

Jesus – Unexpectedly!

Good afternoon/morning! My name is Andrew Lunetta and I thank you for welcoming me so warmly to All Saints today. Before I get started, a quick introduction: I am the proud grandson of Bob and Sue Schuh and the proud son of Rick and Kathy Lunetta. I have lived in Syracuse for the last six years as I pursued studies at Le Moyne College and then at SU's Maxwell School. Throughout that time, I lived and worked closely with men facing homelessness and feel very confident that at this moment Syracuse and working with men facing homelessness is where I am called to be

Now, my reflection today will connect two stories and one observation back to today's Gospel. But before going any further, a quick refresher: in today's Gospel Jesus visited the house of Simon and Andrew and healed Simon's mother of a fever. He proceeded to spend the evening healing and exorcising demons before taking time to recharge. He then, encouraged by Simon, carried on to nearby villages to preach the Good Word, heal the sick and save sinners. Great! On to story #1:

Story 1

In September 2012 I signed a lease on a four bedroom home on the south side of the city. I moved in and invited men I had built relationships with through my work at a local homeless shelter to move in with me. It was an adventure! Lots of highs, lots of lows. We were able to find work for some of the fellas, we reconnected with family and we built a strong loving community. However, we also butted heads with addictions, mental illness and eventual evictions. Lots of stories; but I have one story in particular that I'd like to share to kick off my inflection.

This story involves a drain snake. For those who don't know, a drain snake is a tool that consists of a long flexible shaft that can be pushed through a pipe to find and clear a clog and is used to clear drains by literally snaking the flexible pipe through the pipe. So: at this time I lived with a guy named Charlie (not his real name). A little background about Charlie: Charlie struggled with drug addiction and homelessness and he'd been in and out of rehab programs AND: *Charlie could fix anything!* He could replace the brakes on a car or repair a roof or defrag a computer. Charlie lived by the motto: 'Only call the landlord if it is absolutely necessary.'

So one day I come home and find that the sink in our kitchen is totally backed up and overflowing. So I say that I will call the landlord. Charlie says: "No way! That's not going to happen! You go down to the basement and get the drain snake and a pipe wrench and a bucket." So I went down to our basement and get those three items and when I come back up, Charlie patiently showed me how to shut off the water, use the pipe wrench to take out the trap and then use the drain snake to remove the clog and the water runs clear into the bucket, and then put everything back together. We had a functional sink once again!

As it happened, about a week later I was having dinner at my grandma's and the same thing happens! Sink is clogged and overflowing, and grandma says "I guess I have to call the plumber;" and I said: "Wait! No way, grandma!" Then I run down to the basement and I get the pipe wrench and the drain snake and the bucket and I come back up and using the skills that Charlie had taught me, I unclog grandma's sink! Pretty profound right?!! I was taught how to use a drain snake...

My roommates taught me a handful of other tangible skills:

- Dry-walling, basic wiring, indoor and exterior painting, some basic carpentry..., how to make a Thanksgiving dinner. Skills I will be able to use the rest of my life.

But through the experience of living with fellas facing drug and alcohol addictions, diagnosed and undiagnosed mental illness and intense distrust of strangers, I learned more poignant understands:

- how to communicate with compassion and understanding;
- how to set limits;
- how to avoid the enabling of destructive behavior.

And, ultimately, I gained a profound understanding of my role in this community. I was guided by the men I lived with towards a life more in line with how I can best serve and how I believe God is calling me to live.

So, all this to say, it would be wrong to assume that through my experience managing the house I was the one healing and driving out demons. Far from it. I was the sad sinner in need of good preaching. I was the wayward wrongdoer in need Jesus' saving presence. And guess what? Charlie was Jesus. Rubin was Jesus. Jeffrey was Jesus. The men, who I called roommates and still call some of my best friends, were Jesus.

