

*Into the Wild: A Reflection*

Vince DeStefano

9/15/09

There is nothing convenient about this experience. It costs money and commands time away from family and work. What's more, the accommodations are sparse and it seems to rain every day. I want to spend my vacation days relaxing poolside.

Why, then, do all 100 men from many different states enter the weekend with doubt only to drive off on Sunday dripping with visible edification and peace? How is it that this eclectic mass of testosterone, complete with addictions and imperfections, is crawling out of its collective skin with eagerness to take home the spiritual fruits of the experience to his family, friends, and community?

I have my theories, but do they matter? Ultimately, we have the free will to drift anonymously through our respective lives ignoring God's whispers. We can opt to forever indulge the empty, restless embrace of our all-consuming busyness, despite the deafening lack of Peace in our hearts, minds, and souls. Almost paradoxically, God will never renege on his gift of personal freedoms granted us, though we continue to spurn the ever-available graces of spiritual growth. And so it may seem only by chance or anomaly that most of the men attending the *Into the Wild* retreat weekend event actually arrive to the State Park grounds at all. Perhaps the man's wife signed him up in a final, desperate hope to improve him. Maybe the years of AA meetings alone just didn't seem to fill the entire void. It might possibly be that time and circumstance dropped the church bulletin on his lap, opened to the ITW announcement, on the rare occasion he stumbled into Mass.

The common denominator among ITW's attending Catholic men is that they *do* arrive. Coincidence is an empty word. Prayer for and by the man, and God's response of Grace to these prayers, have delivered the man to the retreat, though he may not know this. And once he arrives, he can't help to participate. Once he participates, he can't help but to be transformed by God's Spirit intensely present. Like the Apostles in the upper room, this collection of men brings to one insignificant dot on the map their multiplicity of sins and weaknesses from all walks of life. Like the Apostles, the breath of Christ transforms these men into *fierce warriors* suddenly motivated to preach their faith from the rooftops! The man discovers consciously, often for the first time, what his heart had already known - God created him a warrior, same as every other man. God infused the man with an innate gift to lead, protect, and provide for those under his care. God drew a distinct line between Himself and the heart of man, and the man only needs to discover this.

So why, then, should a man embrace the inconveniences and make the trip? Should my claims of personal transformation and spiritual emboldening be sufficient? What about my witness to myriad brothers finding supernatural inspiration through this authentic masculine experience?

Words on a page mean nothing if a man hasn't the slightest intention to welcome God's invitation to discover the depth of his created nature. I can only hope and pray for my wandering Catholic brothers to answer the call and enter the Wild. God will be waiting.