The grace of God is always available for those who have eyes to see. The mysteries of redemption in which Christians are called to dwell fundamentally remind us of that fact: creation was formed by God in love, and the love of God will always find a way to manifest itself, even in ways and places that can seem devoid of any light of love.

This theme – the constant presence of God’s grace and love – struck me as I visited Marist College in Poughkeepsie, New York, where Frs. John Ulrich, SM and Kevin Duggan, SM serve as campus ministers. Whether it was quiet moments in the small attic chapel, taking a walk around the beautiful campus, listening to the Marist College Singers, sharing a meal with John and Kevin, or participating in the Sunday Eucharist with the students, I was consistently reminded of the grace of God that seems to envelop the world in a warm embrace. Yet, in spite of the fact that creation swims in an unending ocean of grace, I am often unable to see that. In fact, darkness seems to be every bit as present as light in the spiritual experience of human beings. This paradox of light and darkness, presence and absence, has fascinated me for a long time – it was even the inspiration for a band I formed.

As I prayed about how I might prepare a short vocation talk for the students at Marist College during the Sunday Eucharist, this theme kept resurfacing. As I prayed with that Sunday’s Gospel, the Transfiguration, I was struck by the God who remained at the heart of salvation history: when the Jews were captives in Egypt, God raised up Moses, the great prophet and law-giver, who led God’s chosen people out of Egypt and out of slavery, and who gave them the law so that they might come to know this God who, in love, freed them. When human divisions had divided the Kingdom of Israel, God raised up Elijah the prophet to remind the people of God’s loving presence dwelling among them. Finally, in what is
often referred to as the ‘fullness of time,’ God himself came and dwelt among us in the person of Jesus Christ, whose message of compassion and love embraced all people, especially those considered most ‘unclean’ or on the farthest margins of society – lepers, prostitutes, tax collectors, and sinners. The Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus shows how far this love will go – even when humanity chooses to crucify perfect Love, God finds a way to raise Love to new life in the hope that all people will be drawn into unity with this Love. During the Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John were graced to see this great love, which had spanned throughout salvation history, brought together in glory on the mountain. They saw and witnessed the glory of a loving God whose presence endures forever, always seeking to unite in love creation that finds itself scattered and broken by sin.

Is not our vocation as Christians, then, to be witnesses to this glory of God? We may or may not be in a position to ‘fix problems’ that we encounter in the world, but we are always in a position – provided we have eyes to see – to recognize and, like the prophets of old, proclaim how God is still alive, still active, and still bringing salvation to our own broken world. In sharing this message, I had a chance to share some of the ways in which my vocation as a Marist – and also as a musician – has allowed me to see God at work in the world.

Among the homeless of Boston, in the middle of difficult situations and often inhuman conditions, there were astounding acts of generosity: men and women who, despite not knowing where their next meal would come from, would say, “no thank you, I just got a sandwich; save that one for someone else,” or one man who, in spite of a lifetime spent in manipulation of others, saved a prostituted woman from her pimp. At Joseph’s House in Washington, DC, there was a dying woman who, despite having every reason in the world
to be resentful, had a remarkable ability to see the grace of God and to challenge the entire community to open our eyes to the grace of God. While in the Philippines, giving a retreat to college students in a place where Muslims and Christians have lived in often violent tension for hundreds of years, I witnessed the grace of God in a young Muslim man who, after being embraced by his Christian peers, acknowledged how that experience made him reconsider the hostilities he had harbored in his own heart. The grace of God remains alive, even in the most difficult situations, and all Christians are united in the vocation of recognizing and proclaiming this grace with their lives.

After the Eucharist, I had a chance to speak with some members of the Marist College community and was touched by what they shared of their experiences: one woman who had also been at Joseph’s House, preparing for a mission to Africa; students who shared their musical gifts during the liturgy; many who, in spite of peer or family difficulties, continue to seek and to find the grace of God. The evening ended with a small conversation with a group of students who had expressed interest in the priesthood or religious life and, as I listened to their stories, I was reminded of the haunting words at the end of George Bernanos’s novel, Diary of a Country Priest: “all is grace.”