EAGLE’S WINGS

The Cult of Celebrity vs. A Vocation of Virtue

A warm welcome to our family members who’ve joined us on Family Weekend. Your presence among us is the perfect antidote for mid-terms!

I’ve been thinking a good deal about the ‘cult of celebrity’ in today’s society. As we see in all types of media, celebrity and ‘self-celebrity’ is in. Twitter entices us, texting is the ‘lingua franca’ of youth, and YouTube (“Broadcast Yourself”) allows us to share mundane and quirky moments of our lives. From “American Idol” to reality shows, we see people try to catapult into the cult of celebrity. (My favorite reality show was short-lived “God or the Girl” which followed four young guys in their possible pursuit of priesthood. Alas, the Church came up 0-4).

Wikipedia defines the cult of celebrity as “a widespread interest in arbitrarily famous persons...public fascination leading to a level of idolatry.” Hmmm: “arbitrarily famous persons” and “idolatry.” Seeing what masquerades as news today, I am amazed at how people become famous by their misdeeds, as we watch so many human train wrecks who worship at the altar of fame and fortune. Why will it take us (myself included!) to stop reading about and watching this modern form of idolatry?

DePaul University Professor Dena Weinstein wrote “Celebrity Worship as Weak Religion” defining it as a “substitute for traditional faith in a culture that denies the truth and demands of faith. It allows us to worship the best, the worst, the most banal of who we are. Celebrities are disposable, constantly elevated, cast down, and replaced.”

Where do we look for truth, faith, and a new focus? Family Weekend reminds us to look to the true ties that bind, namely our families. The family unit, defined by Pope John Paul II, is the ‘domestic Church.’ Home is the place where love, faith, prayer, and God are first taught and nourished. The Niagara University community is also a family of sorts: scholars and learners who support and encourage one another who come to see NU as their ‘home away from home.’ At its best, NU helps us learn who we are and who we can become, now and for life.

But we also have another great resource: the two iconic figures of Saints Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac. In this academic year when we observe the 350th anniversary of their lives, we can learn from them. Both Vincent and Louise discovered at an early age that a life of comfort was empty and shallow. They sought meaning and purpose by loving God and serving Jesus Christ in the poor. Theirs was not a ‘cult of celebrity,’ but a vocation of virtue. They led others to Christ- first by their witness, then by their words. As collaborators of charity, they left a network of spiritual and corporal works of mercy that still endure today on every continent in the world.

Fr. John T. Maher, C.M. ’76
Director, Campus Ministry
University Chaplain
A different kind of family…

“It was a hot summer day in East Tennessee. We dropped your brother off at the neighbors’ with his Snoopy sleeping bag and made our way to Fort Sander’s Hospital…” Every year, on July 15th, my parents begin the traditional re-telling of the story of my birth just like this. I know the story by heart, right down to my mom’s reason why they only had a girl’s name picked out—“we didn’t need a boy’s name; you were going to be baby girl, because I wanted a baby girl.” I love hearing it, as much as I know they love re-telling it. How lucky I was to be born into a family rooted in the love of God! A few years ago, my Dad shared a new detail of the story that I’d never heard before—holding me in the hospital room, my dad told me, “Kristina, you are going to be great someday.” And he never stopped telling me that, through the ups and downs of the angst period and the stresses of college. I was blessed with the most supportive and loving parents and older brother.

As many of you know, this past year I had the opportunity to work with pregnant women at a homeless shelter in St. Louis through the Vincentian Service Corps. Most of the women I served were around my age and younger, and I was so troubled by their circumstances. We were similar in many ways, what happened to them that made their paths split off so dramatically? I came to realize, as I observed the ladies’ interactions with their children and their own families, that it wasn’t at all what happened to them, but rather what didn’t happen to them. They were born into a cycle of poverty and never taught how to dream for something more. No one ever told these women that they would be great someday.

Over the year, my family grew to include over 80 sisters and 40 babies and young children. I made it my personal mission to help each new family member—the mothers and their children—believe in themselves, or at the very least, hear that someone else believed in them. I don’t know if my words made a lasting difference in their lives. I’d like to think they did, because I know they made all the difference in my life.

As you spend time with your families this weekend, and over the coming holidays, take some time to reflect on the ways they have shaped you. Thank them—not only for the gift of life and providing those basic necessities, but for believing in you and teaching you how to dream and believe in yourself. And thank God for the blessing of being loved and cared for. You will be great someday, thanks to the beautiful parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, teachers, and friends who have loved you into the person you are.

