

The Hermit that Saved a Soul, Marriage, and Family

Kevin Wells - 2024-11-14

INTRODUCTION: We welcomed back Kevin Wells for the third time as he gave a powerful and deeply personal account of his coming to terms with his wife's addiction, his role and the role of a remarkable priest in her healing as detailed in his book of the same title as this talk. As so many of us deal with great challenges in our own lives, this story of hope, healing and redemption is for all of us.

Two years ago, Kevin's wife Krista asked him to write a book about what Fr. Flum (the hermit of the title), did for her during COVID. She wanted to expose her brokenness, her wounds, her addiction, so Fr. Flum could be exposed as the heroic priest who saved her soul. Kevin was a bystander to all Fr. Flum did, to all that happened over the years. He started working on what would be the hardest thing he ever did in his life, a journey exploring the depths of their own personal hell. Though the words were raw, untamed, and ugly, he knew that at the end of it, those same words would become transcendent and sacred. Kevin thought the book was a book about Fr. Flum's heroism, what he did to take on COVID - a shepherd more concerned about saving souls than a disease of the world. What he found out after giving the book to four reviewers, is that it was actually a book about marriage, about the dark night of marriage and what spouses do for one another, when they do not step away. Kevin put his story into the context of the last four things: death, judgment, heaven and hell. Usually, we associate the last four things with the next life, but Kevin brought them to this side of eternity, how they can encounter us in this life.

DEATH & JUDGMENT: In December of 2009, while on a retreat after he turned 40, Kevin had become aware that he was "not getting it done as an adult," that he was not living according to God's will. He was not caught up in any mortal sin, but there were too many measures of sloth and pride. These things were becoming habits. Life was not working. So, Kevin asked God to "strike him down, and to make it violent," since God had sent His son into the world to endure violence to redeem all of humanity. Kevin too needed redemption. A month later, he suffered a brain aneurysm. God kept His promise, and the love story began. At one point, when he thought he was dying, he was faced with the thought of judgment day – he was not thinking of past mortal sins, but he was thinking he did not love well enough, he had so much more in his tank and he did not give all. What a way to face Jesus, to say he was too comfortable, to say he was addicted to his comfort! He did alright, but there was so much more in him. In the end, a miracle happened and he survived his near-death experience by the grace of God. Kevin did not like the vision of judgment day that he had experienced. When he came home and was recovering, he decided he wanted more of God, more Adoration, he wanted to love Krista and the kids better, he wanted to pray more, he wanted to strive for virtue, he wanted to see if he could become a saint. He was doing what he thought God wanted him to do. The love story had begun when God answered his prayer, when He broke Kevin wide open, and had put within him a zeal to become more like Him. As Kevin's life seemingly was opening up to new things, Krista's life was spiraling downward, as an old mother wound of shame broke open in her, and she started drinking. Kevin thought that the love story was getting him back to the place he wanted to get to, but he was wrong.

HELL, THIS SIDE OF ETERNITY: When Kevin requested violence, God flattened him to prepare him for what was going to happen in the next eight years. Hell had not moved into his life yet. God would answer his prayer and show him His love only when he died to everything he formerly knew, when he could not stop Krista from drinking. This is what hell looks like this side of eternity. Many of us have experienced it in our own lives, and Kevin wanted to show us that even in the worst of circumstances, God is always faithful. The wonderful thing about hell on this side is that there is a way out. Demons can be confronted face to face, we can beat them, chase them away, and peace can come in, but first we have to talk about hell. The evil one wanted to burn down Kevin's life, his family, and Krista. When he gently confronted her one night, he imagined a beautiful scene of openness, facing the challenge lovingly together. But it was not to be – her response was defensive and to attack him. The arguing began in a way that had never been before in their marriage. The fury of the fight allowed wickedness to fill the room. Kevin witnessed a side of Krista he had never seen – she was meek, humble, quiet, the one everyone said was so sweet and kind. Yet that night she was a different person. That was the night everything changed in the marriage and in the home. And the fight was the template for all future fights. Satan is very real. Kevin watched him take over his wife. Kevin's sweet wife had become a different person. As years went by, the disorder was always in the air, the wine, the weight of Kevin's powerlessness, the growing chasm between them, the silence, the absence of joy, the pressing down sensation followed them everywhere. There was no sense of ease for Kevin anywhere, not even in Mass. The feeling of desolation had taken over their lives and they were exhausted. Kevin loved her more than ever and was propelled by a great desire to

