expecting this at all, but it happened. I only got to meet half my class freshman year, and I know you may have had a similar experience too. It was hard making friends because I didn't know anyone here, and I felt like no one wanted to talk to me. I remember this one girl named Olivia. She came up and told me, "You should go and join Lasallian Youth (which is a club about service towards God). It is a very fun club, and you get to just be yourself." I was nervous to go, and almost didn't go at all. But then I heard God again. God said, "I will be there for you. The whole meeting, I will be by your side. I will make sure you are okay and safe."

I was so scared to go to the meeting because it was already hard to make friends in the first place with people in my own grade. How am I going to be able to interact with other people older than me?! But I went to the meeting that next day and I loved it! It allowed me to meet such nice people. This was the first time ever in high school that I felt like I belonged. And I was reminded that God is going to love me through every step of my high school journey. I had so much fun, and I have gotten very close with some of them today. I believe God led me to join LaSallian Youth, and now I am a leader! I have also joined so many other clubs since then, and high school has become a very positive experience for me.

I would like to thank you for listening to my talk. I hope you can all dig a little deeper into your religion and your relationship with God, so that you can also feel uniquely loved by God. It may take a while, but it's all worth it in the end.

Thank you!

Witness Talk during Profession Movement: Hannah and Colette

Hannah: Hello! My name is Hannah, and I am a junior in high school.

Colette: Hi I am Colette! I am a junior in high school. The reason we are speaking today is to share a bit about one of the most important aspect of our lives, our relationship with Jesus. Hannah and I feel we have each been called by God to not only live out our faith, but also to share it with others.

Hannah: Colette and I have known each other for six years. We are really excited to share our experiences living faithfully. We continue to deepen our relationship with God through listening and talking to God through prayer, spending time with Jesus during Adoration, and participating in Crux.

Colette: Hannah and I have both been blessed to grow in faithful homes. We have been going to Church on Sundays our whole lives. We are extremely grateful for our families and special role models encouraging us to deepen our faith and commitment to Christ. After we made our Confirmations and ultimately parted ways for high school, we had our own experiences in navigating Jesus's invitation to fully commit to Him.

Hannah: We are all loved by God, and He wants to have a relationship with each one of us. The power of prayer connects one to something larger than themselves. I am extremely grateful for the people in my life who have helped me deepen my faith through reflection, the daily Examen, and having "an attitude of gratitude." During the beginning of the pandemic when everyone was isolated in their homes, I noticed a pattern in my life: I began to look at life more

through an open mind and an open heart. It was during these times of not only talking with God but LISTENING to His word and reflecting that I really started to have a deeper appreciation for what is truly important. Reflecting on where God has been in my life and where His presence continues, whether that be through a friend or simply looking outside and watching the sun set, was very important. I reflected on putting myself into the Scripture through Ignatian Contemplation. Continuing to grow in my faith has and will always be extremely important to me. Having a good foundation for my faith that originated in my home and continued to flourish in high school has greatly impacted and molded the person I am today. Saint Ignatius and the Jesuits focus on finding God in all things. Once you have that foundation and structure, it overlaps into everything else in your life in such a beautiful and positive way. Being surrounded by people who focus on deepening their relationship with God and being committed to Jesus through their words and actions is inspiring. I have found great joy in joining prayer groups and being a part of Crux, in which I have learned so much from others about their relationship with God and the importance of their faith in their own life. Now, I feel I have been called to share my faith with others. God loves unconditionally, and He is always there for you during both the good and difficult times.

