

NewEvangelists.org

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New Evangelists Monthly #1

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Forward

New Evangelists Monthly is an informal, dynamic, crowd-sourced “meta-magazine” showcasing the best posts faithful Catholic bloggers publish each month. Here you will find many different, but faithfully Catholic viewpoints, insights and perspectives.

Contributing authors submit their very best piece from the prior month between subsequent first and second Saturdays. Readers are welcome to visit anytime, even while contributions are still being accepted for a new issue. Back issues are available in the archive.

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Protestant Jeopardy [at Forget The Roads]



You've had an unprecedented run on "Jeopardy!" Opponents tremble at the mere mention of your name. You've made Ken Jennings look like a high school dropout. Look how you've breezed through this latest category:

"Chinese Archbishops for 400, Alex."

Since 2007, he has been the Catholic Archbishop of Beijing.

Child's play! "Who is his Eminence Joseph Li Shan."

Gosh, that was easy! As a former Protestant missionary to predominantly Catholic countries, you pride yourself on your knowledge of the ways of the opposition. "Chinese Archbishops for 500!"

It's the Daily Double! And the answer is:

He was the Catholic Archbishop of Beijing in the 14th century.

Wait – is that a typo?? *The 14th century?* I'm sorry, Alex – I can't even venture a guess!

Oh, too bad! The question is:

Who is Giovanni da Montecorvino, Franciscan missionary.

In the 14th century??

Alex' eyebrows shoot up as you admit your ignorance.

“Actually, Blessed Giovanni reached China at the end of the 13th century – 1294, to be exact, 20 years after the death of St. Thomas Aquinas, in the days of famed explorer Marco Polo. Sent by Pope Nicholas IV, Montecorvino was responsible for the conversion of some 6,000 people in the Beijing area. He built churches, orphanages and a convent. He translated the New Testament into Uyghur, the language of the Mongol emperor, and all this over 150 years before the birth of Martin Luther! Blessed Giovanni was consecrated Archbishop of Beijing in 1308. After his death in 1328, an uprising of the Chinese population succeeded in driving the Mongols from power, and by 1369 all Christians had been expelled from China.”

Uh, thanks, Alex – I'll file that away for future reference....

“But that wasn't the end of Catholic missions in China – not by a long shot! To understand this, you have to remember Christ's Great Commission to His apostles in Matthew 28:

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

“The apostles took the Great Commission very seriously. Sts. Peter and Paul died in Rome. But the remaining apostles are said to have literally gone into all the known world. St. Andrew is believed to have preached in Byzantium; St. Philip was also martyred in Turkey. St. James went to Spain, as St. Paul had hoped to be able to do. St. Thomas reportedly made it all the way to India.”

Nobody needs to quote Matthew 28:16-20 to you! Sheesh, you never knew Alex Trebek was such an expert on Catholic trivia! And he's not done yet!



“You see, the history of the Catholic Church is the history of missions. History demonstrates the postapostolic Church spreading like a ring along the shores of the Mediterranean, and then steadily making inroads into pagan European territory. It is estimated that by the 4th century a tenth of the world’s population was Christian! Catholic missionaries were rank-and-file clergy and religious, although the names of saints and blessed crop up in this tale of evangelization, as areas as far-flung as France, Great Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Scandinavia, Moravia, Pomerania, Prussia, Hungary, Egypt, Moslem-occupied Jerusalem, Morocco, India, China, Japan, Vietnam, Africa, the Americas, and Oceania heard the Good News preached by the likes of Sts. Denis, Ninnian, Patrick, Columba, Paul Aurelian, Augustine of Canterbury, Amandus, Willibrord, Boniface, Cyril, Methodius, Ansgar, Sigfrid, Adalbert, Bruno of Querfort, Otto of Bamberg, Nikola Tavelić, José de Anchieta, Roque González de Santa Cruz, Jean de Brebeuf, Isaac Jogues and Peter Chanel. In the 13th century St. Francis of Assisi himself went to Egypt to preach Christ to the Sultan, and Franciscans were martyred preaching in Morocco. The 14th century saw Dominican Jordanus Catalini installed as the first Roman Catholic bishop of India. Blessed Odoric of Pordenone, a Franciscan, visited him there, on his way to preach in Sumatra and China. Not to be outdone, Dominican St. Louis Bertrand became the 16th-century apostle to South America, and 17th-century Jesuits, following in the footsteps of St. Francis Xavier, spread the Gospel in Asia.”

This is getting ridiculous! Is there anything else you’d like to tell us, Alex??

