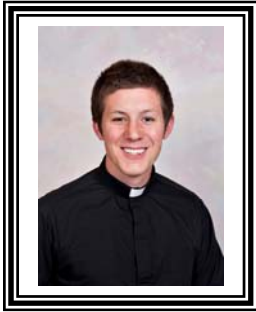


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First Theology – Pontifical North American College, Rome
Parish: St. Joan of Arc, Lisle
Birthday: July 16



The world will never forget the day of 16 July 1987, as I took in my first breaths of sweet fresh air – kicking and screaming as though I had been preparing for this moment for nine months. After a few days in our hospital in Hinsdale, my parents, Steve and Debbie, took me to our new home – built by them – where I would spend my next four years. Only eighteen months later, my parents brought home some girl, “Kristi”, whom they said would live with us. Kristi made a great playmate; mostly she just laughed and sat in her baby seat, watching me make trouble around the house. (My parents apparently liked bringing in strange, smelly creatures into the house, as they would later bring two more boys, “David” and “Jonathan.”)

Much to our chagrin, our parents also insisted that we attend CCD, expanding “God-time” from Church on Sunday, dinner, and bed-time to Wednesday evenings. In fact, my mother has served as catechist for each one of us. To be honest, I absolutely loved CCD and God as a child. The idea of having some huge guy in the sky that knew my name and loved me was simply thrilling. My parents tell stories of me being completely engrossed with the priest when I was a baby, not even blinking for fear of missing something. However, as I grew up, CCD and God waned next to the ever-increasing interest in sports and women.

My sophomore year in high school, I moved schools to go to the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy (IMSA), a three-year boarding school in Aurora. There, I was not immune to the trappings of living alone and the normal high-school hurdles. Was it not for my parents coming to Aurora to pick me up for Mass every Sunday, I would have stopped going altogether.

Coming to college, I reflected on my high school experience and realized that I was not satisfied with life. Living life the way the world told me to, did not fulfill me. I was not depressed, but I was not happy either – I knew there had to be something more to it all. The first or second week of my freshman year at U of I, I walked by the building that my dad had pointed out as the church, and for no particular reason decided to walk in. From there, I began the work of reconstructing my faith life. I remembered being completely in love with God as a child and remembering that He promised that He would never leave us alone. I began attending daily Mass, joined a bible study, and began taking my faith life seriously. For no reason in particular, I found myself online searching about information on the priesthood. However, I dismissed any urge to delve too much into the question, because to me, priests were people who were far too much into God. God was becoming a bigger part of my life, but I certainly was not prepared to let Him become my life.

It was not until going to Peru for a missionary trip that I really encountered the true Christian life. For the first time, I was surrounded by people who did not just follow Christ, but who loved God passionately. I saw a fire within these people that was so clearly the cause of their joy, and I wanted it. I felt confident about leaving my life in His hands. I came home, established a real prayer life, and got those pesky hints again about the priesthood. Through prayer, fellowship, and spiritual direction with a fantastic priest, I came to know what God wanted of me. I broke up with my girlfriend of four years, and called Father Burke Masters (Frburke23@aol.com), the Diocese’s Vocation Director.

After two years at St. John Vianney College Seminary, the Lord has continued to confirm my calling to the priesthood, and I gratefully thank both Bishop Sartain and Fr. Burke for giving me the opportunity to pursue a priestly vocation. My time at SJV has changed me in so many ways and has made me into a better man.

This summer I began theological studies at the Pontifical North American College in Rome. On July 19th I left for language school in Assisi, Italy – all of my classes are in Italian (a language I do not know)! In the Eternal City, I hope to grow in prayer and service and to better become a man in Christ, a man of the Church, and a man for others. God bless you.