Colette: Like Hannah, I am also in Crux, which is a group that invites teens to talk about their faith and focus on Jesus. Being in Crux has helped me grow in my faith and see firsthand the influence and impact that strong faith can have on individuals my age. For many years, my faith life consisted prayers before meals with my family, before bed, and Sunday morning mass. These are all great things. But, it wasn't until I realized the potential of living faithfully rather than simply going through the motions when asked. While I can't account my change in perspective to one specific moment in time, I'd say it was noticing the special joys in life as God's creation or by God's hand. After attending Catholic middle school, I started at a public high school. In this change, I was not reminded of my faith daily with morning prayer or religion class. My faith had to be something I worked on in my own free time. Life committing to Jesus hasn't been entirely perfect. There are days I feel guilty for not taking the time to pray more or journal more. But for me, I know I would not be the person I am today without that pivotal decision which was to fully and actively practice my faith. To fully know and understand Jesus's love for me gives a level of comfort that can ease daily anxieties and stressors. Knowing there is a loving God who has a plan for me individually and all of you is extremely comforting especially in times of doubt or pain. My actions and words are impacted by my relationship with Jesus. There is a song (I am sure Hannah remembers) that we would sing after Wednesday mass in middle school called *You Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love*. It is one of my favorite church songs and it is a testament to how I try to live my life. I always try to be kind, caring, and a friend to anyone. Living faithfully has truly made me a happier and stronger person and I am forever grateful.

Hannah: While we know this seems like a lot right now, we want to remind everyone that change starts with you.

Colette: Simple habits like remembering to pray not only before meals but also when you wake up, and go to sleep, elaborating in your conversations with Jesus can lead to a closer relationship with him.

Hannah: There should be no doubt that Jesus is knocking on your door, don't be shy to open up to Him and share your thoughts. Have trust in God that He does have a plan for you.

Colette: We recommend that you pray for others , find out what times your local parish has Adoration, and connect with people who share in your faith and ultimately put Jesus first.

Hannah: As Confirmation approaches, Colette and I encourage each one of you to think about your commitment to Christ and how you can deepen your relationship with God. A good way to do this is by going to Mass on Sundays and if possible, during the week.

Colette: We will be praying for you for your openness to Jesus. Remember God loves you, and He is always guiding you on this journey through life, but it is up to you to “hear the knocking of Christ” and to let Him in.

Hannah: Thanks for listening. We will be praying for you.

Colette and Hannah: Bye!

Keynote Speaker Talk during Proclamation Movement: Chika

Oscar, thank you so much; you're one of my faves. I really appreciate that introduction. And like he said my name is Chika. I just moved to Pittsburgh from Southern California. I had the opportunity to work for a wonderful mission called Vagabond Missions where we had the opportunity to minister and mentor to teens living in inner cities.

Teens, here's the deal: I might be a little bit older, but I still remember what it was like to be a teenager. And one of my favorite memories is Friday night football games. My two older brothers were football players, and my sister and I would cheer for them on the sidelines. I loved going to the after-game parties but there was a time where those after-game parties I kind of had a decision to make: either go to the football game then go to the after parties or go to the football game and then go to youth group. Man, I hated that decision! Because after-game parties, my friends were there and I got to hang out with you know folks from my school, but I also really enjoyed going to youth group and I love Jesus. So there was kind of like that tension that would fester. And after a while I realized I just really like Church. It's fun, I actually like going, I like my friends, and I love learning about Jesus. So I stopped going to the after-game parties or we would go to the movies sometimes on Fridays and I stopped going. My friends are always asking, “Hey, come to the after-game party, or hey, let's go to the movies”. I'd say, “No, I have youth group.” Finally, they started asking okay what's up with this whole church thing? Why do you like it so much? What is it about Jesus?

That's a great question. I mean I knew I liked going. I had Miss Carrie and Miss Wendy, the two women that helped catechize me and teach me about the faith, and I knew I liked them because they made faith fun. But what about Jesus? I didn't really mention him too much. I don't really mention the sacraments, even though I love praying the rosary and I appreciated going to confession (although sometimes it kinda scared me depending on what I had done). I love Jesus and adoration, but I didn't really mention those things. I mentioned all the fun stuff. Mass is fun sometimes, right? Anyway, that question, why am I Christian, why am I Catholic? That question of why do I like Jesus? Why do I wanna go to church versus hanging out with my friends? Maybe you felt that tension too. Maybe you've asked yourself that question or other people have asked you.

In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus asked a question of his disciples and he says - let's actually read straight from scripture okay - so Matthew 16 starting at verse 13 called Peter's Confession about Jesus. Let's begin: In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen. Come Holy Spirit. Give us ears to hear you, a heart to love you, and to learn more about Jesus. Amen.

