

# My WALK WITH GOD

## Discernment In Youth



Ch **IV**

### Our Lady Queen of Peace School

It was now 1949. The war had ended about 4 years earlier and the country was slowly returning to normal, whatever normal was. I would be starting in a new school because my family had moved from Pawtucket to the New York City Metropolitan area of Northern New Jersey. It was an exciting time for me as my adventurous spirit started to develop. It wasn't as if I were leaving God in Rhode Island for I knew that He was everywhere and I could pray with Him in any time of need. Our Lady Queen of Peace was our new parish church and their school was just up the hill and about one quarter mile to the left. This was a relatively new school as it was built in the 1930's, before WWII. The church building was never built because construction was interrupted when Pearl Harbor was attacked in December of 1941. The first floor of the school, except for the two front classrooms, was occupied by the church. This space was in the center of the building where 4 classrooms would later be formed.

My family moved to Arlington towards the end of June, after I had completed 7<sup>th</sup> grade at St. Mary's. it was time to go to Mass on the first Sunday after we moved. I was curious to see what a new church environment would be like. Entering the church, we went through the side entrance of the school building. Climbing the steps to the entrance the large double doors ahead provided an invitation to enter the church. I found a different environment from what I was used to at St. Mary's in Pawtucket. Here at Queen of Peace, the Baptismal Font was at the back entrance flanked on each side by two confessionals. There were no stained glass windows because the space was not intended to be a permanent church.

There were two entrances in the center of the side walls of the church flanked by high clear glass windows. Below the windows the Stations of The Cross were arranged, 7 on each side. They were not bass relief sculptures like at St. Mary's but were very beautifully done paintings, ornately framed in gold leaf. The main altar was not adorned with marble, but was intricately carved wood with a large crucifix framed with a red velvet backdrop on the wall above the altar. The side altars were matching miniatures of the main altar, with a statue of Mary as Queen of Peace on the left altar and St. Joseph on the right. In a way it was a reminder of the basement church at St. Mary's in Pawtucket, but without the saints watching over us through the stained glass windows. As the Mass began, it became very familiar and I felt at home. We had come a long way from Pawtucket but God seemed to be everywhere just as the sisters at St. Mary's had promised.



As our house in Arlington became home, I had set up my statue of Mary and St. Therese the Little Flower flanking the Crucifix on my bureau. There was a small votive candle at the base of the crucifix, on the statue, that we boys were told, to never play with or never to light the candle. The large crucifix that was previously over our beds, was now in my brother's room along with Mary's statue of Our Lady of Lourdes, as she appeared to St.

Bernadette. At bed time I would kneel beside my bed and pray my evening prayers to God, for the forgiveness of all my faults. I knew that we should also seek God's help and protection with morning prayers, but I figured that our prayers at the beginning of class at school would suffice.

My parents had registered us at school, before the end of the summer, so when the first day of school came, my older brother and I walked up the hill and off to school. My 8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom was at the rear end of the school on the second floor. The windows provided a view of the New York City skyline just beyond the New Jersey meadow-lands. I became the star disengaged student. I felt unaccepted by the other students. With my New England accent, I did not fit in socially. Upon reflection, the only memorable thing about that year in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade was lunch time and the view of New York from my class room window. At the time, it didn't seem that God was interested in my plight.

My father was more involved with his work now; not as he had been in Rhode Island. We boys were no longer invited to visit him at his work. As a result, all of my difficulties were not shared with my parents, but became the focus of my constant conversation with God. Even though He knew all about the things that were going on in the world, I wanted to make sure that He was aware of how I felt. It didn't seem to make any difference at the time.

My classroom at school in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade was on the second floor and at the far east end of the building. There was an excellent view of the New York City skyline, and I spent my time daydreaming out the windows. There was a good view of the entire Jersey Meadow-lands from the windows. This covered the vast area of the Hackensack River estuary between the high land of the cities of Kearny, Arlington, Lynherst and Rutherford on the west side and Jersey City, Hoboken and Union City to the east. The railroads criss-crossed this area and the steam engines would belch steam and smoke as they pulled their long heavy loads through the meadow-lands. I dreamed of the places that they might be going with their loads of people and cargo. I was a poor student and God seemed very far away in Rhode Island. I knew that was not true that God was only in Rhode Island, because God was everywhere, but it surely didn't feel like it.

Every morning when I left home, anxiety built within me. What trauma would confront me today? My poor academic history remained unbroken as I entered the 9<sup>th</sup> grade at Our Lady Queen of Peace School. The schoolroom changed along with the view. Now my classroom overlooked the construction site of our new church building. Again, morning prayers were the highlight of my day. It was the only time that I felt the comforting presence of God.

I went to confession a couple times a month but it was not the same as at St. Mary's. I felt nothing significant following my confession. God was far away and I was performing an act of obligation. I'm sure that I still believed in Him but it became more difficult as time passed.



There were problems at home. My father was having difficulties at work and after a few weeks he was unemployed. The stress turned him to drinking and therefore he lost much interest in the family. Church was always a priority, however, and he would always go to Mass, together with my mother and my

two brothers. As unemployment gripped my father, anxiety in our family grew. It became difficult to see a spiritual life where the goodness and love of Jesus might prevail in our lives. Christmas was sparse, not only in the gifts that we had become accustomed to in more bountiful times but in the decorations I had always associated with the birth of Jesus. Maybe it was the same at the time of His birth with all the disruptions of Jewish life in Judea. Rome had occupied the country and Herod was terrorizing the population. Jesus was born during a time of tribulation and poverty for himself as well as the nation. It was a time when any sense of comfort was welcomed. In my case it came, unfortunately, not from God or the Church, but from acquaintances who didn't have my best interest in mind. I longed for a change and stability in our lives. Prayer didn't seem to be in my bag of tricks at that time. It was at about this time, in the summer of 1951, that we moved from the city to a country town in central New Jersey.

Maybe I could become closer with God in our new home. A new environment, I thought, would bring a new beginning in my life. Even though I was able to actually make new friends, or so I thought, I soon found out that I was still the same unhappy person. I hadn't yet learned that happiness would be the product of my own spirit, and something to be generated from within myself.

## NOTES

### *from the future*

*I visited Queen of Peace Church in NJ in '72. The building had been completed in the early 50's and was a striking modern colonial structure.*



*The windows had no saints overlooking the congregation. The interior of the church was massive and functional. The main altar area was rather plain but there were two side altars for Our Lady Queen of Peace and St. Joseph. Even the votive candles arranged at the foot of these altars had a modern bent to them.*

*'They were electric'      The symbolism of offering a candle was gone.*