



## Chapter 2

I tell you all this because you may want to know a little about me and my life, and I think you should also know that I can communicate with the saints.

What I am saying is that they talk to me, and I talk back to them. They teach through the stories they tell, and I listen. They reveal visions, and I learn. And miracles... yeah, even miracles I witness while staring and gaping in total amazement.

I know that you think all this saint talk sounds crazy, but you've got to believe that it's been like this most of my life. It started from when I was about fourteen, and it's been like that until now. From the time we moved to Long Island, I've had this gift. I don't think it has anything to do with Long Island being the center of some heavenly repository of saints... I think it's just me. Some may call this "special talent" a curse but for me, it is definitely a gift. Imagine having St. Peter let you know whether you're making it through the pearly gates or having St. Joseph show you how to build an armoire.

Just kidding. It's not like that at all.

It happens like this...I can be doing just about anything. I can be having a cup of coffee, reading a book or looking at beautiful pleasure crafts from my home overlooking the Huntington Harbor, and these visions will come to me. I am still in the present, where everything seems to freeze in time. My surroundings change, and I am transported to wherever or whenever my saints want to take me.

As a fourteen-year-old kid, I guess I could have been out playing ball or trying to imagine what it would be like to kiss Joanie behind the backstop at the Mill Dam ball field, but that wasn't in the plan. What was in the plan? Adventures. Some were wonderful, some terrible, but they all were life altering for me. I would not have given up the journey for all the treasure on earth.

It started like this. Winters can be tough on Long Island, and as the weather one year got very cold, I got really sick. My mother kept me home from school one day, and I lay in bed with the most horrible fever, cough and sore throat that you can ever imagine. I could have overplayed my condition, especially because I didn't like going to school, but I didn't have to because I was really sick. You know the kind of sick I'm talking about—light-headed, chills and sweats...the whole ball of wax, and I had it in spades.

Mom was very concerned about my condition, and she had to go to the store to pick up the medicine our doctor prescribed. Since I was fourteen, I guess she felt that it would be okay to run out for a little while, so reluctantly, she left me alone with strict instructions that I stay in bed. Mom had a lot of rules, but this one was easy to obey because every time I tried to get up, I collapsed back into bed, so that's where I stayed.

As I lay there in bed, the entire room began to spin. I was overcome by dizziness and nausea. I thought that it was the sickness that made me so disoriented, but that wasn't it at all.

While I was in this state, I received my very first vision.

In the vision, my room was transformed into an ancient expanse in what appeared to be a desert country. I was in a small town surrounded by a flat, sandy vastness with outcroppings of rocky hills in the distance. In the midst of this expanse, I found myself standing outside a large mud and stone building. It was one of a number of smaller and larger dwellings and shops where the people were going about their business.

I had never seen anything like it—well anything like it outside of books about ancient times.

As I gaped around at all that I was seeing, something drew me to walk inside the building behind me. As I went inside, I entered a very large room. The room was sparse, with little in the way of decorations. It was more like a place where people worked, not lived. In the room, there were many cots set up along the long walls on both sides. On each cot, people were being treated for what seemed to be all kinds of problems, sicknesses or wounds.

I looked out the window, and I saw a group of soldiers dressed in what looked like ancient Roman uniforms. But this was not Rome, or at least not the Rome I saw in the movie *Gladiator*. The soldiers were patrolling the marketplace that was next to this building while the people looked to be shopping for cloth, spices, food and other basic items.

I noticed that the shoppers in the market took great pains to avoid the building I was in. They would walk by looking away, covering their mouths. It was obvious that I was in a hospital, and you could tell the people outside were consumed by fear of catching any of the illnesses being treated here.

Two other things became obvious to me. First, nobody seemed to notice I was among them. Second, I no longer felt sick.

In the ancient hospital, there were two physicians brothers, twins actually, treating their patients. The men hurried from one person to the other shouting instructions at the nurses and aides and giving comfort to the sick wherever they could.

“Get water for this one; he is burning with fever!” shouted the one doctor, as he wiped the brow of the man who was vomiting. The doctor and a nurse were busy cleaning the man as best they could. The meticulously thorough cleaning looked to be more of a treatment than simple bathing, and both the doctor and nurse kept at it.

“Bring me the mint...bring me the mint!” shouted the other twin doctor. He was comforting a woman holding her head in agony. He took the mint, placed it into a bowl and began to crush the leaves. He then made the woman breathe in the aroma of the mint. You could see her pain subside, the mint bringing her some measure of relief.