“So, the existence of a Catholic archbishop of Beijing in the 14th century really isn’t all that surprising. The Middle Ages were anything but quiet and dull, and the Catholic Church took the Great Commission very seriously, to the point of martyrdom in many instances. And with that said, it’s time for Final Jeopardy! How much are you going to wager?”

What’s the category, Alex?

“Go Ye!”

I’m betting it all!

And the answer is:

There is not one single recorded instance of this particular kind of missionary outreach before the second half of the 16th century.

Oh my gosh, that’s a tough one! Evangelization... but not one single recorded instance before the 16th century.... Hmm.... It obviously can’t be Catholic missions – as much as you hate to admit it, it sounds like Catholics have devoted 2,000 years to missions. You certainly don’t want to get Alex started again!

But what could it be? Evangelicals are all about missions. All your life you’ve heard stories about the revered 19th- and 20th-century Protestant missionaries going into all the world to preach Christ. The Great Commission wasn’t just for the Apostles and those of their generation – it is for **all Christians in all eras**. After all, Jesus wasn’t just making a suggestion – He was *commanding* believers to spread the Good News to all people, and so your spiritual ancestors, the New-Testament-faith-alone-eternal-security-Bible-believing Christians, went out and set the world on fire as they evangelized the nations, nations like....

Like...?

You rack your brains as the *Jeopardy!* music counts down the seconds. If the Great Commission is an imperative, why was NO ONE evangelized by your spiritual ancestors? You yourself gave the best years of your life to the mission field because you knew that Jesus commanded the proclamation of the Gospel to those who had never heard it – it MUST have been an imperative in the minds of true believers down through the ages. And yet, where were the sola-fide/sola-scriptura missionaries? *Who was ever converted to Christianity before the 16th century by someone who believed and preached the Gospel that your church believes and preaches?*

The music ends.

“And let’s see your answer! Oh, it... doesn’t look like you wrote anything there. Aww, too bad! You bet it all...”

You bet it all!

You bet it all!

You sit bolt upright in your bed, sweating and shaking, still in the grip of your bad dream. Even awake, you can hear the *Jeopardy!* music ringing in your brain. *What a nightmare!* You couldn’t force yourself to admit it to Alex, but there simply was no such thing as a Protestant missionary

effort to bring the Gospel to the world until the 16th century – **no such thing**. Yet how can that be?? *Bible-believing Christians simply ignored the command of Jesus Christ for 1,500 years?? Where were they? What were they doing?? Jesus told us that we are the light of the world – A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Those verses basically mandate that the Christian church must be a VISIBLE PRESENCE in the world. All it took was one 14th-century guy – Giovanni da Montecorvino – to convert 6,000 people to Catholicism! Yet for 1,500 years your ancestors in Christ said nothing, did nothing, and went nowhere. It almost sounds as if those spiritual ancestors of yours were the stuff of myth....*

Christianity is the world's largest belief system, thanks to the faithful response to the Great Commission – the faithful response of **Catholic missionaries** literally going into all the world. *Not one pagan nation* was won for Christ by Evangelical Christian missionaries until several hundred years AFTER the Protestant Reformation (and precious few then!) You know the Catholic version of events – that the first Christians were CATHOLICS who preserved the teachings of the Apostles and Christianized the nations. You yourself devoted your adult life to persuading fallen-away Catholics that the REAL body of Christ down through the ages consisted of believers who privately kept the true faith while the Roman Catholic parody held sway. With Martin Luther, real Christians burst forth to proclaim the truth to the world. But if those putative Bible Christians who believed what you believe actually existed, *to whom exactly did they preach the Good News for 1,500 years?*

There'll be no more sleep for you tonight. In the darkness echoes the *Jeopardy!* theme song, as the game show host chants his sad refrain:

Aww, too bad! You bet it all!

On the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Deo omnis gloria!

This contribution is available at <http://forgettheroads.com/2012/12/12/protestant-jeopardy/>
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Ecce Virgo Concipiet [at One Arrow Alone]

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel.

Twice this Advent, this well-known text from the prophet Isaiah has been the Scripture reading during Lauds. Together with the immediately following verse which no one has ever heard: *He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good.* But that is only a triviality, to be casually dropped during a Christmas dinner or something of that sort; in any case, beside the point.

I am enamoured of Isaiah 7:14 because it challenges our insidious evolutionism, the reigning assumption (whose tyranny even rebels feel) that everything in this world is a product of natural forces, and every positive development a slow-paced unfolding of what one possesses within, flourishing under prosperous natural conditions. The way pregnancies usually develop. And there is nothing wrong with that.

