

The Man in the White Robe

I would like to take a moment to write to you in reference to an individual here at SCI-Graterford in Pennsylvania. A man who changed my life in so many wonderful ways providing nothing but positive input. This man showed me that no matter what life throws our way, the Lord will guide us through the storm.

When I arrived here from Camp Hill on November 9, 2012, my self-esteem in life was grim. I was sentenced to life in prison without a trial. At the time I no longer trusted anybody, especially anyone in authority. Because of my situation, it didn't matter if I woke up in the morning or not. My outlook on life was not looking favorable, so to speak.

While sitting in my cell on a regular Saturday evening, I heard over the intercom that Catholic mass was being held at the prison chapel. So, as I sat there thoughtlessly, the idea of going to the chapel came over me. I thought of a hundred reasons not to attend mass and only one reason to go; and that reason was to get out of my cell. When I got to the chapel, I noticed a black man standing in front of the altar. At that moment I thought I was at the wrong service, but this man was wearing a white robe so I decided to stay and hear what he had to say. He began by saying how the Lord could change any situation in anybody's life, no matter what sins were committed. Now mind you, he wasn't preaching that it's alright to break the law, only that the Lord will forgive us all equally. So that evening, I sat in the fourth row and listened to this stranger in the white robe speak highly about our Lord. I knew in my heart that I was supposed to be in that chapel and this man in the white robe was the real deal. This man not only spoke about the Lord, but he walks with the Lord. From that moment on, new meaning was brought to my life. I knew immediately that the House of the Lord (the chapel) is where I needed to be.

After attending several evening masses, I decided to speak to this man in the white robe. He said there were classes throughout the week that I could attend. I told him I was already baptized. He then said there's a class called Rights of Christian Initiation for Adults (R.C.I.A.) every Wednesday morning at 9:00 a.m. to learn more about our Lord and the Catholic ways. I told him to sign me up.

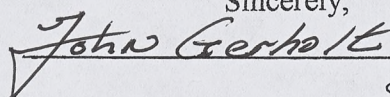
On my first Wednesday class, I was surprised to see the man who wore the white robe was now in a tailor-made suit. I attended his classes faithfully. However, my new desire to have the Lord in my life and in my heart was unbelievable because of this man.

As the weeks went by, I learned to believe in this man and to trust him. I still didn't realize completely how much this man would change my life. This class taught me that once you are Baptized, you must also be Confirmed to become a Roman Catholic. So, after much hard work and dedication, it was time for me to be Confirmed. On the night of my Confirmation, the man in the white robe stood at the altar with the priest. After approaching the altar, he said to me, "My son, the Lord has you now and this Confirmation by the priest is your internal salvation."

Now, the man in the white robe not only accepted me as one of his Catholic ushers, he now accepted me as a Roman Catholic. This man who wears the white robe asked me to participate at one of the chapel's Holy Name Society meetings. At the meeting, he asked if I wanted to join this most respectful organization. And, in the weeks to come, I was called to the altar to be sworn into the Holy Name Society as a member. Shortly thereafter, I was voted in as Sergeant-at-Arms. Months later, I was approached by the same man and offered to be involved with another respectful organization – the Order of the Franciscans. After attending numerous meetings, I was under oath to study the ways to becoming a full member. I am currently studying to achieve this goal. I am also blessed to become a full time employee at the prison chapel with the support of the man in the white robe. I am very fortunate to work in the Catholic Office with this man who wears the white robe.

This man has changed my life forever in ways I thought would never be. This man is such a great asset, not only to me, but to so many men that come through the prison and the chapel. He has also showed us how to respect the people who hold authority over us and still keep our dignity as men. We are all servers of the Lord. This man is not only our friend, but our spiritual leader. He has not only given me my life back, but other men as well here at SCI-Graterford. He is what we call our God-sent Saint, and I thank the Lord daily for putting this man who wears the white robe in my life. He is my mentor and my friend, Deacon Brouycie Isley.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John Gerholt". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

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