Eternal Flame
David Rice

I have lived with ADD my whole life. So when I was a kid, going to church was tough. Sitting for a whole hour during the mass without any other way to divide my attention was almost too much.

Thank God I was Catholic, and we had the Catholic Hokie Pokie: sit down, stand up, kneel, sit down, stand up, shake your partner’s hand. I mean, if the Vatican made a workout video, we’d all have buns of steel. At the time, I thought praising our Lord Jesus Christ was hard enough, but serving him must take nerves of steel.

And I learned this at the age of eight. That’s when I became an altar boy at Saint Theresa’s Catholic Church in Edcouch, Texas. Before serving my parish in this capacity, I had been used to walking in the church with a cavalier attitude and saying to the crucifix hanging over the altar, “Hey, Jesus, can you forgive my sins?” and “Hey, Jesus, what can you do for me this week?”

Later, as an altar server, however, I learned that God is best praised when one serves others. It is a lesson I carried with me for many years, but then lost. I found it again eight years ago when I walked into the Main building of Our Lady of the Lake University.

A faculty member in the English Department invited me to talk to her students who had read my collection of short stories that semester. I had never heard of Our Lady of the Lake University, but figured it was like the other church colleges I had been to for readings and book signings. No big deal. I had given lectures in almost all central Texas colleges and this was just one more gig.

Getting there was not easy. I always got lost in San Antonio. The more lost I get, the more frantic I get, and the faster I drive. And how many lakes could San Antonio have? I mean, how can you not find a lake? But I finally found the college. I drove up and parked and ran toward the Main building.

La Llamada
OLLU
OUR LADY OF THE LAKE UNIVERSITY
2008
Crossing 24th street, I saw the grand Main building and its bright silver spires and the sun washed marble cross and statue of the Virgin Mary at the very top. I paused for a moment. When I pulled open the big wooden doors and entered, everything stopped. I wasn't a cocky 36 year old man with two books under my belt. I wasn't the arrogant writer with all the answers. The spirit of the building, the wisdom of its walls and the strength of floors humbled me. I was eight years old again, standing before the altar at St. Theresa's, ready to serve our Lord Jesus Christ. It was that visit that made me realize that I don't need praising from students. I need to praise them and serve God in the best way I can.

Today, every school I visit is Our Lady of the Lake University. Every time I visit with students in any classroom anywhere to discuss my stories, I know I'm there because of the grace of God. No fire can take that away from me.

David Rice is the author of Give the Pig a Chance and Crazy Loco.

Carriers of the Mission
Maintaining Faith

La Llamada

OLLU
OUR LADY OF THE LAKE UNIVERSITY
2008