But Mary shows us a higher alternative, the alternative of the People of God. For as Kierkegaard said, God is that all things are possible. A woman who becomes a mother without a man (proximate or remote – the latter possibility technology allows) is a miracle indeed. But if the natural conditions do not obtain, will the fruit survive? Will it be healthy? It stands in need of careful scrutiny, this Child; it might be born half-human, half-void (for God is nothing to nature): stunted, crippled. But no! Not only is the Child as healthy as any other, but He is already the Health-bringer of the world.

Similarly, God gives the Church a hundredfold of what She gives to Him in prayer, sacrifice and love. It sometimes seems that all these things are vain. But at other times it does not seem so, as at Christmas. We are Christ-bearers; that is enough. We are really and truly filled because – I speak as a fool – because the void overshadows us.

Word of the Year: Respite [at Clan Donaldson]

Over the past few days I've seen a couple references to selecting a "word of the year". The concept seems to be that you pick a word to focus on during the upcoming months.

I'm a big fan of words, patterns, and themes, so this seemed like a fantastic idea. Only I couldn't pick. So many great words! How do you narrow it down to one?

So I asked the Holy Spirit to reveal the word that would best sum up what I should focus on for 2013.

Immediately, the word "**respite**" came to mind.

Respite?

For a number of reasons, I balked.

1. It's not a pretty sounding word, like "glimmering" or "marmelade".
2. It's not a word that conjures up the same things that "luxurious" or "plucky" do.
3. It means this:

res·pite

/ˈrespɪt/ 

Noun

1. A short period of rest or relief from something difficult or unpleasant.
2. A short delay permitted before an unpleasant obligation is met or a punishment is carried out.

Synonyms

reprieve - postponement - rest - deferment - delay

Sure, sure, there's the "rest" aspect, but that's only part of the word's meaning. It's a *brief* rest from something unpleasant. A breather before you have to go back out there and keep slogging through whatever it is you're slogging through.

I asked the Holy Spirit for some pretty firm confirmation that this was the word He wanted me to meditate on for the next 360-something days.

You know, in case I misheard, and He really wanted to tell me something like, "naps!"

While I waited for a sign, I kept remembering the last Christmas we spent in Mississippi. It was one of the best Christmases I've ever had. For the entire 10 days of Ken's vacation, we got to spend time with our best friends, getting to hang out with them almost every day. The four of us would go see a movie while our kids played together. They'd come over to our house for dinner, or we'd go over to their house for dinner. We'd played so many games of Settlers of Catan during that time, laughing until we ached over Kim's ability to roll whatever number she needed. Stupid funny, the kinds of stupid funny that grown-ups don't get to enjoy very often because we're so busy dealing with plain stupid. We'd sit in the living room and talk for hours, while our kids, all best of friends, ran around laughing like hyenas and got to be kids. It was such a wonderful, unusual time of leisure and pure happiness that even while I was in the middle of it, I knew that I was being given this gift to strengthen me for something difficult to come.



This picture has nothing to do with my post.
But Ken doing the Gob Bluth chicken dance is too good a picture
to not be shared.

And sure enough, within a couple weeks of Ken returning to work, we learned that we were being transfered to Connecticut.

Two months later we were gone.

That Christmas was the last time our whole family got to enjoy the friendship of another family in that way. The last time Ken and I got to spend easy, completely comfortable time with a couple we had fun with and had so much in common with, while our kids and their kids called each other best friends. That time, that golden Christmas, was respite from the challenges we were about to face (and in some ways are still facing) in moving to New England.

So the word "respite" conjures up bittersweet memories for me.

Add that to the fact that just the other day, I had some women from the local homeschool group sitting around my dining room table. We were planning for an art class we're co-teaching, and the surprising thought flashed through my mind that these women were ones that I would like to get to

know better. I enjoyed their company, their conversation, and their kids seemed to be getting along well with mine.

On the heels of that thought, came this one: "You're starting to make friends, to put down roots. Timer's started, and within 18 months you'll be transferred out of here, too."

Now, I have no idea if or when we're going to be transferred again, but still, that specter is always there.

So when the Holy Spirit revealed the word "respite" to me, I froze.

Respite from what? Another move? A health issue? A job loss? A spiritual battle? What?

Then, I got this email from a friend of mine, who had no idea that she was writing to a loony tune woman freaking out over the concept of respite. She just thought she was writing to a loony tune woman freaking out about possibly being transferred again someday:

"Okay, you and my husband are exactly alike. Exactly! This is you simultaneously loving and hating the exact same moment because you fear that loving it will lead to disappointment so you're bracing yourself for the inevitable crap-fest waiting for you on the other side. Do not do this! Do you know when he starts dreading Monday morning? On Saturday. "Because it's practically Sunday and then Sunday goes by so fast so it might as well not even be a day off at all. Pretty much I should just go to work right now." Embrace the new friendships! Let Connecticut give you what measly fun it has to offer (insert winky face here). That way no matter what happens it will be good instead of no matter what happens being bad. Because truly anything in the world could be the beginning or the end of either something good or something crappy depending on which part you call the beginning and which part you call the end."

