

5-18-2017

## What is Faith?

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### eCommons Citation

Spina, Eric F., "What is Faith?" (2017). *President's Blog: From the Heart*. 67.  
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# What is Faith? : University of Dayton, Ohio

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Thursday May 18, 2017

## What is Faith?

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By Eric F. Spina

Here are his remarks:

My name is Michael Dosedel. I am proud to say that I am now an alumnus of the University of Dayton! I graduated two weeks ago with a degree in psychology and my current plans include applying for jobs in research at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. I'm also studying for both the GRE and LSAT, as I'm undecided on attending either law school or grad school for psychology. I have the great privilege of being your emcee for the evening!

The first time that I recall truly appreciating the type of man President Spina is was when I received an email over Easter break with the subject, "A Message of Hope." That struck a chord with me, and not just because I had started to gear up for finals! In it, he reminded us of our purpose as students — to make a difference in the world by using our education to help those who cannot help themselves, and to do so with compassion.

This is the essence of a University of Dayton education. Individuals like President Spina and the faculty inspire us students to live out this mission, and I know I will do so proudly with my UD diploma. So thank you, President Spina.

This evening we recognize Father William Joseph Chaminade who welcomed all travelers and constructed the underlying Marianist spirit that serves as our foundation today. We, as the student body, take the Marianist charism to heart. It helps to shape us, and it becomes a part of who we are.

My parents have heard many, many things about me, though I suspect that “your son will be graduating from the University of Dayton” was not something that they would have expected to hear 20 years ago. You see, before they heard those words, they had to endure hearing that phrase which haunts parents all over: “Your son has cancer.” I was diagnosed with stage IV Rhabdomyosarcoma at the age of 3. This was, at the time, a terminal diagnosis. However, I became the only survivor in my protocol, and have since had the remarkable opportunity to bear witness to the beauty of the human spirit.

Whether on the burn ward of Walter Reed, perhaps the most well-known Department of Defense hospital, or the oncology ward here at Dayton Children’s, tremendous acts of courage are happening everywhere — most performed with quiet strength and dignity, which is the very reason we need to be reminded of them. These acts have allowed me to see in others that which John Stuart must have seen all those years ago: a reason to have faith.

What is faith? It is not a mere risk assessment; there is something rather intangible in the process of faith, in the process that allows us, for instance, to look at a dying child or injured soldier and believe, against all odds, they are destined to achieve something others deem impossible.

In 2004, when I was in fourth grade, my father was stationed in Virginia. I was sent to Walter Reed for physical therapy. At that time, there were hundreds of wounded soldiers being flown back to the States for treatment from the war. It was there I saw our troops had no clothing to fit comfortably over their injuries besides a hospital gown — I’m sure at least a few of you have heard the old joke about why they call it the “ICU.” Because I and others had experienced this need, my mother and I began what would become an international non-profit, Sew Much Comfort, which makes adaptive clothing for the troops coming back with severe burns, amputations and external fixators. Many of the troops I met have since gone on to do incredible things: I’ve met quadriplegics who are now in medical school, though even the act of walking is a feat in and of itself.

I had the chance to find that out for myself recently, as I underwent an above-knee amputation on my right leg in order to get rid of a staph infection. I was sent back to Walter Reed last summer to undergo physical therapy, learning how to walk again. I spent four-plus hours a day in the gym with other amputees, many of whom had been gravely injured, only

to return even stronger and fiercely indomitable than before. As with any journey, it is a matter of putting one foot in front of the other, over and over, through good times and bad. What are we to do when that road gets more difficult than we expected, when the trials of life seem insurmountable? We turn to those we have around us for help. In this area, I have been abundantly blessed.

For those of you who attended the University of Dayton, or have spent time on campus, I'm sure you are keenly aware of which word I will be using next: "community." Though we hear it so often, I know that we have all appreciated just how wonderful a thing our community is here. Without the wonderful people of this school, I would not be the man I am today. For the past several years, I have endured a number of procedures and difficulties. Never once have those around me allowed me to give up faith or lower my expectations for life. If anything, it has been the opposite. The outpouring of love has always overwhelmed me; whether it came from my professors or from the staff in the dining hall or from my fellow students, I have been lifted up in times of difficulty. In a day and age where we are so easily caught up in the world presented by our phones, I am pleased to announce that there are countless individuals here who look beyond themselves to see what change they can effect in the lives of those around them.

It takes courage to believe in others. It takes courage to let go of the reins and believe that others can blow us away with their support and competency. Ladies and gentlemen, that is exactly what you are doing when you support a student's scholarship or an academic program: placing your faith in the members of this community, believing in them as they have believed in me. Again I ask you, what is faith? Not mere risk analysis, but the recognition of another's humanity, the recognition that you can bring their potential to fruition by placing your trust in their dreams. When others afford us opportunities such as these, we see ourselves prosper, for others have enabled us to say not what has kept us from our dreams, but who has helped us fulfill them? Thank you, ladies and gentleman, for having helped me to fulfill my dreams.