

Mother's example taught future priest importance of trusting in God

By Mark Zimmerman, Editor, Catholic Standard, Tuesday, June 05, 2012 7:45 AM

For Deacon Daniel Carson, his parents' example of love, faith and sacrifice helped foster his eventual vocation to the priesthood. And witnessing his mother's death from cancer four years ago taught the future priest about the importance of trusting in God.

"Her faith guided her. She suffered greatly, but never spoke about it," said Deacon Carson, who will be ordained by Cardinal Wuerl as one of five new priests of the Archdiocese of Washington on June 16 at the National Shrine.

Deacon Carson, who joined other family members in praying at his mother's death bed, later only learned of the depth of his mother's suffering from reading a journal she had kept. "She was never shaken in her faith," he said.

Three years ago, the seminarian served at Holy Cross Hospital in Silver Spring, in the neonatal intensive care unit, emergency room and cardiac care unit. "I felt strength from mom's experience and knowing how much is not in our hands, but in God's hands," he said.

Providing pastoral care at the hospital, Deacon Carson said, helped him realize "how much I need to lean on Christ in my vocation. It made me realize the most important thing about the priesthood is being present, and trusting God to guide you in that moment."

He remembered being with the parents of a newborn who was about to die. At first, he didn't know what to say. "I simply let them talk. We prayed a little bit. At the end, they were so grateful...It was a matter of being present, and letting them guide or show you where they need to go."

And his seminary training also taught him that priests need support, too. This past fall, after a fellow Theological College seminarian, Michael Fallon, died suddenly, Deacon Carson said the brotherhood of that community helped the seminarians mourn and cope with the loss of their friend. "When you go through the priesthood, you're going to rely on your brother priests the same way," he said.

Two retreat experiences proved to be key moments on Deacon Carson's path to the priesthood. He grew up in Bowie and has two older sisters and an older brother. As a 13-year-old, Dan Carson attended a youth retreat at his home parish, Sacred Heart, and first thought about the priesthood, after seeing how happy Father Mike Wilson was in being a priest. (Msgr. Wilson is now the pastor of Our Lady, Star of the Sea Parish in Solomons.) "That kept coming back to me in life," he said.

The examples of other priests also stuck with him. Sacred Heart's longtime pastor, the late Msgr. John Hogan, once said in a homily, "No matter what's happening in life, if things get rough, if you put God first, everything falls in place."

Later, as a University of Maryland student, the future priest attended St. Mark Parish in Hyattsville, where he would later serve as a deacon. At St. Mark's years ago, he was inspired by the example of Msgr. Tom Wells, "the way he was so present to the people. He just had this rapport with parishioners. (I was inspired) watching how he took care of them, and how they cared for him." Msgr. Wells died in 2000.

After college, Deacon Carson worked as a computer specialist in the White House during the George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton administrations, including sometimes serving on Air Force One. Later, he served as a computer specialist for a research office of Congress. He also worked as a senior manager for Arthur Andersen and for another firm, doing management consulting on Wall Street and for government clients. Those experiences, he said, reinforced his respect for the dedication of government workers.

Six years ago, attending a young adults' retreat at St. Mark's helped Deacon Carson realize that he was called to the priesthood. "God calls us at the right time," he said, smiling.

His earlier jobs in government and in the business world, he said, will help him in his priesthood, as he works with a variety of people trying to find balance in their lives between their careers and their faith, as he once did. And he will be able to apply his financial and systems experience to any parish administrative responsibilities he might ultimately face, he said.

His outside interests include swimming, and until two years ago, he competed in master swimming events. "I like the peacefulness of it," said the future priest. "I can often pray while I'm doing laps. The water shuts out the noise of the world, there's a calmness to it."

As a priest, he said his goal will be "to help people realize Christ within themselves." That's something he knows firsthand. "Once you allow Christ to enter your heart, you know with His presence, you can fulfill the vocation you're called to do," he said.