When you ask the Holy Spirit for confirmation, He does not mess around. **"...you're bracing yourself for the inevitable crap-fest waiting for you on the other side. Do not do this!"**

(Yes, I think the Holy Spirit would use the word "crap-fest" when talking to me. It's the kind of language I understand.)

Doing this would be completely counterproductive. You can't get relief- even brief relief- if you refuse to take it when it's offered. There's going to be a crap-fest, yes. But there's *always* going to be a crap-fest. That's the nature of our fallen world. That's why it's called a "vale of tears" and not a "vale of laughter" (plus, "vale of crap" sounds sort of vulgar). So to turn my back on those moments of relief and rest just because they're surrounded by crap-festivities is stupid.

So now I get to meditate on times of respite this year. Both when I'm experiencing them, and when I'm offering them. I will try to be mindful when they're happening (like the 40 minute drive to Costco this evening, when I focused very hard on enjoying singing to the radio with my kids as a means of rest before the horror of dragging those six kids through the store), and I will try to relax into them in order to regain strength, rather than seeing them as occasions of weakness.

I'll let you know how it goes.

This contribution is available at <http://www.clan-donaldson.com/2013/01/word-of-year-respite.html>
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Hope [at Convert Journal]



We have hope. It is like light against darkness. Without the light of hope, the darkness of despair would overcome and consume us.

Our hope is for ourselves, each other, the country and the world. We hope for good jobs and good health. We have many hopes for our children. We hope our country does not descend into complete moral depravity. We have grand hopes such as world peace and trivial ones like sports championships.

These desires are *natural hopes* and are good. Our healthy wiring is for such good and emanates from God within, even if we deny Him. Such hope gives us a reason to get out of bed, to embrace the day and to enjoy life... or to at least look forward to better times.

Natural hope is short-term.

Christian hope is supernatural, not just an immediate purpose but an eternal one. Without it our lives are merely mortal and often selfish. Our faith would rest in people and institutions. Then we die.

I feel sorry for atheists. If they truly believe what they profess (something I am not always convinced of), their coming death marks for them the complete end of their existence. However, denying God is like denying gravity – stepping off the top of a 33-story building would undoubtedly bring a big surprise. When the atheist stands before Christ at his particular judgment, he will similarly be surprised – and confused – and remorseful. Some of you may remember Lucille Ball’s television husband Ricky Ricardo (Desi Arnaz) and his oft quoted line: “you have some ‘splainin’ to do.”

God sent His Son to offer us the hope of eternal life. HE SENT HIS SON! Our hope rests in God and His promises, not any promises born of this world.

I feel sorry for agnostics too. They are like atheists, but want to keep their options open “just in case.” Their eternal hope is vague and couched in conditionals. They have mastered the sin of presumption. If some sort of supreme being or beings exist, he / she / they will accept me because they accept everybody and/or I am a good person. God sent His Son and this is their take-away.

We have a lot of evangelizing to do.

Evangelizing not just to atheists and agnostics but to Catholics and other Christians too. In a couple weeks we will see (thank God) CEO / ChEaster (Christmas and Easter Only) Catholics. Essentially, they are culturally Catholic agnostics. Let’s pray that their hearts open fully to the Holy Spirit and that they truly come home. Pray also for the faithful who have listened to secular voices, placing secular “values” above God’s will. His will is not about feelings, partisan politics and certainly not about “choice.” Blessed Pope John Paul II taught us that “freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought.”

Pray too for our brothers and sisters in separated Christian communities. Through their baptisms they have entered into the ordinary means of salvation, but their paths are guided by maps with missing sections. Some are taught much of the truth while others astonishingly little. Some have little error introduced while other dangerously much. They differ greatly from each other. Few meet Jesus through the sacraments He gave us.

Our Lord Jesus Christ came into our lost world to bring us hope – to reveal God’s truth and to offer us a path to salvation. He did not leave us alone when He ascended to heaven. He sent the Holy Spirit to us, beginning with our first pope and bishops. His real presence remains too, most especially in the Eucharist (communion; literally receiving the body, blood, soul and divinity of Christ) and in the other sacraments. He gave us a deposit of faith and one Church to teach it, infallibility protected to the end of time by the Holy Spirit. Our hope rests on truth proclaimed from that rock and sanctified through the sacraments.

Therefore, we are not discouraged; rather, although our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to what is seen but to what is unseen; for what is seen is transitory, but what is unseen is eternal.

