

FEBRUARY 3, 2025 DEACON MIKE WALSH

I want to share something that might not be a secret. You just kind of have to look at me, and I think I share this, actually, with many of you who watch the Daily TV Mass, every day as part of our community. I'm a child of the '50s and the '60s. Yes, a pure baby boom baby. And, one of the things that was a great gift of that particular time frame, and I've always, at least in my life, been very thankful for it, is I was born into an environment where there were great storytellers. Especially great storytellers about our faith.

I was very fortunate to come up in the Catholic school system at the time, and right through elementary school, I had the Sisters of Saint Joseph all around us. And even though they may have been short in stature, many of them, they were absolute giants in terms of their ability to teach the faith. And in high school, I had the Jesuits. It was an all-boys school, but we had these many Jesuits with us, including the scholastics, the young ones, who were studying to be priests.

My parents were great teachers, and they always took us to church. But one of the things that was very unique, at least in the early part of my life, when I was-- I'll say up to about eight years old, my grandmother, my mom's mom, lived with us. And not only did she live with us, because our house was so small she shared a bedroom with me. And she would always tell me these stories, especially the stories of the saints.

Now she was Irish, so she loved Saint Patrick. So she would tell me many times the story of Saint Patrick. The only thing she left out was that actually, Saint Patrick was not Irish. He was English. She always left that part out. Because I was named Michael, she gave me the statue of Saint Michael, that had this rod in it, that you could move up and

down, and poke out the eyes of the devil. So she would tell me the importance of Saint Michael.

But then something happened. When I was very young, I had this medical emergency. Now it wasn't anything serious. Again, if you're from the '50s, you probably-- or '60s, as a child, you probably had, any time you had a sore throat, they wanted to take your tonsils out. So, at this point they were going to take my tonsils out, and I didn't know what that was going to be. So, I was a little frightened, but two things got me through it.

First of all, the recuperation, it was actually great. It was no more than a sore throat, but I got to stay home from school, have as many popsicles as I wanted. So I tried to really stretch this out, for about three months. But then my parents got onto me, and a week later they made me go back to school. But she then told me the story of Saint Blaise. And Saint Blaise is the saint that we celebrate today. He was really a remarkable saint. He was from the Fourth Century, he was also a martyr, which is why we're wearing red.

Little is known about his early life. But he was a physician before he became a bishop. So he was uniquely in a position to not only deal with the spiritual needs of his community, but also the physical needs. And he was really a part of-- and my grandmother would tell me these stories about the communion of saints all the time. That there are all of these saints that are gathered together, that are there to help us when we need it. And Saint Blaise was one of what's called the 14 Holy Helpers. Look that up.

So these saints that are there for intercessions, when we actually need a particular-- someone to pray with, when we're going through things. And, of course, Saint Blaise is known for you know, sicknesses or

diseases of the throat. But the other thing about him, is that he survived a tremendous period of-- well, he didn't survive, actually, uh, but he lived during this period of intense persecution, under the Emperor Licinius. And so, at some point, he had gone actually to live in a cave. And from this cave, they came, and they grabbed him out, and they tortured him.

And they tortured him to the point they wanted him to renounce his faith, and he didn't, and he became a martyr in 316, as they beheaded him. Now the beheading, my grandmother also left that part out of the story. Right? But you really see that this was a man of great miracles, because he was known for his compassion, and his ability not only to heal humans, but also animals. And his best-known story is of this young boy, who was choking on a fishbone, and they brought him, and through the intercession of Saint Blaise, the child was miraculously cured.

So as I mentioned, he became the patron saint of those with throat ailments. Now, in our Gospel story today, you see this story of the great compassion of Jesus Christ. Saint Blaise, a model of compassion, where did he learn that? From Jesus. So in the story today, we have Jesus after being very busy, they come across the lake, they come out of the boat, and he's immediately confronted with this man, who has these demons, this demon called "Legion." And he sees them right away, and what does he do? He spends time, and he listens to him.

He listens to him. And then he gets the unclean spirits to leave him. And at the end of the story, we find a man who's completely transformed by this encounter with Jesus Christ. Here's what we hear at the end of this story. Because Jesus had this ability to deal with the man with no fear, and compassion, we hear this: He says to him, Jesus says to the man possessed: "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit." Which he does. And at the very end, we hear: "Then the people came to see what it was

that had happened. "They came to Jesus and saw the demonic sitting there clothed."

And immediately, what you see is the man, who had no dignity before, because of this encounter with Christ, is now clothed. And he is in his right mind. But then you see that the people see that the man has been transformed, didn't know what to do, and they were frightened of him. Now, I had an experience this past weekend, which really taught me a lot about this particular passage. I met a man, he was an elderly man, it was at a very large event, and he knew I had done work with ex-convicts, as part of my deaconate, and he told me about his time in prison ministry.

He's spent many years in prisons. Kind of our modern-day cave, or tombs if you want to say... And he learned one thing. He said the most important part of this ministry was to listen. And I was so profoundly impacted by that. Because in our Gospel story today, what does Jesus do? He listens. And because he listens, the man is transformed. And that's what we're called to do. Follow the example of Jesus, the example of Saint Blaise, and the other saints in the communion of saints.

And as we get older, one of the things we can truly offer is the gift of listening, and then storytelling, to help the younger generation to move forward. See, Christ is our example, especially in this Gospel. As I mentioned, he listens to the man from the tombs, he heals him, and then what does he tell him? He tells him to go in peace. And the best way that he can glorify the Lord is to live a life that is good and full of compassion. A life amongst those in his community who had rejected him. God bless.