"When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven."

Amen. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Brothers and sisters, I love that Jesus is like, "Who do people say that I am?" Have you ever heard that some people say that Jesus is just a good teacher? Just a good guy and he wants us to be good people? Jesus, yeah he was a good guy, yeah he's a great teacher (that's why he was called Rabbi), but he is just so much more. And he is a God for all people, for everyone, but he wants to be in a relationship, an intimate relationship, with you. So he asked that question, "Who do people say that I am?" And then he asks, "Who do you say that I am?"

Peter is bold. And I just have this glimpse of the apostles and disciples kind of like hearing the you know the chisme, the good gossip, about who Jesus is. And they're like, oh yeah, I heard so-and-so say that Jesus is like Elijah. No over there, so-and-so said I think he's like John the Baptist; he's just a prophet. And maybe they're kinda nervous. Will Jesus be upset if we say he's Elijah or will he be hurt if we tell him what people are saying about him? But you know, they just say it. And then when he says, "Who do you say that I am?" I imagine them being kind of quiet like, oh, I wasn't expecting that. Who is Jesus to me?

And then, because Peter has this close relationship with Jesus, he listens and interacts with him in a such special way. The way that he interacts with all of us; we all had an encounter with Christ that shapes us. Simon Peter he says this confession. Let's go ahead and read it again from Matthew chapter 16 verse 16. He says, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." The living God. He's expressing, proclaiming this proclamation of who Jesus is. From an encounter, but also from something so much more: from the Father. The heavenly Father gives Saint Peter, the rock, a revelation as to who Jesus is.

God has given you a revelation as to who Jesus is through the encounters that you experienced in your daily life, through the sacraments, and through the kerygma, the proclamation of the faith. So you have the ability to proclaim that Jesus is King, that Jesus is Lord, that Jesus is Messiah. He is the Anointed One. That Jesus is a friend, that Jesus is your companion, someone that you walk through with in life. That Jesus is, fill in the blank: Who is Jesus to you?

And listen if your response to that is I don't know, that is okay. No one said that you had to have an answer right away. Maybe it's gonna be tomorrow, a week from now, a year from now when you'll have that encounter that you'll be able to profess who Jesus is to you. But until then I would love to share with you more about who Jesus is to me.

Just like Jesus posed that question to Peter, Jesus poses that question to us, "Who do you say that I am?" And if you're like Chika, I don't know. I don't know who Jesus is to me. I'm still searching, I'm still wondering that for myself. And how do I explain that, when my friends ask me why do you go to church? Why are you Catholic? And why are you going through confirmation? Listen it's okay if you don't have an answer today, tomorrow, or even in a year. But the beauty of our Catholic faith is that we have the Church. We have catechists and directors of religious education and our parents are called our primordial catechists, our first teachers of faith. We have a community that gathers together to help us learn more about Jesus so that we can encounter him and be able to answer that question. Not just communally, but personally and intimately.

Pope Benedict XVI, I appreciate his writing so much and this is something that he said and I want to share it with you. He says,

"This it is through the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of the sacraments, and the works of charity that the Church guides us to meeting and knowing Christ. This is not an encounter with an idea or with a project of life, but with a living person who transforms our innermost selves revealing to us our true identity as children of God."

Wow. Our faith in Jesus is so much more than just going to class or reading books (I mean please read and know your Bible), but it's an encounter with the living person. Just like Peter says that you're the Messiah, the Son of the living God, our faith is about being in a friendship, a union, with the living person of Jesus Christ. And sometimes it's hard, sometimes it's difficult to explain, but there is something called the kerygma, the proclamation of salvation, in which we are able to learn and share that Catholic faith with others. And again, the more that we know it, the better we're able to live it out. And so people ask questions. And that question isn't, oh my gosh what's wrong with you? Why are you the way that you are? You're so weird. Who knows, maybe they'll ask that question. My brother, I have two older brothers and an older sister and my second brother, he's always like, why are you so weird? And I'm like, Jesus, I love him. So, people are gonna ask questions. And you'll be able to say, when people say, "Man why do you have so much joy? Why do you have so much peace, especially in adversity when things aren't going right? It seems like there's this this inner peace that you have that: I want that." And you can say, it comes from being in a relationship with Jesus. It comes from knowing that he's truly present, body, blood, soul, and divinity, in the Eucharist and that I can go to a tabernacle at any moment and spend time with him. It is that relationship with Jesus that propels me into having a love for the world. That doesn't mean that I'm attached to it but detached. That detachment to the world allows me to cling even closer to Jesus. Man, I love our Catholic faith. So let's talk about the kerygma the proclamation of salvation and 5 truths about Jesus and our relationship with him.

