

BUILDING THE DOMESTIC CHURCH

While Strengthening Our Parish



“The family as domestic church is central to the work of the new evangelization and to the future sustainability of our parishes.” ~ Supreme Knight Carl Anderson

Man Up and Go: Q & A With New Director of CIS

Damien O’Connor was welcomed as the new director of the K of C Catholic Information Service at the end of 2017. He recently sat down with Communications Staff to discuss the Lenten devotion of the Stations of Cross, sharing how it calls him to “man up” as a husband, father and Knight.

The Stations of the Cross focus on the worst moments of Jesus’ life — but wouldn’t it be easier to just think about the happy times of Jesus’s life, like the Nativity or Resurrection?

They mean nothing without his suffering first. He had to suffer. You can’t understand the Resurrection without Christ’s suffering. He also was teaching us how important our own suffering is. Nobody wants to suffer and suffering is never from God, but God allows suffering. So why does he do that? Well, sometimes we don’t have the answers to that, but suffering is given meaning when we can take our suffering, surrender it to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and say “I want to join in your suffering for the redemption of the world.”

Do you remember the first time you prayed the stations? How did this moment impact your faith?

I remember the first time I really paid attention was when my father, who was a Knight for 52 years, wrote a Stations of the Cross prayer book. It was based on his experience having worked in maximum security prisons for a long time. It was very dramatic and powerful and earthy. And it really caught my attention. I was only in high school, but I remember it was just a very powerful way of looking at it.

Do you pray the stations with your family?

We do. Like any other family, we’ll go to the stations at our parish. But two of our three kids have autism, so what you have is a variety of ways that it’s prayed.

My daughter Ana is involved. She’s praying and looking around at which other teenagers are there. My son, Damien Jr. — he’s one of our kids who has autism, but he’s higher functioning — is very pious. So he’s really getting into it. And when they read about how Jesus suffered, he gets physically upset because he’s very black and white in how he interprets things. So for him it’s very real: Why would we do that to Jesus?

For my daughter Mary, who is also on the spectrum, what they’re reading means very little. But the music speaks to her. She loves to sing and be part of that. And sometimes she’ll start to cry because the music’s so beautiful. So you have three very different ways of praying the stations.

How does praying the stations compel us to live our faith? To be better Catholic men?

To me that’s simple: It’s a reminder to me to man up when I have to suffer with regular, everyday things. Maybe I have young children that get up in the middle of the night or maybe I have to do the dishes or I’m doing the laundry. I see friends that are going out and having a great time, but I have to man up and be committed to my family. It’s a reminder to me of the impact I can have on the world through how I live my faith. I am the spiritual head of my family, so I have to make sacrifices. I have to man up.

You look at what Jesus went through; the suffering I have to go through is nothing compared to that. But some people do suffer a great deal. It doesn’t mean that it’s easy and it definitely doesn’t mean that I like it — that has nothing to do with it. There’s no liking in suffering. But it’s a reminder to me to really live my faith as best as I can and to surrender that suffering to God.

What if I never prayed the stations before, what should I do?

It’s the easiest thing in the world. You just show up. In Scripture, we hear Jesus say, “Come and see.” Just come. He didn’t say come and see and we’ll explain every detail of it. He said, “Come and see. Trust me, I know what’s best for you. Just come.”

Stations are typically held on Fridays on Lent around 7:00 p.m. For families, Friday nights are busy. Why should we join in our community to do this?

My answer is twofold. You should feel encouraged to pray with your family if you can’t pray with your parish or with your council. But the best way is to be united with your parish. Because if we make that extra effort — again, back to sacrifice — that sacrifice to get there, it’s worth it. By just being at the physical church itself, we’re united with every other church in the world. I want to be part of that. If it means making a little sacrifice and you have to eat dinner later or something like that, well, man up, you go to church.

Knights wishing to pray the stations with their parish should take a look at Catholic Information Service’s Way of the Cross (#363). See page 7 for details.