

TRANSFORMATION

AT THE CROSS

A Young Man's Search for Meaning and Mission



One year after visiting Divine Word College for the first time as a Come and See guest, Alejandro Gonzalez Cruz found himself suspended from a wooden cross — playing the very role he once rejected because he felt unworthy.

Portraying Jesus in the Stations of the Cross was more than a performance for Alejandro. It became a sacred moment of transformation — a public expression of his acceptance of God's love and a powerful step in embracing his newfound faith.

For much of his life, Alejandro distanced himself from Catholicism despite his family's deep devotion. Attending Mass felt like an obligation rather than a choice. As a teenager, he felt aimless and disconnected, floating through life without purpose or drive.

"I didn't want to do anything with my life. I didn't feel any ambition or initiative," he said.

In high school, Alejandro sought belonging in the wrong places. He partied with classmates, hoping their wild lifestyles might help fill the void inside him. They didn't. Later, in college, he studied psychology and began dating, believing that the right relationship might bring him the love he longed for. That, too, left him empty. His lack of motivation eventually led to academic probation.

But everything began to change because of someone very close to him — his little brother, who is 12 years younger. His brother's devotion to Mary stirred something in Alejandro. As his younger sibling attended catechism classes, Alejandro became a catechist himself. That's when his pastor told him he might make a good priest. At the time, the suggestion felt absurd, so he dismissed it without much thought.

After meeting an SVD priest at his parish in Texas, Alejandro accepted an invitation to visit Divine Word College in Epworth during Holy Week. He participated in the Triduum liturgies and had his feet washed on Holy Thursday. The experience left a lasting impact.

"I realized I don't feel that emptiness inside of me anymore. I told my mother about it, and she told me, because it's been filled with God," he recalled.

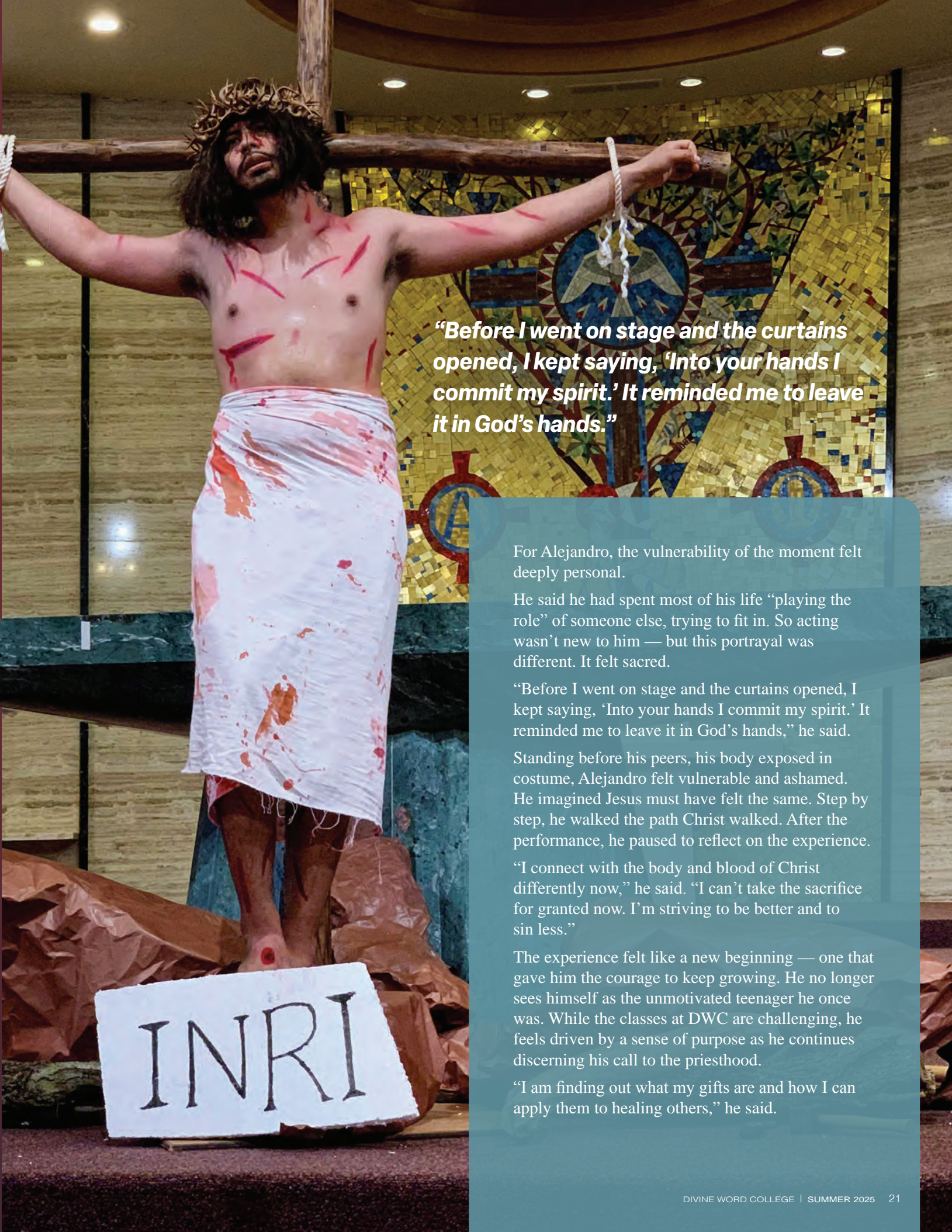
Alejandro enrolled at Divine Word College in the fall. Since then, he says, he's been on a journey of self-discovery. His classes and participation in the formation program have helped him grow spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually.

"In the past year here, I learned a lot about myself. I learned to love myself more, to love God, and to communicate effectively," he said.

So, when casting began for this year's Stations of the Cross, Alejandro didn't turn down the role of Jesus like he had in the past. This time, he was ready.

The role carries deep meaning in Alejandro's family. His father, uncle, and little brother have all portrayed Jesus in their parish's Via Crucis, or Way of the Cross. His grandmother once crafted a crown of real thorns for his uncle's portrayal, and his mother later did the same for his 10-year-old brother and father. When she heard that Alejandro had accepted the role, she carefully packaged the crown and mailed it to Epworth.

When Alejandro opened the box, students gasped at the sight of the gnarly mix of sharp thorns. They warned him to be careful during his performance — the crown could easily draw blood to match the theatrical makeup representing Christ's wounds.



“Before I went on stage and the curtains opened, I kept saying, ‘Into your hands I commit my spirit.’ It reminded me to leave it in God’s hands.”

For Alejandro, the vulnerability of the moment felt deeply personal.

He said he had spent most of his life “playing the role” of someone else, trying to fit in. So acting wasn’t new to him — but this portrayal was different. It felt sacred.

“Before I went on stage and the curtains opened, I kept saying, ‘Into your hands I commit my spirit.’ It reminded me to leave it in God’s hands,” he said.

Standing before his peers, his body exposed in costume, Alejandro felt vulnerable and ashamed. He imagined Jesus must have felt the same. Step by step, he walked the path Christ walked. After the performance, he paused to reflect on the experience.

“I connect with the body and blood of Christ differently now,” he said. “I can’t take the sacrifice for granted now. I’m striving to be better and to sin less.”

The experience felt like a new beginning — one that gave him the courage to keep growing. He no longer sees himself as the unmotivated teenager he once was. While the classes at DWC are challenging, he feels driven by a sense of purpose as he continues discerning his call to the priesthood.

“I am finding out what my gifts are and how I can apply them to healing others,” he said.