Number one: God loves us and he has a plan for our lives. In Genesis chapter two we hear that God made us in his image and in his likeness. In Jeremiah 29: 11, it says, "For I know well the plans I have for you, says the Lord. Plans for your welfare not for woe. Plans to give you a future full of hope." When we read Scripture, we know more about who we are because God created us; we didn't just manifest ourselves. God, the creator of the universe, created us out of love because God is love. It says so in 1 John 4:8, "God made us. He who is love created us out of love to be love and to love others." That he has a plan for us. I love Acts chapter 17 verse 27, and it says this, "So that people might seek God, even perhaps grope for him and find him, though indeed he's not far from any of us. For in him we live, and move, and have our being."

We cannot do anything without God. He has created us out of love to be love. We seek him, we grope for him, for in him we live and move and have our being. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraph 27 it says this, "The desire for God is written in the human heart because man is created by God and for God and God never ceases to draw a man to himself. Only in God will we find the truth and happiness that we never stopped searching for." That thing that we are seeking, the desires, the passions of our hearts, the dreams that we have, the things that we aspire to, it all comes from God and it all is us seeking God. Because he has a plan for us and we have a desire to fulfill that plan. There is this song and there's this saying that there's a God-shaped hole in our hearts. And I know it sounds cheesy, but it's true. There's a part of our hearts that longs for something and the reality is that longing is for God. God is truth, absolute truth. You know nowadays we hear about having your truth and this truth and that. God is true north. He is the way, the truth, and the life; Jesus says that. So if you are looking to know more about who you are, if you are looking to know more about who he is, then seek him. If you wanna know what to do in life, who be in life, seek the Lord and you will know.

Number two: sin separates us from God. I'm gonna say something that may shock you or a few people: you are a sinner. I know, you thought you were perfect and you are not, but here's the deal: so am I. I try so hard not to do things that separate me from God. I try not to sin. It's this inclination called concupiscence, this inclination towards sin. And we read in Genesis chapter three about the fall of Adam and Eve and original sin that we all inherit. And friends I know the struggle because I'm in it too, we all are. If you have a priest sitting next to you, they're in the struggle. If you have a sister sitting next to you, they're in the struggle. If you have your parents sitting next to you, y'all know that your parents are sinners too. We've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Man, the devil is a jerk. It says in Scripture that he prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. St. Paul even says that he does what he doesn't want to do and there is that struggle. Have you felt that struggle? You want to be better and do better but there's something, the sin, the temptation, that pulls you away. In John chapter 8 verse 44 Jesus says this, "He {being the devil} was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in truth because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie he speaks in character because he is a liar and the father of lies." Oh, gosh. Remember we talked about Jesus being the way, the truth, and the life? That capital T truth, true north, God is it. The devil hates you; he's jealous of you. He hates the fact that you that you are made in the image and likeness of God. He hates the fact that he was asked to serve, and he said I will not serve. He will do anything and everything to separate you from God because sin kills. It says in Scripture that the devil comes to steal, kill, and destroy, but Jesus has come that you might have life. And how do we have life in Jesus?

