

From S. Joyce:

I first met him when I was a junior in high school. He was sent to my parish for his first appointment. He was smart, witty, with an engaging smile, a sort of ruddy handsomeness in spite of acne scarred skin, dark hair and eyes...very attractive. I think his certainness about his life made him even moreso. I watched though that summer, as he began to make friends in the parish and began to relate to many of us older teens.

He became my "family living" teacher in the fall of my senior year. He exuded warmth, wisdom, passion, goodness. We struck up easy conversations. He enjoyed my "questioning everything" which I did frequently. He enjoyed my devotion, because I was devoted to my God and very involved in the life of the church. My pastor was a wonderful wise man, and I spent lots of time with him reading and talking, and so I was around a lot.

By the end of my senior year, I was in love with this man, this wonderful young priest who had come to us. I used to avoid looking up when he entered the room because I knew my friends would figure it out, or worse, those giddy foolish clique minded girls who didn't like me, would figure it out. But he openly invited all of us to come to his home town for the parish festival that year, and I couldn't wait.

My parents and I arrived and when he saw me, he broke into the biggest smile I thought I'd ever seen. He asked if I wanted to see the school and grounds. I said sure, and my parents wandered off to the game tables and food, with me promising to meet them there. A few feet into our walk, he reached over and took my hand in his and we strolled the grounds. It was so good to be with him, holding hands and just being two normal people. And we were normal...he talked and laughed and looked at me with such joy. He never once let go of my hand, never....not until we rounded the last corner of the church and were in eyesight of his mom and dad. But even then we continued to talk and laugh.

After that, I took every opportunity to see him, showing up at the masses he was scheduled for, walking down the rectory side of the street on the way to the accountant's office from my office which was just across the street from the church. And he, when passing my office, would wave if I were visible, greeting me with that smile, that infectious, wonderful smile.

I became a communion distributor, not because of him, but it was an added delight to be able to serve with him. We had a few awesome conversations while preparing for mass or finishing our duties after. And always, he would look deeply into my eyes. There was something growing between us, tender, sweet and warm. It was good.

Then he was sent to Rome to study and I thought I would die. When he came back and was sent to a parish some 75 miles north, I made plans to spend the weekend in the city and go to mass there. I called to find out which mass he would serve so that I could surprise him. I planned events to take my parents to so that we could have a nice

weekend while still seeing him. I begged God to just let me see him, promising I would let him go because I knew he truly was called and I wanted him to succeed, to be happy. And God heard and we were able to spend wonderful moments chatting after mass.

I did walk away, but to this day, I love him and I love him more than ever. He takes up my thoughts so often throughout the day, every day. I saw him a couple of times a few years ago when I had traveled to his city for work. We had a couple lunches. The first, we laughed and talked and hugged when we parted. The second, he surprised me with telling me how capable and talented I was, but the hug was our last. I had left the church, become a minister, and he had told me how often he wished that the Catholic Church would accept women in ministry because, like me, they had what it took. It was heartwarming to know he felt that way. But when we parted, his eyes grew sad, and his hug, though warm, was brief. He didn't look back this time when he left though I kept watching him. And I knew.

I will always love Dennis. I will always cherish those moments we could just be two people who loved God and enjoyed each other. I will always pray for him. But I know I can never revisit those early days with him. I know I can never take him away from what he loves. I know I can never truly and openly tell him how I feel. For now and forever, he is God's and I, as God's faithful servant, will say "I love you Dennis! I always will!" and then I will say "Lord take him, protect him, bless and prosper him. Let him never want. Always make Your love enough."

S. Joyce