My initial wonder turned to confusion. Where was this place? Why was I here? Who are these men?

All the people in the entire building focused on their tasks and took direction from both doctors. This frenzied activity went on until a nurse suddenly screamed, "He's dead, he's dead!" At the sound, the twin physicians came running to the bedside of a dead black man. All activity stopped. A hush came over the room. In death, the man's careworn face seemed to be at peace. The doctors said a prayer over his body, now free of pain, wishing him eternal rest and heavenly rewards. All of those present in the room, doctors, nurses, aides and patients alike stopped and joined in prayer for this man. Then the doctors did something that literally shocked me into the realization of what was about to happen.

The doctors began to cut off the left leg of the dead man.

With a long, sharp metal instrument, the doctors began their work. They took great pains to assure that the leg was cleanly severed and done with minimal damage to the bone and the skin surrounding the hip. Working with great concentration on the amputation, the doctors took care to be sure that the leg was placed on another table, washed and covered with a clean white cloth.

The dead man was carefully wrapped in a shroud of sorts, and when the nurses finished, one of the doctors said,

"Prepare him for burial."

After that, the doctors turned their attention away from the dead man to their next patient. Lying in a bed next to the dead man was another man writhing in agony, and his screams echoed through the entire chamber. His leg was infected with sores that had become ulcerated, and the infection covered most of the skin. Immediately, the twin physicians began to prepare this man for another operation of some sort.

Ancient medical tools were laid out to perform the procedure that was still a mystery to most in the room, including me. The doctors began preparing an herbal compound, mixing it with what they called a "spathumele." The mixture smelled horrible, but that didn't stop the doctors from their work. The mixture was placed into a bowl with mint and hot water, creating a steamy herbal liquid, but I didn't know for what purpose. With bowl in hand, the nurse began to wipe the man's head and allow the steam to be inhaled. In a very short time, his screams lessened, and he seemed to fall into a semiconscious state.

"Cosmas, have you cleaned the body and leg well?" said one doctor.

"I have, and I am ready to begin," said his brother.

“Continue to wipe the man’s brow while we are preparing him for what is to come,” commanded Damian to the nurse.

As the nurse continued to wipe the sick man’s forehead, his cries stopped, and he seemed to drift into a stupor. As the man fell into this state, the doctors started to pray.

“Lord, we beseech you to grant us the wisdom and skill to save this man and Your intercession and strength to guide our hands so that we may help in this his time of greatest need. We ask this in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ.”

With that prayer there was a collective “Amen” from the doctors, nurses and some of the patients.

The doctor called Cosmas picked up the first tool, a long gleaming knife or scalpel of sorts, and he began to cut off the man’s ulcerated leg. The patient let out a muted cry, but the nurse continued wiping the forehead, administering the herbal mixture and soon the man fell into a restless state of unconsciousness.

With all due speed, Cosmas finished cutting off the ruined, infected left leg from the body. Although it was a cool day, both Cosmas, Damian and the nurses assisting them were covered in sweat. The twin doctors worried about the bleeding, knowing that the danger to their patient was greatest now.

“I need to stem the flow of blood, but I do not want to alarm the nurses” Cosmas whispered to Damian.

With that, Damian picked up a clean linen cloth that was on the table with the other instruments and sprinkled some dried, crushed herbs onto the bandage.

“I have the cloth with yarrow, and I will hold it in place.”

As Damian placed the cloth onto the hole where once there was a man’s leg, the bleeding slowed dramatically. As he administered to the man, Damian frequently changed the cloth, but after the fourth time, the bleeding had practically stopped. The crisis had passed.

When Cosmas and Damian were done, with great care, they disposed of the amputated leg in a sack made of a brown woven material. The nurses then lifted the man off the cot, quickly changed the bloody bedding and placed him back onto the cot. He had fallen completely unconscious, and he had trouble breathing, but the need to continually wipe his brow was over, at least for the moment. Cosmas then carefully

lifted the amputated leg they had taken from the dead man and placed it onto the clean cot next to the wounded opening on the unconscious man's hip.

"We are ready. Let us start."

Damian and Cosmas took the leg, positioned it where it needed to be and with that, they began to graft the black man's leg onto the white man.

"Take pains to assure the bone is in place and prepare the sutures," said Cosmas. For hours, both doctors worked tirelessly as they sewed the new leg onto their patient, taking time to be sure that all was going as expected. The nurses were busy going about all their duties to help the doctors, but you could feel that they were in awe of all that was going on. The gathered mass sensed, on some level, that something miraculous was taking place. All the while, both doctors continued to pray, which seemed to calm and reassure all who were taking part in this surreal scene.