Well actually that's number 3. That Jesus died to save us. It's such a weird juxtaposition, dichotomy, that for us to have life, Jesus had to die. Why? What can I give God, what can you give God, to say sorry for our sins? God who is absolute perfection itself. I can't give him money, because what he's gonna do with that? I can't give him clothes or jewelry, because what need does God have for that? But what I can do is believe in his Son, who is God. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. I can believe in God the Son and that he died to redeem me, to save me from sin. So that you and I don't have just hell awaiting us, but we have the reality, brothers and sisters hear me when I say that, the reality of heaven. That we get to be with God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, our Blessed Mother Mary, St. Joseph, the angels, and the saints (anyone who has died and is in heaven is a saint). And we get to be with them and rejoice where there is no weeping, there are no tears, there's no worry, there's no

fear, there's just God. And the devil separates, but Jesus has died, and not just died, but conquered death. He rose from the grave, he defeated death, so that we can rise with him in heaven. What a grace. What a good God. What a merciful God. He's a God of justice, but he is also a God of mercy. So when I talk about sin and you feel maybe there's a stirring in your heart where you're like, "Yeah Chika, you're right, I am a sinner." I don't want you to sit in that. I don't want you to stay in that woe is me, I'm such a sinner. There are quite a few saints, St. Alphonsus Liguori and Brother Lawrence who say, "Yeah, we are sinners. Recognizer sinfulness; now get up and rise because we were not called sinners, we were called children of God." Alleluia, yes, and Amen. So we recognize that we have sinned but we also recognize and proclaim to the highest heights that Jesus has died and rose from the grave so that we may have life eternal.

Number four: because we believe we are baptized, and we receive the Holy Spirit. Do any of you know when you were baptized? I actually have this super cute picture of my Baptism. And I know that may sound conceited, but it's true. It's the cutest picture of me in this little white dress and my siblings were there, my mom, my Godparents were there, and I was about one year old, more or less. Now I don't remember my Baptism. Some of you may be baptized when you were older, some of you when you were just little babies, either way when you were baptized as a child your parents they stand up in front of the priest, in front of maybe the congregation or family and friends, and they, along with your Godparents, say that they will raise you in the Church. They will raise you as Catholics because the Catholic Church is the fullness of Jesus, the fullness of Christ. When you were baptized and water was poured over you, you were cleansed of original sin and you receive the Holy Spirit and the gifts the Holy Spirit. I love confirmation because it is the completion of the sacrament of baptism. Where we receive a greater outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. And these are not gifts that we earn, but God, again in his gratuitous love for us, he gives us these gifts. Piety, I used to pray for piety a lot because I love the word pie that is in there (I know it's super cheesy, but I love that), but it means to have this this reference, this love, for God and the Church. We have the gifts of wisdom, and fortitude, and council. We have the gifts of understanding and knowledge. We have the gifts of the Holy Spirit, everything that we need to know, and love, and serve the Lord in this world because it's gonna be hard. Listen friends, if anyone has told you that being a Catholic is easy, they are wrong. I'm just gonna flat out tell you it's not easy. But is it worth it? Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely it's worth it. Why is knowing and loving Jesus and being baptized and confirmed in the faith worth it? Take a look at the news. I mean you see what is happening around the world with whether it's the pandemic, maybe your parents have lost jobs or have had troubles getting back into work because of the virus, or you have witnessed or even experienced racism. And you were like, I thought were supposed to be brothers and sisters in Christ and yet look at what people are saying about me or doing to me or to someone else. This is so unjust. We see what is happening at our borders where friends, it's tough. Even within the Church, we've heard about the abuse scandals and what happens at residential schools, and we don't ever want to turn a blind eye because that is how sin festers. But the gifts of the Holy Spirit allow us and the Church to be a shining light. Not one that is held under a basket, but one that is shining so bright that it exposes sin. That is how healing begins. That's how reparation begins. We're able to repair relationships, we're able to repair wounds that have happened to the Body of Christ, with the gift of the Holy Spirit, when they are active and we're living them out. When people say, "Oh, the Catholic Church, it's just..." No, the Catholic Church is us, it's you! So when we activate and live in the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, we truly see and treat one another as

brothers and sisters. So baptism, confirmation, and receiving the Holy Spirit are all so important. Why?

