



Raoul Roncal: Master Storyteller and Evangelist

It's dishwashing time here in our household in Manila. We brothers take our customary posts by the kitchen sink to begin the daily after-dinner routine of washing the dishes, the pots and pans, and silverware. There's some small talk and a bit of bantering. But overall, the whole routine takes no more than 12 minutes. Everyone does his chore – be it soaping, rinsing, drying, or taking care of the leftovers – with a no-nonsense efficiency. Everyone... except, of course, Raoul.

Recently, Raoul has been exempted from the communal chore of washing dishes. Instead, the brothers relegated him all to his lonesome in the dining room – there to bus the plates, clean up the mess on the dinner table, and tidy up the dining room. He's not allowed to join the other guys in the kitchen during the communal dishwashing, a revered brotherhood tradition. Reason? Raoul engages everyone doing dishes in conversations and animated banter that "slow down" the dishwashing process, extending the time it takes anywhere from 10 to 20 precious minutes more.

That's Raoul. Epitome of the common life. Life of the party *par excellence*. Winner of the "Brother Among Brothers Award." He's so communal that we've had to "quarantine" him during regular dishwashing times so that we're spared from being regaled and taken away from the task at hand by his endless stories, anecdotes, and funny jokes.

Don't get me wrong. We all enjoy it just as much as Raoul does.

It's this storytelling gift that makes Raoul "an apt teacher." A Master's degree holder in theology, Raoul blends a love for academic theology with a down-to-earth spirituality that makes for gritty pastoral wisdom that young people appreciate. This serves him well in his diverse roles – presently he's a coordinator in the Ligaya Ng Panginoon Community in Manila; the National Director of Christ's Youth in Action, the community's nationwide evangelistic outreach; and a lecturer in theology at the Jesuit-run Ateneo de Manila University. And at countless youth prayer rallies, camps, retreats, prayer meetings, and conferences all over the country where he's frequently invited to speak, Raoul never fails to inspire and capture people's hearts for the Lord with his preaching.

It's this uncanny blend of practical spirituality and theology, a keen and endlessly curious intellect coupled with an infectious joy that comes from a heart set single-heartedly on God, that explains the ever-present smile on Raoul's lips.

Ah, yes! The simple joys of loving the Lord and loving his people... and telling stories at dishwashing time!

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Beloved family and friends,

A blessed celebration of the feast of the Resurrection to all of you! The Lord has risen indeed, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing in his victory and in everlasting life with him! All of us in The Servants of the Word pray that you may know yet more of the joy and the power of his resurrection in your own lives. Those of us who have passed the weeks of Lenten preparation for Easter in Michigan are also looking forward in hope to the coming of spring, as we have endured a winter of record-breaking snowfalls and an abundance of cold and ice. As new life begins to break out once more around us, we are further reminded of the new life that has been planted and is growing within us, through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our brotherhood continues to experience God’s kindness and mercy in countless ways, and this season is ever a time of giving thanks, of counting our manifold blessings, and of offering our lives anew to God as a living sacrifice. We count you among our great blessings, and we thank our God for you! Your love and support mean a great deal to us, and we remember you often, with great love and affection, before the throne of grace. 🌱

In Christ our Risen Lord,

John Keating

We rejoice in our hope of sharing in Christ’s victory and in everlasting life with him!

Raoul Roncal, continued from page 1



Raoul spending time with friends following a meeting in Manila.

Of note about Raoul

- Born in February 25, 1966, to Ernesto and Nena Roncal (only son in a brood of three).
- Graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Electronics and Communications Engineering in 1987.
- Worked as full-time staff with Christ’s Youth in Action (CYA) immediately after college.
- Joined The Servants of the Word as an affiliate in 1986 and made his lifelong commitment to live single for the Lord in 1994.
- Loves to run and play basketball and badminton.
- Earned M.A. in Theological Studies from Loyola School of Theology in 2001.
- Bakes great banana bread! 🌱

– Francis Iturralde

Uganda: Friends in Christ

An Inspiring Travelogue by Dave O'Connor

Several years ago, I read the story of the martyrs of Uganda. In 1886, because of the madness of their king, approximately 40 young men paid the ultimate price for their newly embraced faith in Jesus. The youngest of them, Kizito, was only 14 or 15 years old when he was killed. The account of their martyrdom was very inspiring, but little did I realize at the time that I soon would have the chance to visit their homeland.