“Building Relationships”

As we celebrate “Family Weekend” and begin to prepare for the needs of the holidays, I could not help but think of the gratitude I have for the generosity of those on this campus in particularly the students who are forever stepping up to the plate for whatever needs to be done. I work with many of them through the St. Vincent de Paul Society and the Class of 2011. Pat and Spence, two modern day examples of Frederic Ozanam (He founded the St. Vincent de Paul Society while in college), very willingly offered to pick-up a stove for a woman who was a victim of domestic violence. Little did they realize that it was going to be an industrial size stove! It did not stop them. Pat used his logistics, supply chain management expertise to get the stove out of the basement and to the home of the woman. These same two students touched my heart when they made a delivery of a bed and a dresser to a pregnant young woman who had no family and no transportation. They readily turned to me and said, “Monica, the St. Vincent de Paul Society while in college), very willingly offered to pick-up a stove for a woman who was a victim of domestic violence. Little did they realize that it was going to be an industrial size stove! It did not stop them. Pat used his logistics, supply chain management expertise to get the stove out of the basement and to the home of the woman. These same two students touched my heart when they made a delivery of a bed and a dresser to a pregnant young woman who had no family and no transportation. They readily turned to me and said, “Monica, the St. Vincent de Paul Society really needs to check in on her especially this winter.”

Ellen from the Our Lady of Lebanon Food Pantry called me with a genuine panic. The numbers of people have doubled who seek out assistance but the food budget has not kept pace. John from O’Shea heard the challenge asked for a list of food and the great residents of O’Shea met the demand. Ninety students participated on a very brisk night. Non perishables, clothing and financial donations were accepted. A student named Justin came up to me after Dr. Taylor’s talk about the plight of the homeless at the sleep-out and handed me twenty dollars. He said, “It is a great cause!” There is Katie and Mary who take such pride and care in sorting and hanging the clothes at the St. Vincent de Paul Store so that those living in poverty may shop with dignity. There is Sara and Sam who grace Our Lady of Lebanon Food Pantry every Thursday. They not only make a difference with the customers but the older women who look forward to their company.

These are only a few examples of hope from my personal wealth. The holidays are coming please think about the gift of building relationships while serving. Please turn the medal and see the face of Christ in those you meet as well as in your own mirror!!
“La Posada”

Many of you who were recently home for the fall break were only too glad to have a home-cooked meal and your own comfortable bed for a change. Because the holidays are almost upon us, I suspect you are already thinking ahead and savoring the various dishes that will be served on Thanksgiving and Christmas. These special foods and other activities in your households have become family traditions that bring about a genuine communion in its most basic meaning. From the Latin *communion* (*cum* – with and *munire* – to strengthen) means more than just eating for bodily nourishment, although this is certainly important. Communion strengthens the bonds of identity as a family through shared meals and other unique events in the family’s life together. There is also an unmistakable bond between persons who have gone before us and those presently living.

A wonderful example of this is *El Día del Muertos* (The Day of the Dead and also known as All Souls Day – November 2nd) observed in a number of Latin American countries as well as in this country. Elaborate displays with pictures of recently deceased family members, a variety of sweet breads, other foods, flowers, candles, etc. are displayed for family members and friends to gather in prayer and in solidarity with the deceased persons.

I sincerely hope that you will come to a special mass at 12:15 p.m. in Alumni Chapel on Monday, November 2nd, when we will remember our beloved deceased, especially those from our NU community who have died over the past year. As Pope John Paul II said quite early in his pontificate, “A faith that does not become culture is a faith not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived.”

Perhaps the late Pope’s insight into the importance of culture as an expression of a rich, vibrant, faith that finds one of its clearest expressions in Psalm 137:1-4.

*By the rivers of Babylon we sat mourning and weeping when we remembered Zion. On the poplars of that land we hung up our harps. There our captors asked us for the words of a song; Our tormentors, for a joyful song: ‘Sing for us a song of Zion!’ But how could we sing a song of the LORD in a foreign land?’*

The Israelites are in exile in a foreign land and lacking the cultural references familiar (for example, the Temple) to them in Jerusalem, but are no longer readily available to them in Babylon. Without these it is that much more difficult to give expression to their faith. Peoples down through the centuries have as best they could have brought their rich, cultural expressions of faith to new and different lands. This has not always been so easy. If you have ever been to Ellis Island, you will readily recognize how true this is. The same is true of ethnically based parishes in such cities as Buffalo, Niagara Falls, and across many parts of the country. I contend that we have much to learn from these diverse cultures of people now living in the United States.

