

PARISHES

EWTN Radio host Deacon Harold addresses St. Veronica parishioners

KEVIN C. THOMAS | FOR THE CATHOLIC HERALD

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Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers speaks to parishioners of St. Veronica Church in Chantilly Jan. 9. KEVIN THOMAS | FOR THE CATHOLIC HERALD



Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers entered St. Veronica Church in Chantilly, placed his Bible, with its well-worn blue cover and multiple bookmarks, on the lectern in front of the sanctuary, then sat in the first pew, silently gazing up. It was the proverbial calm before the storm that is Deacon Harold.

A popular, high-powered evangelist, Deacon Harold gave a series of talks at St. Veronica Jan. 9-10, filling the church with his forceful voice.

Introduced by Msgr. Dennis W. Kleinman, pastor, Deacon Harold began his first talk, on effective evangelization, with the need to give what is received in Mass.

"Go out!" Deacon Harold shouted in his trademark style of frequent, thundering exhortations. He turned and pointed to the ambo. "You received Jesus in his Word. You were fed and nourished by his Word, and that prepares your hearts, your mind, and your soul to receive him — again! — body, blood, soul, and divinity in the precious sacrament of the Eucharist."

Deacon Harold pointed his finger toward the altar, then back to his audience.

"You are — double-fed! — by his Word and the sacrament. We are being sent forth to be the Eucharist in the world, to be witness to the power of God's love — in this world! — a world that is hurting and confused and divided and broken. It needs a witness!"

St. Veronica parishioner Ken David took in every word.

"So inspirational, a phenomenal speaker, the way he can communicate to people," said David, who was instrumental in Deacon Harold's visit.

A convert to Catholicism nearly three years ago, David participates in "That Man Is You," or TMIY, a Catholic men's program that is now in more than 1,000 parishes in 45 states and six countries. TMIY weekly meetings feature video talks by various speakers, including Deacon Harold, and was his introduction to the deacon.

"You cannot listen to him speak and not be inspired. Two years ago, at a TMIY meeting, we heard Deacon Harold talk. I walked up to Patrick (Chisholm, the parish TMIY leader) and said, 'Wouldn't it be great if we could get him to come to St. Veronica?' "

Chisholm agreed. They worked to bring Deacon Harold to Chantilly, and on this weekend, they could sit back and experience the spirited deacon, who entertains with personal stories and challenges with messages from sacred Scripture.

"Speaking to an audience, he generates so much energy," Chisholm said.

Deacon Harold, 59, said he traveled 257,000 miles last year, visiting nine countries (and has spoken in 34 countries total). His apostolate grew from simply speaking at a parish, to appearing on a local radio show, where he was noticed by EWTN, which resulted in one appearance, and then a weekly series on male spirituality. Deacon Harold, a husband and father, did all this while holding a fulltime job as director of public safety for the University of Portland in Oregon.

"I had a very meaningful life," he said. Then, in 2011, while praying in Eucharistic adoration, "the Lord said to me 'I need you to do something different — for souls.' I said, 'Nope.' The Lord said, 'Yes.' I said, 'I'm very comfortable in my life right now.' The Lord said, 'You want to take your relationship with me to the next level? You got to get uncomfortable.' "

Thus began a long discernment process as he worried about leaving a good-paying job.

"My Goliath was my paycheck," he said. He finally relented, resigned from his job and jumped into a fulltime apostolate.

"And, bam, one thing after another, after another ..." Deacon Harold has authored seven books, hosted radio programs and spoken around the world.

"Very animated, very good speaker," said parishioner and TMIY member Louis Perna. "All the speakers (for TMIY) are very good. (Deacon Harold) has the knowledge — the way he knows Scripture is very impressive — but he is also emotional and reaches us in ways the others don't."

One of Deacon Harold's lessons was how to put the parable of the sower into action.

"Your job is to throw seed," he said. "When you recognize an opportunity, when the door opens just a little bit, you stick your foot in the door, throw some seed and get out!

"Get out of the Holy Spirit's way and let God be God."

Deacon Harold gave several examples of encounters with co-workers, strangers, conference attendees and others. Usually, he said, the result of his "throwing seed" did not bring results for months, or years.

"Here's a problem: we live in a culture where we want results right now; fast food. We think that is how evangelization should work. But we don't serve a fast-foot God! We throw seed, back up, and let God do the work. It takes time."

Another TMIY member, Mark McCabe has followed Deacon Harold in TMIY talks and on the deacon's YouTube channel.

"He boils it down, doesn't he?" McCabe said. "I could relate to him. I loved his real-world examples, how he is living his faith with his encounters with people and situations, and his ability to reflect the love."

Deacon Harold, often pacing, always holding a crucifix in his right hand, spoke of covenant love.

"Love that holds nothing back," he said. "Jesus held nothing back on the cross. He gave everything! And that's exactly what he expects of us."