

Welcome

Father Mark Thomas

I was born Dec. 1, 1961 in Holland, Michigan. I also lived in towns of Plymouth and Jackson Michigan. At the age of 10 years old, my family left Michigan for 3 years in Bethany, Oklahoma, where I attended grades 5-7. In 1975, when I was 13, we moved to Douglasville. I attended 8th grade at Chapel Hill Middle School and then all four years of high school at Lithia Springs High, from which I graduated in 1980. After earning most of my credits at the University of Georgia, I completed a degree in economics at Georgia State University in 1986 (This was after a brief 5-month Army stint in which I was given an honorable medical discharge after falling and breaking my arm, requiring surgery, during training at Ft. Knox, Kentucky)

I began a career as a high school Social Studies teacher in 1987 at Lakeshore High in College Park. In 1988, Lakeshore was merged with Westwood High to form Westlake High, where I taught through the 90-91 school year. I then moved to Creekside High in Fairburn. In 1996, I embarked on a trip to Tokyo, Japan which lasted about 3 months. It is in Japan, where I earned money as an English teacher, that I rediscovered the Catholicism from which I had fallen away after our family had left Michigan in 1972.

Upon returning from Japan in April of 1996, I hiked about 800 miles of the Appalachian Trail. Upon leaving the trail, I went to Raleigh, North Carolina, where I found work at an alternative school for troubled teens. After two years there, I accepted a teaching position at Apex High School in suburban Raleigh.

My years in Raleigh were vital to my Catholic renewal. I attended Sacred Heart Cathedral in downtown Raleigh, began work in various ministries, especially R.C.I.A., and learned more and more about our faith. Monsignor Tim O'Connor (now deceased) had a great impact on how I began to look at priestly ministry. It took several years of being back in the Church before I started hearing that call to priesthood that has led to my present first assignment at SJV. As you might imagine, for quite a few years I was convinced that priesthood was out of the question. Time went on and I earned a masters degree in school administration at Campbell University in Buies Creek, NC (south of Raleigh). I served as the assistant principal at Highlands School (K-12) in Highlands, NC from 2004-2006.

Another grace-filled moment came with the call to go to New Orleans, Louisiana, which I did, and only 10 months after the flooding caused by Hurricane Katrina. As the public schools there prepared to reopen in August 2006, I was named assistant principal at one of the city's PK-8 schools, Murray Henderson Elementary. During this year of my life, I spent an hour every Friday evening in front of the Blessed Sacrament at Holy Name of Jesus parish, which was not far from Notre Dame Seminary in Uptown New Orleans.

It is really there, in the presence of Our Lord on those Friday nights when I would pray for the children of New Orleans, for my fellow educators, for the recovery of the city itself, that my vocational call really began to establish itself. I began to see that God had brought me to New Orleans for more reasons than I might have realized. One day in 2008 I summoned the courage to enter the chancery of the Archdiocese of New Orleans and ask to speak to someone about the priesthood, about becoming a priest (at that time I did not even realize that seminary formation would take 6 years!). The vocation director suggested that I begin attending monthly discernment meetings with other men who felt a similar sense that they might be called to priestly ministry. I did this for a full year, never missing a meeting. At the end of the year, I applied for admission to seminary formation with the Archdiocese of New Orleans. I was accepted and moved into the seminary in August 2009. With God's help, I stayed. I prayed a lot, I struggled at times both spiritually and academically.

After about three years as a New Orleans seminarian, I began to discern that maybe God wanted me to come back home to North Georgia. I prayed about it for many weeks, finally coming to realize that though I love the city of New Orleans and her people that my true home is North Georgia, the place where I came of age, the place where I was a teenager who loved running track and cross country, the place where I went to college and where I began my career in teaching and coaching.

I told Archbishop Gregory Aymond of New Orleans of my wish to transfer to the Archdiocese of Atlanta. He listened to me very patiently and said that my discernment seemed to him to be genuine. With his permission and the willingness of the Archdiocese of Atlanta to accept me, I became a seminarian of the Archdiocese of Atlanta. Archbishop Wilton Gregory allowed me to continue with my class at Notre Dame Seminary. This is how I became an Atlanta seminarian and now, with God's great mercy, a member of the brotherhood of Atlanta priests.

As you get to know me, brothers and sisters, you will hear more about my life. I do have a wonderful family (2 brothers, 1 sister, 5 nephews, 4 nieces, 1 great nephew. My parents (married 54 years!) reside in Franklin, NC. I am the oldest of their four adult children.

May you keep me in your prayers as I will keep you in mine during this exciting time of transition at SJV.

Yours in Christ,
Father Mark (Padre Marcos)

