

Faith Witness to St. John the Evangelist Youth Group
October 17, 2021

Just Keep Dancing

- **Introduction**

- I've **always been a big dancer**.
- I know that may totally surprise some of you who no me well, but it's true

- **High School**

- In high school the **purpose** of the dance was **self-aggrandizement**.
 - I was really good at attracting attention on the dance floor.
- Fortunately for me, a big part of that **dance floor was the St. Louis CYO** in Alexandria, VA
 - I first met the future **Fr. Gould** there in about 1979 when he was a seminarian assigned to St. Louis for the summer.
 - I was one of the leaders of the group, and I was **really good at the dance steps**. I was even:
 - On the Diocesan **Youth Board**
 - On committees set up by the Bishop
 - Asked **personally by Bishop Keating**, the first Bishop of Arlington, to speak at a Convocation at the Bishop O'Connell High School on the **Liturgy of the Hours**
 - I didn't even know what that was!
 - Very active in the **Youth Encounter** movement
 - Nominated as the **Outstanding Catholic Youth** in the Diocese of Arlington.
 - I knew **I was anything but an Outstanding Catholic Youth**
 - But **I was a good dancer**
 - I knew how to look the part.
 - But even if I **didn't fully grasp the meaning** of the dance, I was **on the right dance floor**
 - I had good **Catholic friends**
 - Some of whom were missing the point also,
 - but at least they knew what the right things were, and
 - I was surrounded by the goodness in the Church

- **Notre Dame**
 - All that **showiness in high school helped me achieve what is a dream** for many of you here tonight – get into a great college.
 - In my case, the University of Notre Dame
 - I **continued to be the big dancer**, always good at the dance steps and always **attracting attention to myself**
 - I lived with a bunch of guys, who are still my closest friends to this day, in a big round turret room in the original dorm on campus
 - We opened a bar and called it **Club 101**
 - Every weekend, we had **massive dance parties**
 - Always with **me at the center of the dance floor**
- One **cool thing** about Notre Dame though is **there's a chapel in every dorm**
 - My friends and I **went to mass every Sunday** at 5 o'clock and then **walked over the dining hall** for dinner.
 - That was a very **important anchor** for me in college
 - It is so **easy to get washed out to sea**, particularly in a large secular college
 - So that, in retrospect, I can see **how important it was for me to at least come back into port** once a week.
- But by far the **coolest thing about Notre Dame** was a **beautiful Varsity swimmer** who I met on the first day of classes
 - She was **way out of my league**.
 - When I found out she was in the **choir at the Basilica**, and that she sang at **evening Vespers**, I started going.
 - I **had heard of it** because it's part of the **Liturgy of the Hours**, but that wasn't why I was going.
 - I was going because there was a beautiful girl singing there.
- Once again, I was **missing the meaning of the dance**, but at least I was on **doing the right dance steps** on the right dance floor.

Early Adulthood

- By far the **most impactful thing that ever happened to me** was that I ended up **marrying** that beautiful girl during my senior year.
 - There is **no decision you will make that will have a bigger impact** on your life than your choice of a life mate.
 - Finding someone
 1. who **shares your Catholic faith**,
 2. who **shares your values**, and

- 3. with whom you can **share a culture**
 - Will make all the difference
 - Marriage is **hard enough**
 - If you **choose** a mate **outside of those three compatibilities**, you are **choosing to make it even harder**
- As we **went off the big city and my big career**, I knew I **had the right woman**, I just **didn't completely understand why** – yet.
 - I was **dancing with the big dogs** now, and I knew it.
 - But my wife kept having babies.
 - I remember when she **got pregnant with our fifth**, Daniel.
 - I was puzzled - and **not celebrating**.
 - I thought
 - “We have two girls two boys - perfect symmetry.
 - We're checked off now.
 - My career is going great.
 - Let's move to the next step!”
 - **How silly I was in retrospect**
 - How could I possibly **imagine life without Daniel?**
 - Or 5 and 6 kids after that, **without Ceili and Connor!**
 - But fortunately, I had myself a **really good dance partner**.
 - I **work with entrepreneurs** who are so focused on their companies, that they **won't let their wives have the families** they dream of having.
 - And they say they love their wives.
 - **How sad**
 - And they **won't even realize** they were on the wrong dance floor **until it's too late**.

The Turning Point

- The **futility of the dance I was doing in the corporate world** became crystal clear when **our company got sold**.
 - I was a **Vice President** for a national uniform rental company in Culpeper that got **bought-out by Cintas**.
 - Maybe you've seen their commercials on TV
 - As the **IT Director**. I led the development and implementation of a totally new state-of-the-art computer system.
 - Then I **built a new restroom service** company called **Sanis** that was growing nationally.