Last summer, I traveled to Uganda for five weeks. For part of the time, I stayed on a ranch 90 kilometers north of the capital city of Kampala, where Cornerstone Leadership Academy, a school for young men that has an informal connection with Cornerstone school in Detroit where I teach, is located. Cornerstone Leadership Academy does a marvelous work of bringing together and training young people – generally from very poor backgrounds – from all the various tribal groups of Uganda as well as from different Christian denominations. Their vision is to create and sustain a strong network of “friends in Christ” who share the common goal of transforming their society.

I also met up with two brothers from our European region, Martin Steinbereithner and Dave Quintana, who happened to be in Uganda at the same time. They were visiting a group called Emmaus Community and helping to put on a two-week conference for university student leaders. I assisted them for three days, and was amply rewarded by the opportunity to fellowship and pray with those attending the conference. Wow! The joy and energy in their worship was amazing. Once the singing started, it was impossible to stand still! Through my connection with Cornerstone, we arranged for one of their senior staff to lead a session at the Emmaus conference. The two organizations have had contact over the years and clearly hold one another in high regard, but they were grateful for how our presence facilitated a renewed connection between them. Their relationship is particularly noteworthy because Emmaus is a Catholic community while those connected with Cornerstone are predominantly Protestant and Pentecostal.



Dave in front of Murchison Falls on the Nile River.

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Other highlights of my time in that beautiful East African country were the opportunities I had to visit two youth homes. One was in the northern city of Gulu, which for many years was terrorized by rebel forces specializing in the kidnapping of children. Cornerstone has opened two homes there to care for street children, to help them return to school, reconnect with relatives, and realize a purpose in living. I was deeply moved by the evening I spent with these traumatized kids who now have become as family to one another. Later, I had the special treat of visiting Komamboga Children’s Home, an orphanage started by my cousin and his wife years ago when they were missionaries in Uganda. Once again, I was greatly uplifted by the joyful singing of the children and the powerful beat of African drums.



An elephant foraging as seen from Dave’s hut.

There is much more to relate of my Ugandan adventure, but space is limited. I’ll close simply by telling of the afternoon when I was asked to speak, with no advance notice, to several hundred school children. The school was named after none other than the youngest of the Ugandan martyrs, St. Kizito – whose story I knew! (In fact, I have taught it to my own students in Detroit.) So, thankfully, I was well prepared to say something encouraging that day. In so many ways, big and small, the Lord provided for me on my travels. He even let me see *four elephants just twenty feet from my door* one night when I was staying in Murchison Falls National Park. With that, my adventure was complete! 🌿

– Dave O’Connor

Working Diligently for God's Harvest

A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold.
— Luke 8:5-8

Some will rightly say that the spiritual ground in London is hard: a lot of effort goes into our university evangelistic work and we can't always reap the crops we were expecting. Coming from our University Christian Outreaches (UCO) in Michigan to do a year of service in London, this has been the most obvious difference that I've noticed. This is not to say that evangelism is easy in America and impossible in London; rather, the soil is different – and I'm used to the more fertile fields of the Midwest.

As an outreach, we often go to the campus of the University of London to distribute free coffee so that we can talk to students. When our conversations turn towards Christianity, I'm amazed at how little a reaction this elicits. In Michigan, my conversations with others on this topic were almost always interesting: people definitely had an opinion (positive or negative) and they were more than happy to share it with me. In London, Christianity is viewed as just one more club distributing "freebies." Students are very polite and will listen to what one has to say, but ultimately, they are not particularly interested in religion. It's no longer the case that people want to debate the answer for it seems that the question itself has become unimportant.



James Munk (right) and Dallas Burkholder offer coffee to university students.

I'm beginning to understand what hard soil really is. And I'm becoming convinced that a better understanding of London is that of a spiritual desert and not just one of hard ground. It seems that this city was once lush and fertile, but the environment has changed and dried the soil – it has forgotten that it's meant to be fruitful. Truly, this is the distinction Jesus makes: the rocky ground fails because it lacks moisture, not because his seed is overcome by rocks. Our lives, poured out in love and joined in Christian community, are often all the water that the message of Jesus Christ needs to take deep root in even the hardest places. This has been the core of my experience in London: seeing people with no faith come to belief in Jesus Christ and giving their lives totally to him. The victories in London are harder fought (and fewer!) than perhaps elsewhere, but the Lord's power to radically change individual lives is easier to see.

In the parable of the sower and the seed, Jesus has spoken much about the challenges we face. This year has given me a greater awareness and appreciation for these challenges. Though the soil is different in our many outreaches throughout the world, the call of Jesus Christ remains the same: sow generously. His words are the words of life and they have the power to transform and make fruitful any heart upon which they fall. 🌱

— James Munk

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