Number Five: go and make disciples. Man, don't leave all of this goodness to yourself; that's selfish y'all, don't do that! No, go out and share the Good News, the proclamation is the Good News of Jesus Christ. That God loves us, that he has a plan for us, and even though we're still sinners he sent his son,, Jesus Christ, to die for us. But Jesus didn't stay dead; he rose so that we can be baptized and be a part of a family of faith, and receive the Holy Spirit, and go and make disciples. And man, we get to do it all over again. How are you living your life so that people ask that question, "What is it about you?" What is it about you that makes you joyful, even in adversity? What is it about you that makes you selfless, that you like to serve? What is it about you that makes you righteous, not in this self-centered way, but righteous in the sense that you want to see justice served? That you see people who are hurting, and you want to see good things come their way. That the Catholic Social Teaching, when we talk about the preferential treatment of the poor, when we talk about the love of family and subsidiaries, when we talk about racism, when we talk about how people are treated, you just well up with this holy righteous desire to see people be treated as brothers and sisters in Christ. When people ask you why you're not going to the after-game party or you're not going to the movies, and you can say I wanna go to Church. And I wanna know more about Jesus. I wanna more about what the Church says. I want to have this encounter. Why? Because it's you responding to the love that God has for you, first and foremost. It is you desiring to love God and to see other people love him too because God is just that good and worthy of love. I know we don't always live out our faith well, but you can be a difference. You can live it out. And you have a community of people around you that you can inspire to live it out well also. You're not perfect and that's okay. God is perfect. We'll have perfection together in heaven together, when we see each other there. So that question that Jesus posed to Peter, he poses to you and I: Who do you say that I am? I encourage your brothers and sisters to take time in your prayer to really sit down and answer that question. Who do you say Jesus is? Who is he in your life? Why do you go to Church? Who is he and why are you willing to serve him? And again, if you're like, I don't know, and maybe even, I'm not willing to serve him, that's okay. Don't just stop there and say, whelp, that's that, and then walk away. Sit with him. Jesus, tell me who you are. Show me who you are. And I know it's not gonna be immediate, but allow me the opportunity to sit and ponder and discover you.

Let's close in prayer: In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

God you are so good, you are beyond us. You are God, the creator of all the living; thank you for creating us. Thank you for even those difficult moments in our lives that will shape us for the better if we trust you. Life is not easy right now Lord, and I know that you see it and I know that you know it. God, I pray for the young person who is experiencing anxiety and depression. God, I offer to you the young person whose home life is so tough that makes them not really wanna be at home. God, I offer to you the young person who is wildly and passionately so in love with you: the man who wants to be a priest, the young woman who is considering religious life, or the man or woman who's just like man, I just love Jesus and I want to share him with everyone as a lay disciple. Thank you for my brothers and sisters. I'm so grateful. And Jesus, as they go through process of confirmation, because it's not about a program it is about a process that doesn't stop here but continues on for the rest of our lives, as they go through this process of confirmation that you will deepen their faith in you and their love for you, so that it like oil spills

out and onto other people. Come Holy Spirit. Blessed Mother Mary and Saint Joseph, never let us be separated from your divine Son. Saints and angels pray for us. Amen

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Keynote Speaker Talk during Profession Movement: Fr. Gibson

“What a friend we have in Jesus

All our sins and griefs to bear

And what a privilege to carry

Everything to God in prayer”

My friends, we have a friend in Jesus. An interesting concept, an interesting reality to think about: that Jesus Christ, the second person in the Blessed Trinity, God made man, is our friend. That song growing up was often sung in different contexts, and I often wondered what it really meant for Jesus to be my friend. There was a particular moment in my life where I really questioned if Jesus could really be my friend.

