

INTRODUCTION

My flip-flops slapped at the grass as I did my best to sprint across campus in the dark. It was nearly 9 PM, and the cool night air lay still, as if waiting for me to sweep through the quad. Moments earlier I had been seated at my desk in the corner of a cramped room on the 4th floor of McVinney Hall, alternating my gaze from the glaring, empty computer screen to the still unfamiliar walls, as I willed myself not to cry. I spotted the Mass schedule that I had conveniently tacked to the wall, and out of curiosity—or boredom—I read the Mass times. I barely managed to mumble a quick, “I’ll be back later,” to my roommate, before slipping out the door.

I stumbled into one of the dark wooden pews, just as the priest began his short, solo procession from the sacristy to the altar. I had run toward the chapel to be on time, but I was running from some things, too—the work that had already piled up, the hideous dorm showers, the loneliness that I had felt since my arrival a few weeks earlier.

The chapel was nearly silent. It was not the awkward silence of sharing a room with someone I hardly knew, or the silence of sitting alone at lunch. It was a

warm, comforting quiet that felt like home, and I felt no pressure to speak. Here, in the presence of God, I was no longer a nameless freshman, walking in a wandering herd. I bore no label. I was still scared, unsure, and looking for the place where I fit in; but I was no longer alone. God knew me, knew why I was there, and felt no need to make small talk about my major, or my hometown.

I began to go to daily Mass whenever I could make the time. I made a habit of talking to God no matter where I was, or how I felt—grateful, angry, excited, lonely—and I gained strength from our prayerful friendship.

One year later, I hurried toward the chapel for what felt like the millionth time. The construction of a new, larger chapel had been completed since my freshman year, and I could see the steeple from across the quad. I had made a hasty exit after my Habitat for Humanity meeting, and as I walked I checked my watch. I would make it. I slid into a pew beside a group of my friends. After Mass we would probably head to the student center where, over a cup of hot chocolate and a bag of gummi worms, we could discuss anything from my Shakespeare class, to the adventures of being a resident assistant, to my preparations to study abroad. But now, we sat together in the familiar silence.

In the months since my desperate sprint to Mass, it had become obvious that the comfort I felt there

extended beyond the walls of the chapel. It was available in all places, at any time, whenever I turned to God in quiet prayer. This book is a starting point, because sometimes, the hardest part is simply finding the words to begin. A dialogue with God does not need to take on a specific form, and we do not need to be intimidated by the idea. God shares our desire for this intimate conversation in prayer, too, and welcomes us whether we rush in desperation toward Christ's comfort, or simply sit quietly, letting the peace of Christ wash over us, like a still night air anticipating our arrival.