This contribution is available at <http://www.convertjournal.com/2012/12/hope/>
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Monday Morning in New England [at The Back of the World]

Things are different today. There's a heaviness to the New England air that wasn't there on Friday morning. A somber feeling creeps over the school building that belies the fact that Christmas vacation is only a few days away.

I check in at the front office, then walk up the stairs to my classroom: I'm on the second floor, right at the top of the stairs. I set my things down, take off my jacket, and let out a deep sigh. In a little while I have a faculty meeting to go to, but for the moment I'm alone with my thoughts...

I take a quick glance around classroom 7B, and the thoughts of "*what if*" come, unbidden: I have no closets big enough to hide children in; there are no bookshelves with which to barricade the entrances. My doors stay locked, but aren't particularly heavy; they don't seem like they would stand up to someone who was really determined to get in. All I've really got are 22 desks, the chairs still stacked on top of them from Friday afternoon, and my parochial school's standard-issue statuette of Our Lady...

...to thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve, to thee do we send up our sighs, morning and weeping in this valley of tears...

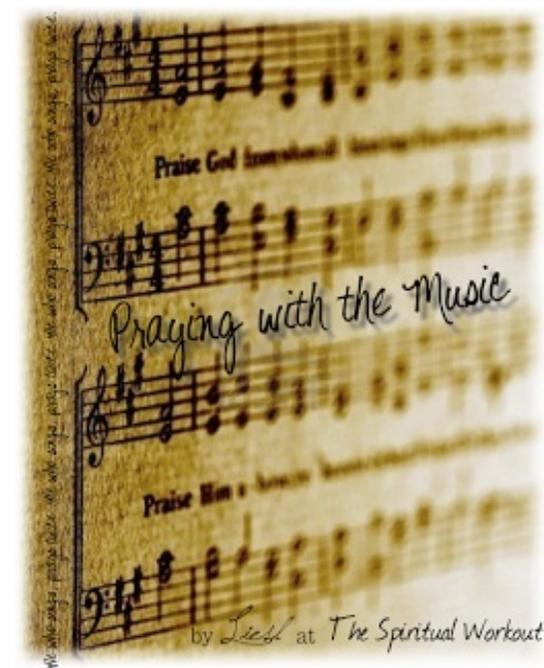
To be honest, I want to just hide in the folds of Her robe and cry for a while. Where do we go from here? How can we restore our children to their lost innocence? What can we do to protect them from evil? Our Lady, Help of Christians, please, please, please, just keep praying for us, we're desperate...

I've seen some well-intentioned people on various social media sites demanding that teachers be armed with guns. To be honest, this seems patently ridiculous to me. What would I do, keep it holstered on my side while I show the kids how to simplify fractions, a 9 mm reminder to my 12-year-olds that life is terrifying? "*Put your sword back in its sheath, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.*" No, the answer to violence can't possibly be more weapons.

Amid the pitter-patter of the cold winter rain, I think I hear a different sound: the steady beat of the Sacred Heart. There are no answers there, just Love. There's nothing we can do, except to stand up, take up our mats, and follow Him. God never promised us that we would be safe as we seek to live out His calling on our lives, only that He is good, and that His mercy endures forever.

The bell rings, the students come up stairs, I walk out into the hallway: the school day has begun...

We Found Love [at The Spiritual Workout]



Do you ever listen to a song on pop radio and just instantly think, "This song is totally talking about my man, Jesus!"

Nope? Just me?

Well, I know this song is

actually

about drugs and sex and unhealthy relationships, but from pretty much the first time I heard it, all I could picture in my mind was

[Jesus on the cross](#)

The more I've listened to it, the more and more I picture the whole song talking about the life of Christ, and how we are just

