

A very warm feeling ran through me as I opened the summer 2017 Edition of *USD Magazine* and read at length the wonderful article about the impact of the Religious of the Sacred Heart on the founding and ongoing mission of the University of San Diego. I was stunned because I am a Catholic priest who had, just this past Sunday, spoke at length about Sister Alicia Sarre RCSJ and the incredible positive influence I had received from her in one semester of Spanish. That small, pint-sized lady had a great influence on my priesthood that continues today.

Last year, I retired from active duty service as an Air Force Chaplain. I had served as a reserve and active duty Catholic Chaplain for 27 years. I am a priest of the Diocese of San Bernardino, and now live in Palm Springs. In civilian life, I have served as pastor of parishes in Big Bear Lake, Banning and Idylwild California. All these parishes required the services of a bilingual priest. Sr. Alicia Sarre was my first instructor in conversational Spanish.

In 1980, I was enrolled in Sr. Sarre's Spanish III class which met in Founder's Hall. One of her rules was that if you were ever absent from class, you had to make it up by meeting with her privately and presenting a verbal "Tema," the word for "Theme" in Spanish. I would have to speak for at least 2 minutes or so in Spanish on any topic of my choosing. I was always terrified, and she was always so calm. "Buenas Tardes, Senor Lowe. Estoy listo." She would say, ready to begin.

This was the very beginning of my putting words together into sentences and speaking Spanish in paragraphs. It was a great foundation, because two years later, I was in major-seminary in northern California and the pastor of my field assignment in San Jose asked me if I "really wanted to learn Spanish." When I said that I did, he sent me to visit families recently arrived from Mexico and Central America who couldn't speak English. Although I spoke like a child, I had the basic vocabulary and Sr. Sarre's foundation. Later, I went to Mexico for an immersion program. After ordination to the priesthood in 1985, I began bilingual ministry at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in San Bernardino.

My homily last Sunday was based on the readings that all echoed the same *Tema*; "Do not Fear." It was said in Jeremiah as well in the Second Reading and Gospel. Sr. Sarre had no fear in her. Ironically, I was full of fear as I went in to give my Temas. But as I learned then and many times since, you just have to walk through it over and over. I had no idea, but Sr. Sarre had an incredible spiritual presence. I had noticed it when she would silently pull out a rosary and pray during class examinations. But now I realize she had an even greater, more profound impact on my priesthood even before I was ordained.

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