

Seeds of Hope, Stories for Lent #22 - *Finding A Saint Mentor*

When my friend, Fr. Jim Willig, was ordained a priest, someone gave him the best advice by telling him, “If you want to be a really good priest, then identify someone whom you believe is a really great priest and get as close to them as you can. Learn everything you can about them. Then hope and pray to God they rub off on you.”

That was such wonderful advice, and he did, indeed, identify someone. In fact, that someone happened to be the very Archbishop who ordained him. Joseph Bernardin of Cincinnati, who later became Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago. He became Fr. Jim’s inspiration and example.

In fact, Cardinal Bernardin has been the same for me. I’ve even written a drama about his life. You see, when Cardinal Bernardin was one of the most powerful Churchmen in America, he was falsely accused of sexual abuse. This was the greatest crisis of his life. He was internationally disgraced.

Eventually the truth came out—but only after 100 days of agonizing anxiety. His accuser recanted. The charges were dropped. But that wasn’t enough. Cardinal Bernardin reached out in forgiveness to reconcile with this man who had caused him so much pain. They actually became friends.

But the stress—the stress of the false accusation—triggered an aggressive form of cancer which would eventually take the Cardinal’s life.

His father had died of cancer when Joseph was only 6 years old. He had always feared the disease. But when it struck him, he prayed for strength and was able to face the cancer with forthright courage.

He became the unofficial chaplain for all those living with cancer—regardless of their race or creed. Instead of destroying him, the cancer transformed him into a hero for all of us living in Chicago.

The week of his death, his picture appeared on the cover of Newsweek magazine with the caption: “Teaching us how to die.”

There is perhaps nothing we can do that would be better for our spiritual growth than to identify a really holy person whom we can imitate and get as close to them as possible. We need to learn everything we can about these saintly men and women. Then, we need to hope and pray to God that they rub off on us. And you know what? They will.

Amen? Amen!

For further reflection...

1. Who are your favorite saints? Why?

2. What can you learn from them? How can you imitate them?

“But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess it forever and ever.” Daniel 7:14