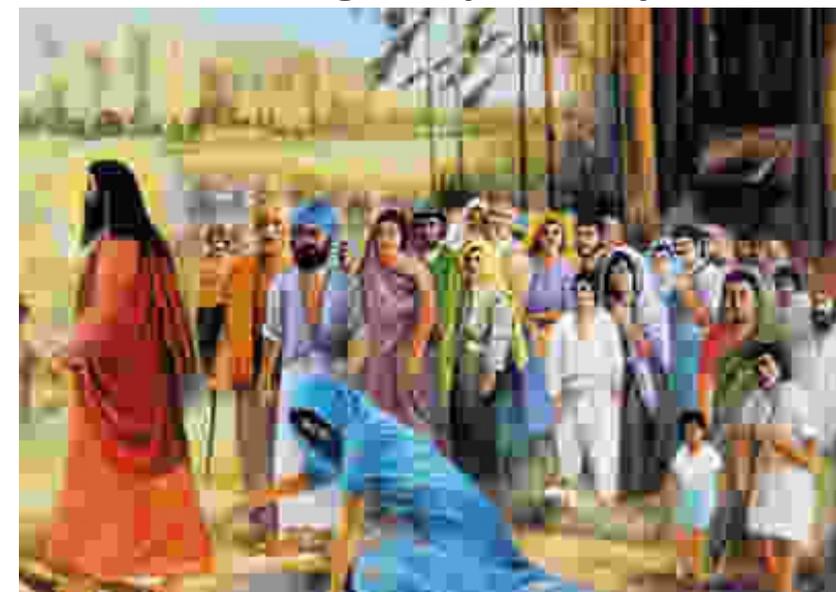
searching and yearning for his love

So, what follows is as close as I can get to show you all what I picture in my mind when I listen to this song, which - crazy as it seems - I use to pray.

We Found Love

Yellow diamonds in the light

Now we're standing side by side, As your shadow crosses mine



(Mark 5:21-43, Luke 8:40-56, Matthew 9:18-26)

[Source](#)

What it takes to come alive

~*~

Shine a light through an open door



(John 1:4-9, John 8:12)

Love a life I will divide



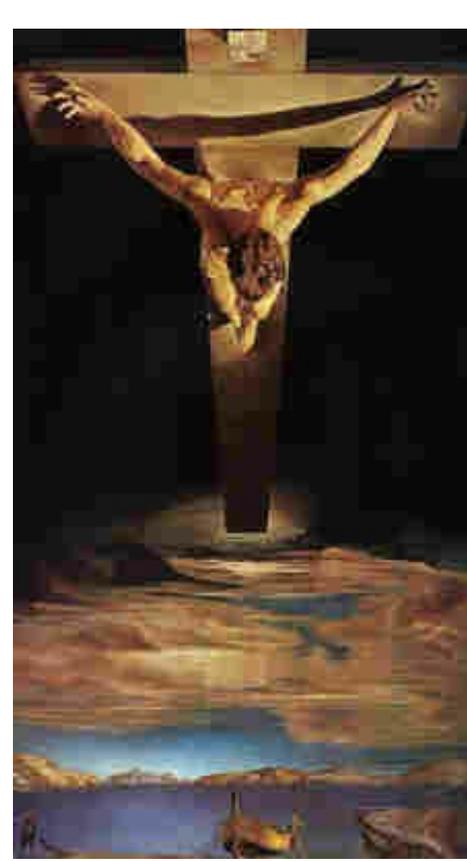
(John 6, Matthew 26:17-30, Mark 14:12-26,
Luke 22:7-39, John 13:1-17:26)

[Source](#)

Turn away 'cause I need you more

**Feel the heartbeat in my mind
It's the way I'm feeling I just can't deny
But I've gotta let it go**

We found Love in a hopeless place, We found Love in a hopeless place, We found Love in a hopeless place, We found Love in a hopeless place...

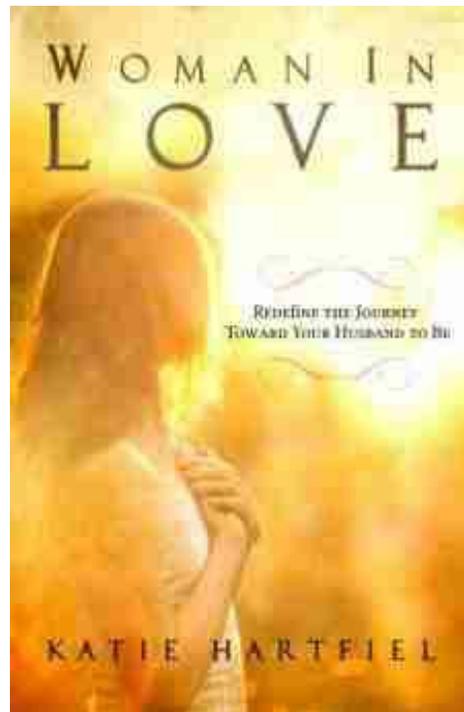


(Matthew 27:33-56, Mark 15:22-41, Luke 23:33-49, John 19:16-37)

I've been working on this post for awhile to find all the right images, and now in light of the school shootings that happened last week, it seems even more fitting. Despite how tragic our world can be, we have to always remember that there is no tragedy where we cannot still find Love, there is no place that is completely hopeless because God is always there in our suffering. May those who suffer and cry out for hope feel God's presence, and may we all come to know and experience Christ's undying love that he has shown to each of us on the Cross.