protect her. Krista had rejected AA and all forms of counseling. Kevin became more and more afraid because he did not know how to stop it. Besides prayers and dependence on God, Kevin did not know how to fight Satan. The marriage grew quieter. Even though both knew they would not leave each other, Krista became increasingly isolated, and the drinking got worse, and so her anger grew, especially towards Kevin. And God was silent. At times, Kevin was his own worst enemy, knowing Krista was subconsciously screaming for Kevin to be a merciful and understanding husband, he could not give her what she needed. Kevin kept praying for wisdom, forbearance and for patience, yet when he came face to face with Krista it was as if he had prayed for the exact opposite. Krista would emerge occasionally, but Kevin was too reserved, guarded to give her what she needed in those moments. Kevin's tiredness and his patterns of detachment had made him an unwitting accomplice to Krista's wounds.

CONTEMPLATION: It was the awareness that he was failing, that led Kevin to explore the dark corners in himself that he had neglected when Krista began drinking. He began to contemplate his soul before God. There were no more barriers or hiding places for Kevin, and he became aware of graceless gestures, omissions, resentments, but finally he saw matrimonial fidelity and sacrificial love despite all costs for what they truly were. He knew Krista would not fully heal until he chose to love her without cost. The struggles in the marriage had marred his intimacy with God – he forgot how to pray. In his prayerlessness, he knew the evil one would lead him to emotionally darker places, leading to a disintegration of all hope. He needed God like he never had before. He decided he needed to learn contemplative prayer, to meet God in the silence of his soul. He began to read St. Teresa of Avila's The Interior Castle, and John of the Cross. The book lit a path out of the darkness. He knew he needed to love Krista and nail his unknowingness of her return to the hard wood of the cross, he had to nail everything to the hard wood of the cross, and just wait on God. Just as Jesus poured Himself out with no consolations on the cross, Kevin realized he would have to love Krista in the same way, with no consolation, no marital entitlements, just pain. He had to surrender Krista, and surrender himself completely to God. Kevin had to give up everything he had ever known, and he began to realize that the degree to which he fully surrendered to the cross, would be part and parcel to his freedom, and in a supernatural way, to her freedom as well. Every morning, he would take an interior path to a thatched cottage in his soul. The cottage had two benches, one for him and one for Jesus. They spoke about everything heart to heart, without ever saying a word. When demons entered his mind, he prayed "Holy Spirit rest on me" to beat down the demons, and he would return to the inner sanctuary of his soul, where Jesus was present and all was right. He knew God was a faithful God. Kevin realized Jesus would save them both. Kevin developed a deeply personal relationship with Jesus, talking to Him about all his troubles. He imagined Jesus regarding him as He regarded John when he rested his head against His Sacred Heart on the last night. Kevin just had to remain obedient to God, love Krista without conditions, and trust Him. Kevin needed to do for Krista what Jesus was doing for him.

A SIMPLE IDEA: Kevin simplified his life around a simple idea: everything was a choice around two certain outcomes. One choice was crucified love, devoid of every sensible consolation to bring peace in troubled times. The other choice was succumbing to emotions, which would be prompts to the evil one to send down demons to destroy them both and their family. Kevin's job was to take Krista to heaven, so he just surrendered to God, and waited. The best thing he could do was rest his head against Jesus' Heart in trusting surrender, a far better choice than penances, cold showers, mortifications, and even more rosaries. This small mental adjustment of remaining as close as he could to Jesus' Heart in silence, opened up new found peace and direction. He had entered the field of contemplative prayer where Christ finally spoke. God was there on his dark night, and He wanted Kevin to cling to Him. The Teacher never hides himself from the suffering one who seeks Him. Contemplative prayer gave Kevin the sacred blueprint to the way out.

HEAVEN THIS SIDE OF ETERNITY: One day Krista said she wanted to go on retreat. She went to confession with Fr. Flum, the same Fr. Flum she had literally slammed the door on when he had come four months earlier for dinner at the invitation of Kevin, who had forgotten and was away at the time. This was the night hope came into her life. Krista spoke of her binge drinking to a priest for the first time. The rest of the story is the book! The beauty and the transcendence and the glory of God is that He answers prayers, He sticks His hand into hell and says "no, not this one." Krista is healed. Fr. Flum told Krista nothing on earth would be more medicinal for her soul than the act of simply keeping Jesus company at Adoration and gazing upon His Eucharistic face in the monstrance. Finally, our Lady came to Krista and told her it is time to give it to Him. Krista thought she could not, she did not know how. Mary accompanied her as she knelt in front of the monstrance and said "It's yours. No more," and she saw Jesus smiling. And Kevin and Krista are now on their honeymoon!