As you can see, we are in my home parish of St. Peter Clavier Catholic Church in the city of New Orleans. Sixteen years ago, this place, where I’m standing right now, was full of water. I was in the 7th grade; I had just started at St. Augustine High school, and that was my dream (my dad went to St. Aug, my brother was at St. Aug, and I knew I was going to St. Aug). Two weeks into the school year, there’s these reports: there’s a hurricane coming. This is typical; the school year begins usually with hurricanes. But this time is a little different because this hurricane is strengthening and intensifying and everyone is getting a little nervous. This would be the first time in my life that my family will pack up our stuff, load up the car, and we drive, in the middle of the night, to Houston. Not thinking anything of it, I’m coming home, I’ll be home and we’ll go back to normal. I remember waking up on that fateful Monday morning of August 29th and watching the news reports. Watching images of my city, my home full of water. There’s water everywhere. The reports are the levees have broken. What does that really mean? I’m like, “What is going on? What do you mean the levees broke?” And all I can see is water. And then looked over and I saw my mother start to weep, start to see tears come down her eyes as she’s looking at these images. And it starts to hit me that something is going on. Something’s not right. My home, the place where my friends were, the place where I encountered Jesus Christ, the places where I lived my life, were gone. And in that moment, like a sharp pain in my stomach, I felt so lost. I remember saying to myself, “God where are you? How could you let everything that I knew, my home, my school, my church, how could you just take it away? How can you allow for something like this to happen in my life right now when everything seemed to be put together? Starting a new moment in life, starting to live the dream if you will, you take it away from me.”

There was so much chaos and confusion. The cell service was down. We couldn’t get in touch with my dad. My grandparents work here in the city. There was just so much. Where are we going to go? We got clothes for a week and we can’t go home, can’t go to church. God why did you abandoned me? I say those words now and I think of Jesus on the cross crying out, “My

God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Where are you? I am in the midst of a struggle and yet you are seemingly silent. Where is this friend named Jesus? Where is the one on whom all of my anxiety, all of my fear, all of my hurt is supposed to go? Where is this Jesus. It seems as if Jesus is gone.

You might have a similar experience. You may be going through it right now; you may go through it at one point or another in your own life. Where you are so broken, so hurt, so destitute that it seems as if God is not there, that God is dead. And you wonder, what's the point of it all? Why would I believe, why would I continue to pray, why would I continue to turn to God, why would I even embrace his body and blood they tell me at the holy altar of sacrifice, when it seems as if this "friend" is nowhere to be found?

Well, you all get to see me now 16 years later as a priest. God did not give up on me in that moment. My friend, though I felt alone, though I felt hurt, though I felt destitute that everything around me was taken away, it was only then that God really was able to act in my life. Started to take me to places where I didn't know I could go. Started to open doors for me where those doors would have typically been shut. It's because of that Katrina experience that I began to really understand what faith was about. That not simply professing, saying words with my lips, that I believe in one God, that Jesus Christ came to earth, that Our Lady is our Mother. No, it was in that moment that it started to become real. It only started to take root in my heart.

You see when everything is taken away from you, you don't have anything to lean on. You don't have any clothes on your back, or you don't have any food. And things start popping up. There is a house that all of the sudden opens up. Or that Christmas you get clothes that you never thought you would have imagined. Or the very first time that I got to come back to this place, this space, after Katrina when there was a question of whether or not I could go home. Those moments, my dear friends, are the moments in which you hold onto and you begin to realize that God has not abandoned you. They begin to realize that God is making a way out of no way. It may not look the way that you want it to look, it may not make you feel good the way that you want it to feel good, it may not even fill that hole that we try to fill with TikTok and Snapchat and Instagram. But he whispers, "You're mine, and I am yours."

He looks at us, looks us in the eyes, and says you are my beloved son, you are my beloved daughter, you are the one that from the foundations of the world when I created all things I said when I looked at you: you are very good. Fearfully and wonderfully made in my image, after my likeness. And then he gives you the opportunity yet again in the waters of baptism when he claims you for himself, weds himself to you. You are you a baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; you become a new creation. And in that moment God for all eternity renews his promise that, "I will be with you always even until the end of the age."

Right now, what that looks like, might I suggest, is friendship. Remember when you met your best friend, the one you talked to almost every day, that you can't live without. Jesus wants to be that for you. That in your dark days, in your sad moments, in those moments where you feel like the world is falling down on you, he wants to be your friend. Yes, he is your Savior, he's the Lord of heaven and earth, he is the Jesus Christ the Son of the living God, the Word made flesh and dwelt among us, the one who is, who was, and is to come. But among those titles, my dear friends, he wants to be your friend.

