



I've been a Catholic for almost thirty years, and I find that one of the most moving experiences I have to this day is sitting in an adoration chapel with college students. I had the opportunity to attend the **SLS18 Conference put on by FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students) this year**. This conference featured nearly 8,000 participants, including thousands of college students, who traveled across the country to foster their faith and learn strategies on how to invite others into discipleship and share the gospel. During the week-long conference, there were opportunities to listen to powerhouse Catholic speakers like Bishop Robert Barron, Jason Evert, and Fr. Mike Schmitz. (Listen to the talks [here!](#)) Those speakers were amazing, **but it was the witness of the college students praying that really convicted me during the entire week**.

Here are the four things that thousands of college students college students taught me about prayer:

1. Prayer exudes joy

If you ever have the chance to attend a FOCUS conference, you'll immediately notice the smile that nearly everyone wears on their face. At first, there may be a temptation to be suspicious as to why everyone is smiling, but eventually, the realization sets in that these people are truly joyful. In my experience, the biggest smiles usually came from those walking out of the adoration chapel having just spent quiet time in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

2. Come as you are

College SLS2018 Steve Duran Concelebrating priests

As I was sitting in the adoration chapel, I noticed very quickly that, side-by-side with the college students at SLS, were priests, seminarians, brothers, and religious sisters from a variety of different orders. It can be strange to see college students in jeans praying next to CFR brothers with full habits, huge beards, and no shoes, but that's what makes the mystical body of Christ so appealing. What I learned here is that there's no particular mold that we have to fit into for us to approach the Lord in prayer.

3. The power in the Sacrament of Confession is real

College confession SLS2018 Steve Duran

The crescendo of big FOCUS conferences such as SLS or SEEK tends to be the night of worship mixed with the Sacrament of Confession. Imagine watching thousands of college students go to Confession for the first time in a long while after having their personal encounter with the person of Jesus, or those who frequent the Sacrament swept up in the worship and moved to take part in this night of mercy with their peers. It's a really emotional experience to witness the power and forgiveness of Jesus on such a large scale. The takeaway here is that there is real power that flows forth through our priests when they absolve people of their sins in this Sacrament.

4. "We must become little if we wish to become great in the eyes of God"

College Adoration Steve Duran SLS2018

One of the big surprises at SLS18 was the appearance of actor Jim Caviezel who plays the role of Luke in the upcoming SONY film Paul: Apostle of Christ. The Catholic actor gave a brief talk in which he pointed out that the name Paul means "little one." In playing the character of St. Paul, Caviezel pointed out that we must become little if we wish to become great in the eyes of God. When I heard those words, I was immediately reminded of Christ's teaching to the apostles in the Gospel of Mark when he said, "Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." So the moral of the story is, be little and love Jesus, my friend.