

International musician stops in Pocahontas at end of tour

written by Special to Arkansas Catholic |



POCAHONTAS - He has recorded 50 albums, penned 18 books and received numerous awards, yet John Michael Talbot's message is one of simplicity: to treat others in a manner in which you would want to be treated.

Talbot wrapped up "The Living Water 50th Recording Tour," with a concert at St. Paul Church Feb. 22, the only performance of the two-week tour held in Arkansas.

During the tour, Talbot held performances in Alabama and Florida as well as Atlanta and Memphis.

"It is really nice to be performing in my home diocese," said Talbot, founder of the Brothers and Sisters of Charity near Eureka Springs.

Talbot said the concert came about when his ministry coordinator wanted to schedule a show on the return trip to Little Portion Hermitage.

"Father John (Marconi) is a great pastor and we knew the concert would be done in the right spirit," Talbot said. "When the spirit is right in the churches, the experience is right and full. Sometimes you can have a big church that is kind of impersonal. You do better when you have a good spirit - not just a big building."

Father Marconi, pastor of St. Paul and St. John in Engelberg, said he first heard of Talbot in 1983 while in the seminary. Two years later, while serving as a resident priest in the Fayetteville area, Father Marconi had the opportunity to assist Talbot at Little Portion Hermitage. Father Marconi credited Talbot's music as the inspiration that "got me through" the seminary.

"I had a cassette that I played so much the tape would squeak," Father Marconi said. "But I kept playing it. It really blessed me."

Testimonials such as Father Marconi's have become the norm for Talbot, who has touched the lives of many during his worldwide ministries, including India.

"This priest was ministering in the outback and had only two or three people coming to Mass," Talbot said. "He was really experiencing burnout and said 'Your music kept me going.' I hear stories like this all the time. I don't get it. I just sing."

Yet, there was a time when Talbot's music had a different effect as a member of the rock band Mason Proffit. In the early 70s, the band was one of the 10 highest paid groups in the country, drawing 10,000 to 20,000 to its concerts, performing with legends such as Janis Joplin, the Eagles and Grateful Dead. It was during these years Talbot began questioning the road he was traveling and embarked on a spiritual journey which led him to the recording of his first Christian album in 1976 titled "Reborn."

In 1982 he moved to the Ozarks and founded the Little Portion Hermitage on 20 acres of land he had purchased while on tour with Mason Proffit.

Today this community has more 30 members living at the monastery. As a public association of the faithful, the Brothers and Sisters of Charisty is the only community in North America with a canonical status that encompasses celibates, single people, married couples and families.

Talbot's attire also reflects the monastic lifestyle, causing 6-year-old Jackson Nichols, who had dressed as St. Francis of Assisi for All Saints Day, to question why Talbot "looked like a saint."

"Well Jackson, I guess it's because of the habit and the beard," Talbot said. "But not too many saints wear glasses. Saints are very loving - very much like Jesus. What you must remember, Jackson, is that people can dress up, to look the part of a saint and still act terrible."