Before I came to Niagara University in June of 2008 and while I was engaged in parish ministry in rural, East Central Alabama, I had the privilege of learning from a significant number of Latinos who attended St. Mark’s in Ashland and St. John’s in Alexander City. I was pastor of these two parishes. One of my fondest memories is the celebration of *La Posada*, which commemorates the search of Joseph and Mary for a place to stay for one or more nights so Mary could give birth to the infant Jesus. For nine evenings preceding Christmas families will make their pilgrimage to nearby households. Joseph and Mary are dressed in period costumes. There are a series of verses sung back and forth for those outside and inside before the household inside lets Mary, Joseph enter. Once inside there are special foods, including a most delicious hot chocolate.

A moving documentary entitled *La Posada* conveys the significance of this observance, and it is appropriate way to anticipate Christmas. I would like to propose that RA’s might want to show this hour-long DVD in their respective dorms, and perhaps even reenact the *Posada* as a program for one or more floors. I would be happy to join you for the event, and share my own experiences as well.

For more information on “La Posada” see www.loyolaproductions.com/posada or www.posadas-project.com

Fr. Bruce Krause, C.M.,
Campus Minister
CAMPUS MINISTRY EVENTS

⇒ Niagara University’s Chapter of The Invisible Children Campaign will hold their 1st annual Harvest Time Chinese auction – October 27th from 11am to 4pm – Study Lounge – LLGC Pizza, Chips & Pop Lunch $3 Special for sale, Themded baskets auctioned off, drawings at 4pm. Join us & Support us by: donating a basket, donating money towards creating a basket and come to the event and make donations by participating in the Chinese Auction and or by buying lunch.

⇒ BASIC Brothers and Sisters in Christ – a week long life changing service experience in either Philadelphia or Camden January 10-18, 2010. Cost is an all inclusive $85. Applications are available in the back of Chapel or in the Campus Ministry Office. Applications Due Wednesday, October 28th - 5pm - Office of Campus Ministry

⇒ Pax Christi - Campus Ministry’s Social Justice Club is having a meeting this Monday at 6 PM. A special topic this semester is: “Protecting the Human Rights of the Indigenous People!” All are most welcome!

⇒ St. Vincent de Paul Society is always welcoming new members and new ideas. The next meeting is on Oct. 28th at 7:30 p.m.” Under the Taps.” Trick or Treat bags will be made for the children in Niagara Falls.

⇒ Advent Retreat Escape the end-of-semester chaos and spend time with friends in prayer and preparation for the celebration of Christ’s birth! 5:00PM Friday December 4 - 1:00PM Saturday December 5 - home in plenty of time to get ready for the University Ball! Pick up an application in the Chapel or Campus Ministry (LLGC); see Kristina for more information.

⇒ A Year of Service If you are considering a year of service after graduation or would like to learn more, come meet Sr. Teresa Daly, D.C., Director of the Vincentian Service Corps. Join Sr. T and Campus Ministry for lunch and conversation. Kristina will be sharing stories and pictures from her year with the VSC—what it was like to live with seven other volunteers and serve the poor of St. Louis, MO. Tuesday, November 3, 12:00-2:00PM Study Lounge (LLGC). Lunch will be provided - RSVP to Campus Ministry.

⇒ Living In Faith Together (LIFT) – Small Christian Communities - Join with friends to pray and reflect on living your faith on campus! Groups meet on Tuesday and Wednesday nights. Contact Kristina to find a group, or grab a few friends and start your own group!

⇒ Pray for Life - Each Wednesday @ 9pm our community gathers in the Chapel to pray for respect for life, please join us.

SUNDAY MASS ALUMNI CHAPEL
11:00am & 10:00pm

Daily MASS ALUMNI CHAPEL
Monday, Wednesday, Friday @ 12:15pm
Tuesday, Thursday @ 12:35pm

Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession)
Monday's 5 - 5:30pm - Alumni Chapel

Join us for Mass - Everyone is always WELCOME!!