The doctors began stitching the new, healthy leg onto the man. Damian and Cosmas turned toward me and stepped out of their bodies. The hospital room faded and became no more than a haze with the doctors still taking care of the man, but their spirits were now standing in front of me.

A halo appeared around the heads and bodies of the men, not only the type of halo you see in paintings or books. These also glow that encircled their entire bodies.

Damian looked straight into my eyes and asked, "What do you see in this place you are in?"

At first I didn't know, or maybe didn't want to know, who he spoke to. I turned behind me to see if anyone else was there.

"You, I am speaking to you."

With that, I pointed at myself and said, "Who, me?"

"Yes, you...we have known you were here from the start. You were summoned here, so that we may tell you of what is required of you."

I immediately started rattling off everything that was on my mind "Who are you guys? Where am I? How did you do that? Is the guy going to be all right? Why do you have the bright light around you?" The questions came out as fast as I could think of them.

“I am Damian, and this is my brother Cosmas. You are in Cilicia, and it is nearly 300 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We have been given an honor of which neither of us is worthy. We are called saints, saints of the Holy Church, and in life we looked to do the Lord’s work as doctors serving those sick and in need of help.”

Cosmas then said, “The man has been given a miracle, he will live and walk again, and it was only through the blessings of Christ that it has come to pass. We still need to know, what is it you see in this place?”

I was dumbfounded. I was talking to someone who lived more than 1,700 years ago, and they are asking me questions.

“Uh, I don’t know. A hospital, I guess.”

With that answer, the brothers looked at each other and smiled. Damian said, “It is far more than that. It is a place for hope, for renewed faith, for charity, for life and yes, even for death. It is where we have found what was required of us.”

Cosmas also explained, “We are all here in this life with a purpose. Our purpose is to help the sick, to comfort the dying and to serve the Lord. Do you know your purpose?”

I didn’t know what to say, so all I said was, “No.”

“Christopher”...he knew my name. I couldn’t believe that he knew my name.

“Yes, Christopher, I know your name, and I know why you are here.”

“Why? Why am I here?” I said.

Damian then said, “You were brought to this place to see us, so that we may let you know what is required of you...your purpose.”

He continued, “You are here for the same reasons the hospital is here. Throughout your life, you will be called on to serve the Lord by helping people to ease their pain, find hope and comfort, renew their faith and deliver justice so that they may find the peace of the Lord through His Son, Jesus Christ. You will be asked to perform works for the good of those truly in need, all in service to our Lord.”

“But I’m just fourteen, a kid, what do I know? Who will listen to me?” I stammered and became anxious at what was being said and overwhelmed by the spirits of the brothers. I know now that they were truly great men, but back then, they sounded like my high school principal.

Cosmas and Damian looked at each other, and in an instant, the room disappeared. I was transported to a place that seemed to be floating on a cloud. Everything was bright white and for the first and only time, I became frightened. The twin brother saints stood before me, and as they raised hands in prayer, there appeared all around them hundreds, maybe thousands of apparitions.

Damian seemed to know that I was scared and said, “There is no need to fear what you do not understand. What you see are our sisters and brothers, those who have gone before you and have been given their reward in heaven, the gift of God’s peace and eternal love.”

Cosmas continued, “These saints in Christ all have a bond, they all have had their faith tested, they have given themselves to the Lord and they all understood their purpose...why they lived and what was expected of them.”

Damian and Cosmas then each moved aside, and I saw a vision of St. Francis of Assisi. He spoke to me, “You will go into the world and see happiness and trouble, life and death, good and evil—you will be expected to help in any way you can. You will help those in need. There will be times you will confront the true nature of evil, but know that you will not be alone. We will be there with you.” Sts. Francis, Cosmas and Damian all smiled at me, and the vision melting into a bright glow and, with that, it ended.

I was now back in my room, staring at the ceiling, sick as ever. My first vision was over, and for the first time, I was overwhelmed by all that had just happened. I couldn’t fathom the meaning of it all, and I reckoned that it would not be my last visitation.

Me, Chris Pella, a fourteen-year-old kid, experienced visions of ancient times, witnessed an operation that was impossible—miraculous, even—spoke to Sts. Cosmas and Damian, was transported to a gathering of saints and told of my purpose in life...imagine that.