What does that mean; what does friendship with Jesus Christ really mean? It's not just snapping it up, right? It's not just making sure that Jesus is on your top followers. No Jesus as your friend

means knowing the depths of your heart. That when you're having a great day, when everything seems to go right, you can say at the end of the day, "Lord, look, the sun is shining in my life today. I had a great day at school. It seems as if everything is pulling together as I'm looking forward to the next step in my life. While also, Lord, my heart was broken today. I experienced something in my life that I don't I really feel like I can talk to my parents about, but I'm going to go to you because I'll know that you'll listen. And I know that you'll receive me and look at me, not judge me, but through grace and mercy bring me ever closer to your Sacred Heart." That friend Jesus.

And this this, my dear friends, is what we all are being invited to be renewed each and every day in friendship with Jesus Christ. To know that no matter who we are, where we are, what we have done in this life, that he is still seeking us out like the lost sheep to be one with him. What a friend. The same one who each and every time we come to the Mass, that place where heaven and earth meet, he feeds us with the best food that any of us can ever have. And trust me I know, I'm from New Orleans, and we got good food. He feeds us with the best food, that is himself, his body and his blood, that is life giving. Each and every time that we turn away from him, he invites us to come back to him and experience his mercy, his grace, and his love in that sweet sacrament of reconciliation. He showers down the Holy Spirit upon us, fulfilling the promise that, "I will be with you always." And he gives us the spirit to move and guide in our lives. And when the time comes to live a life for another, he either brings us a companion the form of a husband or wife, or he gives us a flock as a priest. And when we're sick, he comforts us with the sweet anointing of the holy sacrament of the anointing of the sick. My dear friends that's an incredible friend. In every aspect of life, he wants to be there with you.

"What a friend we have in Jesus

All our sins and griefs to bear

And what a privilege to carry

Everything to God in prayer"

Jesus wants to be your friend. Let him be your friend. Give him everything of your heart so that when the time comes and the Spirit of God rests upon you, you can make other friends in Jesus Christ. Be not afraid and let Jesus be your friend.

Renewal of Baptismal Promises during the Profession Movement: Fr. Gibson

My friends, we've probably had a long day already, but one of the powers of this moment is being able to publicly make a commitment. Make a commitment to Jesus Christ, our Savior, Lord of all, and our friend. One of the beautiful things in the tradition of the Church is that in the early Church, in the first days of the faith, when people made their public profession that they wanted to be a follower of Jesus Christ. That they believed in who this person was; they believed in the triune God. First, they would renounce sin, and renounce Satan, and renounce all of those things that separate us from the love of God. And when they did that, they looked to the west. It is there that they would renounce Satan, put him aside, and then in a beautiful turn of their life – because this is what happens when we move, and profess, and witness to Jesus Christ, we turn away from our old life towards Jesus – they physically turned from the west, turned their back on Satan, and looked towards the east, looked toward the rising sun, looked

toward that place where Jesus Christ is coming back for us. Looking towards Christ, they professed their belief in him. They professed their belief in one God and looked forward to the anticipation of the waters of rebirth and the infusion of the Holy Spirit.

Today, my friends, you have that opportunity. To stand on your faith. To stand on your belief that Jesus Christ suffered and died for you, so that you may have life and so that you may experience his grace and mercy. So now, I invite you to stand. I invite you, using those profession of faith and those renunciations that were made by your parents and Godparents at your Baptism, I invite you now to renew your own baptismal promises, first rejecting sin and Satan. And so, I invite you to turn west, and after each respond with the certainty of faith, with the conviction of faith, "I do". And so, my friends, I ask you:

Do you renounce sin, so as to live in the freedom of the children of God?

Do you renounce the lure of evil, so that sin may have no mastery over you?

Do you renounce Satan, the author and prince of sin?

In renouncing sin and Satan, in renouncing those things that separate us from the love of God. I want you to turn your back on them. Turn away from them and look towards the east. Look towards now Jesus Christ and profess your faith. And so, I ask you,

Do you believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth?

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered death and was buried, rose again from the dead, and is seated at the right hand of the Father?

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?

This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. This is the faith of generations of people who have been named and claimed for Christ. Be proud in professing it. Don't shy away from professing it. Don't be afraid to profess it because in professing this faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord, there is life. Be proud to believe. Be proud to be claimed for him. This is our faith.