

CHILDREN'S STORY HOUR

A secret visit in the dark of the night

By Janaan Manternach
NC News Service

My name is Nicodemus. I'm a member of the Sanhedrin here in Israel, which is something like what you might call a senate.

All my life I have believed in God's law. As a Pharisee, I felt the law was the center of my life.

I tried to observe the law well. It was hard sometimes. But I believe I have kept God's law about as well as I could.

One night I met a man named Jesus. That is what I want to tell you about.

It was late that night. I walked quickly through the dark streets to the house where Jesus would be found. I was careful to stay in the shadows. I didn't want anyone to see me going to visit him.

Some of my friends wouldn't understand, although some others might. But some of my friends felt Jesus didn't keep the law and didn't show our Jewish traditions the proper respect.

Still, there was something about the man, the way he spoke, the way he acted, that made me wonder. He seemed to be good. His teachings were much like the teachings of our great prophets of old. I just had to find out more about him.

So I went under cover of darkness to meet Jesus. I'll never forget how he welcomed me. He knew what a chance I was taking. He felt how afraid I was. He listened to my questions.

Then he told me very honestly that I needed to change, to grow, to be "born again." Most of all I felt he really cared about me and wanted me to be happy.

I left him that night convinced he was a man of God, a prophet.

But I didn't have the courage to be his disciple openly. So I cheered for him privately and learned all I could from his teachings.

Then one day, when the crowd turned against him for his teachings, the guards were sent out to arrest Jesus. But the guards came back praising him. Then the enemies of Jesus got angry and asked the guards why they didn't arrest Jesus.

That was too much for me. I got up all the courage I had and challenged the angry people: "Since when does our law condemn someone without first hearing him and learning the facts?"

They were furious at me and mocked me as one of Jesus' followers.

But I still didn't join his followers. I guess I was just afraid. But I felt badly, especially as opposition to Jesus grew.

I cried when I heard they captured Jesus and condemned him to death. I stood at the back of the crowd on Calvary watching him die on the cross.

Only then did I find strength to do something for him publicly. I bought 100 pounds of spices to prepare his body for burial. I helped lay his beaten body in the tomb.

Someday I may start a whole new life and become one of his followers openly. But it's hard to change, isn't it?

Story Hour biblical quotes — this week from John 3:1-21; 7:45-52; 19:38-42 — are paraphrased.

(Ms. Manternach is the author of numerous catechetical books and articles for children.)

Nicodemus felt that, somehow, Jesus should be a part of his life. But he wasn't sure that his friends would understand. Have you ever had a similar feeling?



Trust

After ordination to the priesthood in his native Ireland, Father Peter Quinn came to America to give his life of priestly service to the disadvantaged living in our poorest home mission areas.

Supported by grants from the Catholic Extension Society, Father Quinn has earned the trust of his Mississippi parishioners by devoted service to their spiritual needs. He is part of a team of home missionaries who, together with Extension, pursue the vital and urgent task of evangelization here in the United States. But the team is too small to do the job without help. It

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HOW ABOUT YOU?

Have you ever worried that something you felt you must do might upset your friends? What did you do?

Nicodemus didn't want everyone to know how he felt about Jesus. Do you think people ever feel that way today?

Children's Reading Corner

To be a loyal friend is to be a great person. To be unfaithful in friendship isn't great. Learn about the value of loyalty in friendship by reading "The Real Thief," by William Steig (Dell Publishing Co., 1 Dag Hammer-skjold Plaza, N.Y. 10017. 1973. Paperback, \$.95.) Then talk about what it means to be a good friend and why people want to have friends. Is a friend someone you can trust? Someone you can count on? Someone who is fun to be with? What else makes a good friend?



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