

Episode 13:
Goodbye GE...Hello JC: Father James Martin's Second Act
(5/7/2018)

Segment	Who	Copy
Intro	Father James Martin	My psychologist at one point said, "You know, you're so miserable at GE and you're bitching about it. What would you like to do?" And I said, "What do you mean?" And he said, "The question that I think every person should be asked, 'what would you do if you could do anything you wanted to do?'" That's a very clarifying question. What would you do if you could do anything you wanted to do? And I said, "I'd be a Jesuit priest." And he said, "Why don't you?" And I thought, "Yeah, why don't I?"
		INTRO MUSIC
Podcast Overview	Andy Levine	<p>Welcome to Second Act Stories, a podcast that looks at people who have made major career changes and are pursuing more rewarding lives in a second act.</p> <p>It's an honor to have Father James Martin as the guest for today's episode. He's an American Jesuit priest who has written a dozen books including New York Times Best Sellers "The Jesuit Guide to Almost Anything," "Building a Bridge" and "Jesus: A Pilgrimage." He's got a huge following on Facebook and Twitter and is a frequent resource to the broadest range of journalists in print and on television.</p> <p>But we are talking to him today about his second act – when he made the move from a promising career at General Electric to embrace a life of poverty, chastity and obedience as a Jesuit priest.</p> <p>It is one of the most dramatic life changes that you can imagine. Here are the highlights of the interview.</p>
	Andy	I'd love to start with just a word about your own upbringing and sort of religion in your early years.
	Fr. Martin	Sure. I was born in Philadelphia and was raised in a family that was Catholic but not super Catholic. I say that they were lukewarm Catholics. I went through all the things that a Catholic boy would go through. So I was baptized, first Holy Communion, confirmation, things like that. We went to church I'd say most Sundays, not every Sunday. And when I was, you know in college I more or less continued but I wasn't from a very religious family, so my entrance to the Jesuits was a surprise to everybody.

	Andy	Take us through the University of Pennsylvania, Wharton and what were you hoping to get out of your college experience?
	Fr. Martin	Money.
	Andy	Money. That's it. You were focused on a job?
	Fr. Martin	Sure.
	Andy	Okay
	Fr. Martin	<p>The main reason that people go to Wharton is so that they can get a good job and that was why I went. I didn't come from a family that had a lot of money, so obviously you have to work. Right? And if you got to work you got to get a job and so where would you want to go to school to get a good job and that would be Wharton.</p> <p>I studied finance because I thought it was the most interesting of all the subjects there. And I was very happy with Wharton and it certainly gave me what I wanted which was a good job. It really made interviewing ridiculously easy. You just had to, at that point in time just take a résumé and a little slot in a wall, you know, like with, you know, sort of jobs listed and you got tons and tons of interviews and I got lots of offers and I ended up at GE in New York in 1982.</p>
	Andy	So that was the time that Jack Welch had just come to power.
	Fr. Martin	That's right. Yeah.
	Andy	What was the allure of GE for you?
	Fr. Martin	<p>Well, certainly, it was, you know, one of the top companies. They had a great training program that had something called the financial management program that I was accepted into which was a two-year training program that took me through rotational job assignments and gave you exposure to accounting, finance, and all sorts of different departments.</p> <p>I enjoyed the idea of living in New York. I thought that was exciting and it was. And GE just seemed like limitless possibility. I mean General Electric for Pete's sake especially in the '80s was just go, go, and, you know, there was no limits how high you could go or how much money you can make or where the company was going, it was just expanding, you know, kind of, left and right.</p>

	Andy	One of Father Martin's first books is "In Good Company: The Fast Track from the Corporate World to Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience" which details his time at GE and his decision to enter the priesthood. It's a great book and I read it in advance of my interview with Father Martin.
	Andy	So tell us about your initial experiences at GE. From the book, it's clear that it became increasingly difficult part of your life.
	Fr. Martin	The subtext of the book is, you know, "Jesuits good, GE bad," I mean that's basically...but, you know, in...
	Andy	That was the highlight?
	Fr. Martin	<p>Yeah. That's the highlight. And, you know, my experiences at GE are all accurate in there, and I had a lot of good people, a lot of good friends that who I worked with. I would look back and say this, "You know, business is a real vocation for a lot of people," you know for a lot of people probably listening to this podcast. It wasn't my vocation.</p> <p>And so I grew increasingly miserable in the job and really just couldn't find a way out and couldn't see a way out because, you know, Wharton didn't really prepare me for anything other than business, so I thought "What else am I gonna do?" I mean, what am I supposed to be like? You know, I often thought like I can't be like a trapeze artist in the circus, I can't be a baseball player. What am I supposed to do? So I was really stuck and, you know, but God found a way to kind of get me out of all that.</p>
	Andy	There's one moment in the book and it just seems kind of like a tipping point. I wonder if you could describe it where your boss calls you in her office and says, "You're a liar."
	Fr. Martin	It was one of many tipping points. It's a very complicated situation but basically, she accused me of being a liar which I was not and am not. But there were other examples of people being mistreated not just me that I looked upon. And I remember thinking I don't know if I can desire to become these people, all right? I mean I don't know if I can sort of aspire to be the kind of people that at least as I saw it tended to rise up in the corporation. And, you know, the ethos of Jack Welch was pretty bottom-line driven. It had very little to do with human dignity certainly. I mean I think that's a fair statement. It was more about the bottom-line and, you know, "up or out" as we use to say at GE.