Story 2

So: story number two. In 2010 I spent nine months in Mexico... in Nogales, working in a shelter established by Jesuits and run with Mexican Sisters which served migrants who risked hunger, dehydration, deportation, and incarceration to find a way to support their families and be reunited with their loved ones. Often the migrants arrived at the shelter with nothing. As a volunteer I was asked to Maybe prepare a plate of food and a secure place to rest. At this shelter, one of the migrants I met was Don Isabel. Don Isabel had attempted to cross over to the United States with his young daughter – I think she was about 14. They were detained and deported back across the border, but sent to different detention facilities. The plan was that eventually Isabel would be united with his daughter in Nogales. The only work that Isabel could find while waiting for his daughter to arrive was a job selling newspapers for about 14 hours a day. This job allowed him to afford a space about the size of a closet in which to sleep. Every day Isabel went to work hoping and praying that soon he would be reunited with his daughter. Isabel was still waiting when I left the shelter six months later...

Every day I met men, women and children estranged from their immediate family. I saw the intense pain this estrangement fostered and the lengths individuals would go to reconnect with their spouses, their children, their grandparents.... People died of dehydration, hypothermia, infection crossing the Arizona desert to reconnect with family.

Now as a volunteer at the shelter, I could offer a plate of food, maybe medical supplies and always a caring ear – but that was the extent. I could not get Rosabel back with her kid in San Diego. Nor could I reconnect Marco with his wife and three daughters in Canton, Ohio.

So, let's be clear, I did not heal any sickness. I did not exorcise any demons. But you know what happened to me? I was educated in what is truly important in this world. Some of the poorest individuals in the Western Hemisphere taught me about the importance of family. And this is the lesson I try to implement daily as I stay close to my grandparents, maintain a strong relationship with my parents and do my best to stay connected with my brother. I have found that the migrants of this world are our teachers. They are our Jesus.

The next part of my reflection is not so much a story but more of an observation.

So: a few quick questions. And for my own self-confidence you don't have to answer out loud!

- How many of you, at some point zoned-out during my reflection so far?
- Anyone thinking about what to cook for dinner this evening?
- Or, maybe about when you are going to get in your run tomorrow?

The idea of these questions to point out how very hard it is to consistently stay locked in the moment. a few more questions...

- When was the last time you looked at a tree (any tree) and appreciated just how amazing it is...?
- Considered how many factors contribute to its growth...?
- And about how important they are to our survival?

The point here is we take very little time to admire the natural beauty that is around us.

So, staying in the moment and admiring and appreciating the world we live in. They seem to go hand-in-hand and are essential for personal and community development. However, they are two important skills that I would argue many of us adults need significant practice in.

But you know who don't need practice and staying in the moment or admiring natural beauty? CHILDREN! Right? There is a photo of me in my parents' house: I'm maybe five years old, at Rosemond Gifford zoo and my face is transfixed – my eyes locked on the face of the "Snow Queen"! This was some woman dressed up as the Snow Queen and was probably telling me about how snowfall works or telling me about the snow leopards or something.... By the look in my eyes, you'd think she was sharing story of the universe... I am SO into that moment!

And the appreciation exhibited by children when they are presented with the outdoors. All the beautiful trees, bushes, insects, animals, smells, sounds, feelings! It's incredible! I have no the kids, but I have seen countless parents trying to egg their kids back to the car from the park or stubborn kids camped out high tree while the parents plead for them to come down... (That would have been me...!)

Now, there is no doubt in my mind that adults hold the mantle of responsibility when raising children; but we would benefit from sitting at the kids table from time to time. Living completely in the moment. Admiring the amazing beauty that surrounds us. Think about how much better we would feel if we were not always thinking about the next five hours; or instead of turning to a cup coffee or glass of wine for a bit of good feelings, we could just take a short walk in the woods...

The little children of our world our Jesus. And we adults have much to learn from them.

So: tying it all together... Charlie and the men of the home I lived in are Jesus teaching me new lessons. The migrants across our southern borders are Jesus, shining a light towards what is truly important in this world. And the children are Jesus, reminding us of the beauty of each moment and the abundant natural beauty of this world.

So, as we go forth, I encourage you to do your best to explore the unexpected teaching moments conducted by unexpected teachers. Maybe once more of us do this, the true power of the poor and little ones will be realized. Thank you very much!