Being a Catholic Educator

I think I have a pretty strong idea of what you are looking for in this response, and I could postulate what many of your applicants include. “I live Christian values.” As do I. “I regularly attend mass.” I do. I play an active role in my church and my school, including being a lay Eucharistic Minister.” I do that too. My sense though, is that you want to know the depth of my faith. If I am being completely honest, I must admit that I do not have faith. Allow me to tell you why.

Years back I was the victim of a hit and run accident. The perpetrator was known to police as a career criminal and drug dealer. They assume he was impaired at the time of the accident. They don’t know for sure, as he fled the scene, ultimately waiting a few days to report his vehicle stolen, and his alibi of being out of town was corroborated by friends. They were unable to proceed with making a case. I however, was suffering. At the time of the accident I was briefly unable to draw in breath. I even had a conscious moment of thinking I was about to die. While I was considering this, the driver backed his van up, and drove away.

Thankfully, my injuries ended up being minor, but immediately following the accident it didn’t appear that way. My L6 and L7 vertebrae are now on top of each other, and for a few months I had pain in my back. My belief was that I would no longer be able to play sports, which are a huge part of my life. In fact, I played baseball in the NCAA versus division 1 competition, most notably playing against (and at) Ohio State University. That opportunity came as a result of an interview I gave on television to Marty Adler of CBC Windsor, after a successful tournament. I still have, and prize, that video. My belief was that sports would no longer be a part of my life, and for that, I grieved. I could not understand how God could allow a person such as was described to me, could get away with what he did, and I, a “good person” and a believer, could be left with an affliction. It was unfair, and I grew angry. I cursed God’s plan and I felt He abandoned me. I sunk into a depression, where I remained for a couple of months.

That came crashing down all at once, one evening. I was driving somewhere with my wife and she told me to put my seat belt on. I protested, as we were only going a block or two. She noted that I, of all people, should know the value of wearing a seat belt, as one could have been responsible for saving my life. I flippantly responded, “Maybe I don’t want to survive the next one” to which she broke into tears, choking out, “You would want to leave me?” Suddenly, and completely, all the weight of the feelings I was struggling with were erased. It hit me as starkly as cold water in the face, only in the form of a warm calm. It reminded me of how little I know of His plans.

Years before, I was showing that video I referred to, to a friend. While the highlights were running, my friend asked me to stop the video. Our teams were shaking hands on the screen, and a young boy walked across, raising his arms in recognition of being in the shot. That kid was the bat boy for the team I was playing. “You’re not going to believe this. That’s me”, he said to my astonishment. I hadn’t met him until we were both much older, and I had no idea he was in that video. I did know a few things though. He was my best friend, and the best man at my wedding. His mother had been best friends with my wife’s older sister, and my wife had actually babysat him when he was very young. Finally, his mother had been the one to introduce me to my future wife, when I ran into her while she was shopping, and they were talking. What coincidences, I had long thought. Until that moment when in my despair I had brought my wife to tears. Then it sunk in. These were not coincidences. This was His plan all along, and when I had failed to realize the signs, He circled them back into my life until I clued in.

So you see, I don’t have faith, because faith is having belief in something despite the lack of evidence. I have been given the evidence, and when I look into my wife’s eyes, I still see the face of God. And I am restored in the great gifts He has granted to me in my life. I look back on those darkest days and I recognize that I have never felt as angry and lost as the time I spent apart from God, and I have never felt more relieved and full of joy when He wrapped his arms around me. I see that my accident was not an ending, merely a transformation. I am a coach rather than an athlete, and a leader rather than a learner. There is nothing I would rather do, and that is what I can bring to my students.