	Andy	<p>His book describes a lot of other difficult situations. And over his six years at GE, it led to him being miserable and even to develop physical illnesses.</p> <p>And that ultimately led him to the Society of Jesus, a scholarly religious congregation of the Catholic Church founded in Spain by 16th Century. Their members are called Jesuits. They take a vow of poverty, chastity, and later obedience.</p>
	Andy	How did you first started exploring the priesthood?
	Fr. Martin	<p>I came home one night and I was dead tired and I remember I had a bowl of pasta and sauce and I was sitting on the couch and there was a TV show on PBS about a Trappist monk named Thomas Merton. He was born in France, studied in England, eventually, went to Columbia University and led a fairly dissolute life and then gave it all up and ended at the Trappist Monastery. It's a beautiful book, it's called "The Seven Storey Mountain," and that really just changed my life.</p> <p>I had no clue that this was gonna lead to the priesthood. I just thought this is really beautiful and interesting. And then gradually I started to think, "Well, maybe I'd like to do something like this."</p>
	Andy	The job had become so difficult for this aspiring executive that he started seeing a psychologist to sort through these issues. And it led to what Father Martin called "A Clarifying Question."
	Fr. Martin	My psychologist at one point said, "You know, you're so miserable at GE and you're bitching about it. What would you like to do?" And I said, "What do you mean?" And he said, "The question that I think every person should be asked, 'what would you do if you could do anything you wanted to do?'" That's a very clarifying question. What would you do if you could do anything you wanted to do? And I said, "I'd be a Jesuit priest." And he said, "Why don't you?" And I thought, "Yeah, why don't I?" I remember sitting in his office and thinking, "Why don't I do that?"
	Andy	So Jim Martin started exploring the priesthood.
	Fr. Martin	I did a terrible job exploring the Jesuits and the priesthood. From the time that I decided that I wanted to enter which was in May of 1988 to August, that's how long the application took. I should have been doing a lot more discernment and thinking and I mean you know I didn't explore for example any other religious order. I didn't talk to the Dominicans, the Franciscans, the Benedictines, which I should have. I didn't look at the Diocesan priesthood very carefully.

		Part of it was that I was so miserable at GE that I felt this push, but also the Jesuits seemed really exciting to me and that just seemed like a great fit, I thought, you know, where else will I go. So, yeah, I did explore but I think that I should have explored a little more carefully. But, you know, in the end, it worked out okay, I'm still here.
	Andy	It all happened very quickly from there. He left GE in late July not even knowing if the Jesuits would accept him.
	Fr. Martin	I think that was probably the bravest thing I've ever done, I quit without knowing what I was gonna do.
	Andy	But two weeks later on August 15th he got the news that he had been accepted.
	Fr. Martin	<p>I called in all my friends then I said, "Take what you want." Books, bookcases, furniture, we gave...I was living with two other friends. We gave furniture to Goodwill and to the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. I gave my parents my car for a dollar. I gave them \$30,000 roughly of what I had saved and it was profoundly freeing. I was so excited, I thought I don't need all these stuff, I couldn't wait to get to the novitiate.</p> <p>It was just, I can remember as I'm sitting here I remember the excitement and thrill of just something totally new, something totally new, totally good, totally wonderful; romantic, you know, and I'm still amazed more people don't join. And so it was very freeing and you know that's the vow of poverty which is what that is which is getting rid of what you own and depending on the Jesuits, very freeing, and that's the one vow that I've never, well, not always but that I really found most freeing of all of them.</p>
	Andy	Was it pretty clear to you or early in the process that yes, this is the right thing for me or were their question after you started entering the novitiate?
	Fr. Martin	The first two years as a Jesuit in the novitiate were just the best years of my life. It was just fascinating and exciting and moving and relaxing, right? I mean it wasn't go-go-go. We had a lot of time for prayer. We worked in ministries. I worked in a hospital for the seriously ill. I worked in the homeless shelter. I worked with the poor boys on the lower east side and the school. I worked with Mother Teresa Sisters in Jamaica, this was fascinating. I'm learning about the Jesuits and praying and living in a community. It was great.
	Andy	I want to switch gears. So you have what appears to be a really interesting job.