This contribution is available at <http://spiritualworkoutblog.blogspot.com/2012/12/we-found-love.html>
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My First Book Review [at The Veil of Chastity]



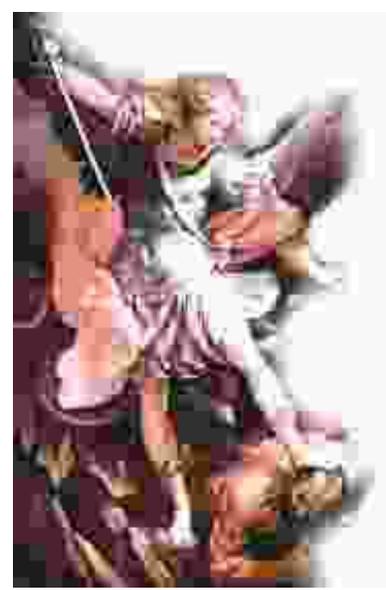
I have been dying to post this book review ever since I finished this book back in September. Katie Hartfiel's book "*Woman In Love: Redefine The Journey Toward Your Husband To Be*" is one of the best books I have read regarding practical and spiritual advice to single women.

I immediately knew that Katie was my kind of girl when I noticed she used the word '[Superabundance](#)' several times in her book. Although she applied the term a little differently than I do, I was impressed because it is a word that is not often used.

Okay, where do I begin? I will break the book down into three main points and try not to give away too much:

1. It is a proactive approach to the vocation of marriage
2. It is her personal story and therefore it held my interest
3. It is a complete catechesis on [Chastity](#)

A Proactive Approach To Marriage



Now by proactive I don't mean aggressive. I mean she got down to business! She wisely chose to participate, through prayer, in the spiritual well-being of her unknown future husband. She proactively started praying for him when she was 17 years old.

Her prayer was not *"God please give me a husband!"* or *"God, please give me 'that' husband!"* It was, instead, *"God please bless and protect my husband."* And, her prayers were honored.

This, to me, is the best quote from her book:

"The most important thing you can do for your spouse is pray for him. Crawl into the trenches of the spiritual battle raging over his soul and be a warrior for him."

Goodness, I wish I had this insight when I was 17! I may not have had to wait 38 years to be married. I can accept that it may have been God's will for Gregg and me to have a [delayed marriage vocation](#), but if I had known the power of this prayer, I could have positively impacted Gregg in his earlier years. I could have crawled into the battle and been a warrior for him!!

But, I didn't. However, you can!

A Personal Testimony

Katie was honest about her story. She did not have her spiritual strength handed to her on a silver platter but instead went through suffering and doubt. God had to unlock her heart.

Katie wrote, *"The process of discerning our vocation molds us."* She admitted that, *"the time leading up to the revelation of God's will can sometimes be seemingly torturous."* An understatement indeed!

A Key Decision

She did a very wise thing, in my opinion, which set the course for her life. She was determined to attend [The Franciscan University of Steubenville](#). Every single person that I have met who attends or attended Steubenville has impressed me with their love of the Lord and their solid Catholic

identity and foundation. This one decision seems, to me, to have been a driving force in the revelation of her future vocation. She met Mark, her husband, at Steubenville practically on her first day!

What if she had attended some public college (like I did)? Think of all the secular guys she would have met. Her heart, which needed to be unlocked, could have hardened and locked up even more from all the hazards awaiting her there. Her life today would have potentially been totally different!

Sometimes Our Wounds Protect Us

Katie met Mark, her future husband, at Steubenville and they immediately were interested in each other. But, Katie was suffering from her parent's recent divorce which caused her, out of fear, to keep her feelings for Mark hidden. In other words, she did not chase him or overtly reveal her feelings for him. She did, however, [sweetly respond to his courageous initiation.](#)

After a while, Mark initiated their 'relationship talk' because her struggles with herself "*caused her to hesitate and prevented her from chasing Mark.*" It is amazing how God can even use our wounds as a natural protection. As women, our reserved and silent, but sweet, response to a man's initiation can often force a man (that loves us) to reveal his feelings.

Beyond Expectations

I can relate to Katie when she wrote, "*My expectations paled in comparison to what the Lord had in store for me.*" God knows what we need and in my case as well [surprised me beyond my expectations](#) with my husband, Gregg.

