

# Cursillo Witness

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## Introduction

Good evening! My name is Jena Blaustein and I worship at St. Clare's in North Palm Beach with my husband, Jason, and our four children. I experienced Cursillo #62 at our Lady of Florida in 2019 and sat at the table of Saint Rita.

In addition to my full-time role as wife and mother, I also work full-time as the Director of Consulting with a small DC firm specializing in helping nonprofit organizations leverage the power of information technology for mission success, strategic advancement and resource development, and operational excellence. What does that mean? I must ingest a steady diet of time management and productivity to keep many balls in the air, constantly handing over my very full plate to Jesus to manage for me. As a result, even my apostolic action must possess an element of efficiency. In other words, I must kill two birds with one stone, or in our current PC culture, feed two birds with one scone. I know many of you can relate, either as parents yourselves, or as caretakers of your own aging parents or other family members and friends in need. Spare time becomes elusive. Therefore, tonight, I would like to share how the Holy Spirit has shown me that, in this season of my life, I don't need to magically find extra time to volunteer for activities that would bring others closer to God but that He will bring the opportunities to me through my obedience to the vocation and avocation He has gifted me.

## Family

One of the more surprising ways I have been able to feed multiple birds is through my Domestic Church. It can be very tempting to go through the motions of the day, mark off the daily to-do list of making lunches, driving the kids to school, getting through my work calls, picking the kids up, helping with homework, making dinner, cleaning uniforms, the bedtime routine, wash/rinse/repeat. When I allow myself to give in to that temptation, no matter what I do, I never feel like I get ahead and usually feel pretty empty and unfulfilled by the end of the day. When I pause and ask the Holy Spirit to sanctify my time with them, what can be a mundane labor of love becomes fruitful and often even fun.

Mornings can be tough. Jason and I are tired, the kids are tired, we wake up at 5 am while it's still dark out, but we still start our day glorifying God. We take turns with the children saying our morning offerings out loud together, always thanking God for gifting us another day, for allowing us to wake up again, to see and hear, walk and talk. We pray for our needs for the day, but also the needs of others, and most mornings, we are blown away by how the kids choose to pray for others, whether it's a friend they know who is sick, the homeless, souls in purgatory, or mothers considering abortion.

We live in Loxahatchee and drive to North Palm Beach daily, so it's a healthy 35-45 minutes, depending on traffic that day. We often listen to a Hallow challenge, especially during Advent or Lent, and then we let the kids play DJ, picking whatever upbeat Christian hip hop, pop, or EDM song they are feeling to get pumped for the day, and then always end with a "Come Holy Spirit" as we are about to pull into the school parking lot.

After school, on the way home, we ask about our children's day, if there are any bullies we can pray for or friends or teachers who

seem like they are struggling. At dinner, after we say grace, we ask our children their favorite part of their day that we can thank God for, and in the evening, before nighttime prayers, we will all play the daily trivia on Hallow and then discuss which questions were hard or didn't make sense to learn from it.

Some days, we can see the fruits of this labor of love when God shows us how we can multiply that little scone we are feeding 2 birds from, into feeding a flock when we see our kids take on evangelical action. Like when our younger two, Minka at 8, and Valor at 4, couldn't wait to bring their Saint sticker Valentines to school instead of just handing out candy like everyone else (shout out to Amy DelValle for finding those for me). Or when Siena, who is about to turn 10 sees a little boy in a wheelchair at Mass, decides to offer up her Eucharist, and then when she gets home, goes on the extended family group text chat to ask her grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins to pray for that boy. Then, when we need it the most, the Holy Spirit inspires our children to evangelize to us. I'd like to read you all a text that our son, Harrison, who is 12, wrote me the other night when he saw me struggling:

“Mom, you're probably the best mom I could ever ask for. God blessed me with a mom who does everything for me, my siblings, and dad. You keep us in order and help us to get through tough times. Whatever is bothering you is just the devil trying to make the greatest mom ever have a rough time. But if not, whatever it is I ask the Lord our God who can do the greatest of things to lift what's troubling you. If that did not help, then just try to offer it up. And if that does not help, maybe this text did. PS – I love you.”