	Fr. Martin	I sure do.
	Andy	Tell me, you know, what are your responsibilities? What do you do here at American Media?
	Fr. Martin	Well, so I'm a Jesuit priest and we are missioned, meaning we are sent by our superiors to do certain things and I have been missioned to American Media, which is a Catholic Media Ministry and I, basically, am editor-at-large, I've been here for 20 years. I've had different hats. So I've been associate editor, which was, you know, like a regular editor. Culture editor, acting publisher for a while, and now I'm editor-at-large which means basically I write. I write books that bring in money for the magazine and I do a lot of media stuff and social media stuff, but I basically write. That's my vocation within a vocation.
	Andy	So you've written like a dozen books including a number of New York Times bestsellers and yet as I read through your first book, it didn't seem like anything in your background suggested you were like focused on writing.
	Fr. Martin	No, not at all.
	Andy	It just seemed sort of bizarre.
	Fr. Martin	<p>I mean I liked writing. I was on the student newspaper in junior high school and high school and on the yearbook and I enjoyed English a lot. But, you know, once I got to Wharton, I remember my faculty adviser said, I wanted to take an elective and at Wharton at least at that time, they encourage you not to take any difficult electives, right? So just focus on accounting and finance.</p> <p>So take all these basically that we used to call it guts, take these easy electives. And he said, "Don't take that because no one will give a damn, you know, at Goldman Sachs, what you scored on your American poetry class. They're not gonna care if you know Walt Whitman."</p> <p>So I didn't listen to him, I took it, it was my favorite course at Penn. I know, that's...so I enjoyed writing, I enjoyed reading but it wasn't until I was in East Africa working with refugees that I thought I really want to tell these stories, you know? And that's how I ended up kind of getting into "America" Magazine.</p>
	Andy	You sort of answered this a little bit earlier but what advice would you give to someone who is considering either a major career change or a major life change?

	Fr. Martin	<p>Well, that's under the category or rubric of discernment as we Jesuits like to say. So the first thing would be paying attention to your deepest desires. Those are in religious language, those are God's desires for you. How else would God call you other than to look at your deepest desires? What gets you excited? What motivates you? What is appealing? What do you find romantic? What do you find interesting? And then explore, you know try to explore and try to see how your skills, I mean I, you know, even if I wanted to be a baseball player at age 57, and not a great athlete, I wouldn't be able to be a baseball player. So you have to understand those desires in the light of your talents and your skills and your background. But usually, that's not the restriction. The restriction is usually people don't allow themselves to dream.</p> <p>So I'd say, you know, as Saint Ignatius said, "Pray to understand your desires and follow them and trust them."</p>
	Andy	So as the title of your book suggests you left the corporate world for a new position that involves poverty, chastity, and obedience. Are you happier today as a Jesuit?
	Fr. Martin	Yes. That's the easiest question you had. Yeah. I mean not only because I'm happy as a Jesuit but because I was pretty miserable by the end. I really, you know, the work in itself, so by the end I left finance and accounting and went into human resources, I actually enjoyed that. I was good dealing with people. The, I don't know if I can say it, the bullshit that I had...
	Andy	You can say that.
	Fr. Martin	Yeah, the bullshit that I had to deal with in terms of, you know, how people were treated was just unbelievable. I mean I really, I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe what I heard. You know, as an HR person what you hear behind closed doors, you know, about certain people, it's a bit sexist, homophobic, cruel, and, you know, a lot of power games that you would see played. And I just didn't like it. And quite a few of the managers were just jerks. You know, some of them were lovely and really kind, but some of them are just jerks and it was that kind of macho, aggressive, hyper-aggressive attitude that I ran across that I just didn't like.
	Andy	So interesting question, there are jerks in large or any large organization.
	Fr. Martin	Yeah, even in the church.
	Andy	I was gonna ask, are their jerks in the church...

	Fr. Martin	Yeah...Plenty of them.
	Andy	Okay.
	Fr. Martin	Yeah, I know them. Yeah, it's not immune. But it enables you to live a non-jerky life a lot easier than GE did.
	Andy	So I want you to consider if you graduated and you took a job at maybe a friendlier company, or a different sort of company than GE, do you think that might have worked out?

	Fr. Martin	I often think if I had gotten a job where people were a little less, shall we say ruthless, I might not be a Jesuit because it really...that really sort of made me miserable and made me vulnerable I think and that's how God tends to break in in those times. I think God, you know, we have our defenses up so carefully. You know, they're built...we build them and they started to be built at Wharton. And it wasn't until those defenses were vulnerable, you know, thanks to my being miserable and I ended up getting some stress-related illnesses and that really broke me open and enabled God to break in a little bit.
		OUTGOING MUSIC
Thank-You and Show Credits	Andy	<p>I only got to spend about 30 minutes with Father James Martin. But I have to say I'll never forget this interview. He's so intelligent and well-spoken but in an "everyman" kind of way. I can't thank him enough for taking the time to sit down with me.</p> <p>A special thank you as well to Father Bob VerEecke who is also a Jesuit and connected me with Father Martin. He is the pastor at the wonderful Church of St. Francis Xavier in New York City which my wife and I attend.</p> <p>If you are considering your own second act, we hope you'll take Father Martin's advice and ask the one clarifying question: "What would you do if you could do anything you wanted to do?"</p> <p>It's so powerful, let me share it one more time..."What would you do if you could do anything you wanted to do?"</p> <p>We hope you'll keep listening. A new "Second Act Story" is just around the corner.</p>