

'The greatest temptation of my life'



Dominican Father Carleton Parker Jones (CR/Owen Sweeney III)

Dominican Father Carleton Parker Jones calls it the “greatest temptation” of his life.

It happened 21 years ago in the library of the Anglican Centre in Rome, where Father Jones was completing research for his doctoral dissertation on Blessed John Henry Newman.

Blessed Newman, an Anglican priest who was received into the Catholic Church in 1845, was one of Father Jones’ greatest heroes. Inspired by Blessed Newman’s writings, Father Jones had followed in the Englishman’s footsteps – leaving the Anglican priesthood to become a Catholic priest in 1982.

Deep in the stacks of the acclaimed library, Father Jones pulled out a first-edition of Blessed Newman’s “On the Development of Christian Faith.” It was the very work that had most inspired Father Jones to become Catholic.

As soon as the Dominican opened the volume, a letter fell from its pages. Father Jones, then a student at Rome’s Angelicum University, stooped down to pick it up. His eyes widened as he read the old letter and realized it was a hand-written, signed note from Blessed Newman to a reviewer who had written some kind words about his book.

No one was watching and no one knew the letter existed.

“I could have simply taken it and put it in my pocket and no one would have known the difference,” remembered Father Jones, now the pastor of Ss. Philip and James in Baltimore. “It’s not that I was looking to sell it and make a lot of money. It was just that Newman had become so dear to me that it would have been a wonderful keepsake to have – a kind of relic.”

Father Jones stood still in the library for about a minute staring at the letter and thinking, “shall I or shan’t I?” The temptation was overwhelming.

"I can still feel it now," the priest remembered. "I can feel the tingling in my spine as I looked at it. I wish I could have seen the expression on my face."

Honesty triumphed and Father Jones turned the letter over to the librarian. He was rewarded with a gift of 10 books.

"I overcame the temptation by the grace of God," Father Jones said. "I thought at the time, 'If I steal this, it undermines all the graces I had received that brought me there.'"

Father Jones said it would have been ironic to steal something of the man who had led him into the church.

"Oh, but I struggled," he said with a laugh. "I stood there looking at it – coveting it. I went through the whole thing!"

Click here to read about what Father Jones and the Dominicans are up to at Ss. Philip and James.