- I had **assembled a great team**, many of whom I still work with today.
- It was a **super-heady time for me**
 - I was in the **center of the dance floor** and everyone wanted to dance with me.
- But when **Cintas came in**, among the first things they did were
 - **Replace my beautiful computer system** with their own, even though it wasn't as good,
 - **Close all of the Sanis companies** and roll that business into their uniform companies, and
 - **Get rid of all of my key people.**
- How fleeting was glory
 - **How quickly 11 years of work was replaced.**
 - I was previously one of the best dancers in the company, and now **no one even knew who I was.**

Back to Faith and Family

- Fortunately, I **still had the girl of my dreams**, and my still growing family.
 - 9 of the 12 had come.
 - **My family and Saint John's were the two constants** in my life through all this.
 - We'd been **sitting in the front row for years** so the kids could be occupied by Janet Winston, then Janet Walbroehl, playing the guitar with her brother Carl.
- I **started my own businesses** with some of my key guys back at Sanis
 - But now I had a **little more perspective.**
 - Thanks to **my wife and my good Catholic friends**
 - I started to **better understand the meaning of the dance**
- At this point, my **older kids were starting high school**, and my wife, with incredible wisdom, directed our family to **Seton School** in Manassas.
 - I decided **to get involved by volunteering**
 - **To teach** my kids **high school math** classes, which I did until 2012, and
 - **To coach** the swimming team, which been doing for going-on 21 years now.
- **The Catholic Community at Seton** was the **perfect dance floor** for my family, but it was also the **perfect dance floor for me.**
 - I was suddenly **surrounded by people who understood, not just the dance steps, but also the dance.**

- And I saw the **impact a man's sacrifice can have** on a kid who is trying to figure it out.
- I started to **internalize and then teach some of what I had learned** from two great men – Deacon **Bernie Ragan** and **Pope John Paul the Great**
- The **things I had been surrounded by all my life were starting to make more sense.**
 - And my **Catholic faith became the framework** that gave me such clarity.
 - The **world made sense now because of my Catholic faith.**

Lessons from Deacon Ragan

- I thought of the **lessons I learned from Deacon Ragan**, for whom the Deacon Ragan Pavilion is named
 - He always told me that **he did not believe God would have to judge us**
 - He believed that **we would judge ourselves first.**
 - That when we **look into the face of God**,
 - It will be like a **little child who knows he's done wrong**,
 - **Looking up at his mother**
 - Ashamed and sad that he's disappointed her.
 - That **suffering is something we would want** to endure so that **our soul would be cleansed** for the beatific vision.
 - Even suffering on earth.
 - Such an easy concept intellectually - but how hard it is to internalize.
 - Suffering is a blessing?
 - When offered up, it cleanses our soul so that we can stare into the face of God with joy?
 - Really?
 - But have you **ever heard a clearer explanation** for what you observe in your lives every day?
 - People suffer.
 - Some of those evangelical preachers that **preaching their Gospel of Prosperity** just don't any sense to me
 - Just **look around our world** - it is so obvious.
 - **We will not always be prosperous and free from suffering**, but that can be a **great gift!**
 - No wonder it is **so easy for some to lose faith and wonder why an almighty God allows anyone to suffer**
 - Our **Catholic faith** has **given us the answer all along.**

Lessons from Pope John Paul the Great

- I thought of the lessons I learned from reading about Pope John Paul II
 - Who became Pope when I was in high school.
- He calls it the **Law of the Gift**
 - **Responsible self-giving, not self-assertion, is the road to human fulfillment**
 - Karol Wojtyla's favorite lines from Vatican II says, "Man finds himself only by making himself a sincere gift to others" (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 24).
 - **Radical Personal Autonomy is not the key to happiness.**
 - Some of you **may hear the opposite** at school or from your friends every day.
 - The key to happiness is **total self-giving**.
 - It's **this desire for Radical Personal Autonomy**, and I use the word **radical intentionally**, that leads us to **justify things that should be otherwise impossible to justify**, like:
 - We can **end another human life** so that we can live our lives as we wish
 - Paradoxically, I have **realized that sacrifice was the key to happiness**
 - So many of us, including me sometimes, **live our lives as if our purpose is to avoid discomfort**
 - If we want to get to heaven, **we should be embracing discomfort!**
 - It **changed the whole way I thought about Fatherhood**
 - Fatherhood means **rejecting the prison of selfishness**.
 - It means **being conquered by love**
 - **Fatherhood means to give birth in acts of self-giving**
- Once again, **our Church had the answer to life's most perplexing questions**, all I had to do was accept it.
 - **After years of dancing** with the Church and with friends in the Catholic community, **it finally sunk in:**
 - **The meaning of human life is found, not in self-assertion, but in self-giving.**
 - **It's not all about me!**

Conclusion

- You **won't find me in the middle of the dance floor** much anymore.
 - Even at my kids' weddings, **a dance with bride** and a dance with my wife are **about all you'll get out of me**.
 - I mostly **confine my dancing** at such events to a big rocking chair with a 50-ring cigar where I give **gratitude to God** for:
 - my beautiful **wife**,
 - my beautiful **family**,
 - my wonderful **friends**, and
 - and the beautiful **faith that explains it all**
- A bunch of you here **may just not quite be feeling it yet**.
 - Even if that is true, **just keep dancing!** .
 - Just keep **doing the steps the best you know how**,
 - Because at least you'll be **doing the right dance steps on the right dance floor**, and
- If you can **stay on the right dance floor dancing with the right people**, I think you're going to find:
 - That eventually it might all **start to make some sense**
 - That will be a **whole lot happier here on earth**, and
 - That you will **ultimately be invited to the big dance** to which we all aspire.