## Community

One very natural way to feed two birds with one scone is being visibly pregnant with four children going into grocery stores, going to Mass, or birthday parties. Many people will make comments like,

“oh my, you certainly have your hands full.” Others make less polite comments like, “I guess you had an oops moment” or “didn’t anyone every tell you about birth control?” My favorite is when they say, “don’t you feel bad bringing another child into this world when we already have too many people with climate change?” Even my OB asked whether he should say congratulations or “I’m sorry.” It’s tempting to feel judged in the moment, and I admittedly often do, but I refuse to let others have the false notion that being pregnant with my 5<sup>th</sup> child is anything less than the incredible blessing and gift from God that it is. I will respond to those comments with how God knows better than us how many children we can handle (with His help), that our kids could not be more excited to welcome an addition to our family, and that we have seen our joy increase with every child God has gifted us. Depending on the comment, I may have to do some education on why Catholics don’t believe in birth control, that God’s first command to us was to be fruitful and multiple and also remind some recipients that one of my *many* children may be the one who discovers how to stop climate change or cure cancer.

So not that pregnancy isn’t fun 😊, but there are times when it can be slightly more enjoyable to evangelize to the community. Minka is about to make her First Communion, and while we all know the dress is not the most important part of the Sacrament, like weddings, it is still a vital piece. A few of the moms had shared that they were shopping at bridal stores for their daughter’s dress, which I knew would be more money that we could reasonably afford. Other moms were just ordering dresses on Amazon which, I am not judging, but didn’t feel meaningful enough. So I googled Catholic Communion Dress companies and came across “Gowns for Grace,” a small business owned by a Catholic mother of 5, name Jena (weird, right?!) who is based in Charleston, SC, but sends dresses to churches who want to do pop up fittings as fundraisers. Each dress

style is named after a saint and to top it off, they were very reasonably priced. I found a pop up in Ft. Lauderdale and invited Minka's friends to join us in the experience to pick out a dress and get fitted together. I was pleasantly surprised how many of the moms agreed it was a better option to, not only support a woman-owned small business, but also a Catholic church and make the experience more memorable. The event was today, it was a beautiful day and Minka will be wearing the St. Therese of Lisieux style.

## Work

This is an area that has been a bit more of a challenge for me. Some of you who are familiar with my industries, both tech and nonprofits tend to lean in a certain political direction that does not always align with our Catholic values. Please don't get me wrong, I am not making a political statement as I feel like we can all agree there are issues with both sides that can put us Catholics in difficult positions. I've been working with these industries for 20 years now. Ironically, the first 10 years were with a software company who did serve the faith-based space, but it was before I converted so I didn't get to appreciate. During our conversion, I was blessed enough to take a break on full-time work to focus on my motherhood and only chose a handful of customers who were either Catholic or with a mission similar to Catholic Charities. The past 8 years I have been working with a consulting firm who, of the almost 200 nonprofits we serve, only 4 of them are faith-based and that includes Habitat for Humanity International which many people don't even realize has Jesus Christ in its mission statement.

This difference in values has caused me to choose more subtle ways to evangelize, like wearing my huge cross on Zoom calls, letting my employees and clients know I will pray for them, putting in my bio that my volunteer work includes altar server scheduling, and

sharing with my team when I need to change my schedule to attend Mass for a Holy Day of Obligation.

Recently, I was given what may have possibly been a test where I was asked to take on a project with Planned Parenthood. My boss positioned it like it was an honor to work with such a large nonprofit making a positive impact in the world. I think he genuinely believed he was gifting me an opportunity I would be thankful and excited for, so I am sure he was shocked when my reaction didn't mirror his expectations. I had to be honest that it was not a project I would be taking on. I will admit it was not an easy thing for me to decline. I first sought spiritual guidance to validate that putting my family in a position of possible financial risk was the right thing to do. That is when I realized it was another chance to feed 2 birds. I had to be obedient to our faith, to our commandments to not murder, and hopefully that was an action that resonated with others in my company, including fellow Christians who thought it was okay to accept that work.

## Conclusion

I want to thank you all, my sisters and brothers, especially my husband and children, who teach me so much about ways we can bring others closer to Jesus. Some days I worry I am not doing enough, that I should be volunteering more time, reaching out to more people who I know could use a kind word or prayer. Other days, like the ones I shared tonight, God gifts me the consolations to see the fruits of my labor when the kids are doing that evangelization on my behalf or when my brother tells me we inspired him to go back to Church and to make his Confirmation. These consolations show me that, by accepting God's will with what He puts on my plate, whether with my family, community, or work, that just obedience and glorifying God in the small things can turn my tiny scones, or my 5 loaves and 2 fish, into enough to feed thousands.