

JUNE 20 2025, FATHER MICHAEL COUTTS

66 years ago today, I joined the seminary. One of my companions was becoming a diocesan priest, so I asked my mother, "Should I join the diocese?" And she said, "No way!" She told me, "The diocesan priests are smart and quick learners. You're a slow learner—join the Jesuits. They have a longer tradition of training." I said, "Thanks, Mom." But so said, so done.

After three years of philosophy and four years of theology, along with a degree in classical studies—Latin and Greek—they made me do another degree in education. Speaking about one's qualifications is both embarrassing and nauseating. Just like Paul in our Gospel today, who said, "Why should I boast?"

Paul was attacked—attacked for his right to proclaim the Gospel, attacked for his apostleship to the Gentiles. So he came out with guns blazing. He spoke about being shipwrecked three times, being beaten and scourged five times, being stoned, being in danger in the city and the country, going hungry, being attacked by his own companions and by others.

Yet Paul said, when it comes to boasting, "I'd rather boast in the Lord." He was challenged about his right to be an apostle, and he answered, "I was called by the Lord Himself. I am a Jew, a descendant of Abraham. I studied in the rabbi's school under Gamaliel." He had all the credentials.

As for his mission to the Gentiles, he said, "The Church in Jerusalem sent me, together with Barnabas, to proclaim the Good News to the Gentiles—to tell them that they do not have to follow the Jewish traditions. They do not have to be circumcised. All they have to do is believe in Christ."

And as for being a disciple of Jesus, he cited Jesus' own words from Luke, chapter nine: "If you want to be my disciple, you must carry your cross." Paul made it clear—he had carried his cross, listing all the sufferings he endured because of his belief in Christ. What a powerful story.

Still, in both business and apostolic work, we often have to show our credentials—and we must show them in a way that impresses others. Throughout the Church's history, great saints lived humble and poor lives, following in the footsteps of Jesus. But when they had to prove their identity, they did not hesitate.

Take Francis Xavier, for example. When he went to India, he lived a poor life. Imagine a Canadian ambassador walking the streets of India, calling people to listen to him. That's what Francis did. Sent by the King of Portugal, he carried his credentials, washed and sewed his own cassock, and lived simply. Yet when it came to meeting authorities, he wore his full regalia. And bureaucracy moved—moved quickly.

Or Matteo Ricci, who went to China. If you visit Beijing today, you'll find a house where tourists go to learn about him—a man who impressed the Emperor so deeply that he became his advisor.

When proclaiming Christ, we come with peace, order, and dignity—with all our guns blazing, spiritually speaking. But when it comes to following Jesus, we live exactly as the Gospel says today: "Do not store up treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in. Store up treasures in heaven."

Jesus says further, "If you walk in darkness, there is no light in you." This is so relevant in today's world. Media and advertising have become dominant. They don't care about the truth of a product—only about its appearance and how it will attract consumers.

Psychologists and psychiatrists tell us that pornography has taken second place. Today's greatest addiction is: "What I see is what I want."

Amazon, Costco, Spotify, Temu, Kijiji—we want the latest, the best, the most appealing. We walk not in light, but in darkness disguised as light.

Even more insidious than that is FOMO—the fear of missing out. And now artificial intelligence brings us a new bright light that is, in fact, pure darkness. It often has no concern for truth, only for what appears credible. Prime ministers, presidents, and people throughout history have shamelessly used this to serve their agendas, inviting us to walk in darkness, not light.

And so Jesus challenges us today: "Walk in the light." Because if we walk in darkness, all we do is head toward destruction.

God bless you all.