Katie thought she would have to "*Choose between a man who was a strong spiritual leader and one she was attracted to*" but happily reported that "*Mark fit the needs of her soul while simultaneously captivating her on every level.*" She wrote that, "*God chose Mark as His vessel to save her from herself.*"

I can also relate to this! I thought I would have to choose between a strong spiritual leader and a man I was attracted to. But, to my surprise, [Gregg met all of my hopes and needs.](#)

A Complete Catechesis on Chastity

Katie somehow packed a complete catechesis on Chastity in her book. And, she made the information relevant and easy to understand. She explained that chastity is a 'yes, yes, yes' as well as the Sacramental component of a chaste marriage. She covered the bonding hormone oxytocin, STD's, the problem with contraception, the benefits of NFP, reconciliation and much more. She answered the question "*How far is too far?*" and provided rules for singles that are logical and clear. She displayed a solid understanding of the Church's teaching on Chastity as well as *Theology of the Body*. Finally, she included quotes from Blessed John Paul II and others

concerning marriage and chastity.

Help Lead Men To Holiness

Without coming off as judgmental, Katie gives girls the straight facts on supply and demand, respect and holiness. This quote nicely summarizes her wisdom:

“For every guy who gets what he is looking for, there is a girl who is giving it to him. If women begin to demand respect, men would be more inclined to offer it. Help lead men to holiness.”

Katie’s book also includes insights from Mark. This quote was my favorite one from Mark because it parallels the terms and concepts I use in my book and on this blog :

*“When the man **that God has for them** comes along, he will be **captivated** by this purity and it will be **utterly beautiful** to him. He will **never forget** how **superabundantly blessed** his is to have such an amazing woman.”*

I clearly do not own the rights to the term Superabundance or the concept of a Holy Spouse. But I think it is amazing that Mark and Katie applied the term and concept in a way that aligns with how I apply the term and concept.

Holy Spouse

Note that Mark wrote, “*when the man that God has for them comes along...*”. To me, he reinforced the idea that [God arranges marriage](#) and has a specific person in mind for us in accordance with His will. This is what I call our [‘Holy Spouse’](#). This concept among believers is not often discussed with such certitude. Virtually all the books I have read concerning chastity and marriage seem to lead the reader to believe that God leaves it completely and sadly, up to chance. *Woman In Love* will fill your heart with hope!



Katie and Mark on their Wedding Day
Gorgeous Dress and Veil!

Superabundance

Mark's quote also described what I believe happens as a result of chastity before and within marriage. The husband has this supernatural view of his wife. He is "*captivated*" by her and she is, despite her faults, "*utterly beautiful*" to him. And, he has a perpetual belief in how blessed he is to have her.

As a result of the Superabundance in a chaste marriage, my observation is that the husband's love for his wife **grows rather than diminishes** with time. This, I believe is a result of the supernatural grace imparted during the chaste marital embrace. The Catholic Church teaches us that this is a renewal of our Sacramental wedding vows and that supernatural grace is imparted.

Get. This. Book! You will learn so much and be inspired to get in to the trenches and pray for your future husband!

You can join [Katie on Facebook here](#) . Go to [Katie's website](#) to order her book. There is a special bulk order price! Also, while you are there, check out the video of Katie and Mark and you will be further inspired!

Her book is available on [Amazon in soft cover](#) or for only \$9.99 through [Kindle](#).

**** Next week: [Mythbuster #3: Something Is Wrong With Me](#)**

God Bless!

This contribution is available at <http://theveilofchastity.com/2012/12/27/my-first-book-review/>
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"Sola Scriptura Began in 70 AD [at St. Joseph's Vanguard]

Hi Steve,

You said,
Hi De Maria,

As you say, the Word of God was around long before the Bible. So then why a Bible?

The answer is complicated. But your answer below is basically false, although it does contain some truth.

The Word was being distorted.

By some. But not by the Church. Scripture tells us that the Church is the Pillar of Truth (1 Tim 3:15). Therefore the Church will always teach the Truth (Eph 3:10).

The gospel Word was being warped into all sorts of heresy.

Scripture tells us that the Church is here to combat heresy (Matt 18:17). And that the Church identifies heresy and approves of the proper doctrines in order to combat the heresies (1 Corinthians 11:19).

So a re-calibration of that Word was needed to put people back on track.

Again, Scripture tells us that the Church always taught the Word of God correctly, by word and by epistle (2 Thess 2:15).

So, there was no so-called "recalibration" necessary.

The New Testament was written in order to more effectively pass down the Traditions of Jesus Christ. Not as a means of correcting or recalibrating these Traditions. The New Testament is a collection of the Traditions of Jesus Christ and is written on the basis of the Traditions of Jesus Christ.

For us the Word is firstly Jesus Christ Himself.

That is Catholic Teaching.

Then preaching and teaching about Him.

That is still Catholic Teaching.

Then the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion.

All Seven Sacraments are outpourings of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ works through His Sacraments.

Then the Bible.

The Bible is the written Word of God.

We believe the gospel is pure. That Christ died for sinners, and that nothing at all needs to be added to that to improve our lot with God.

Individual repentance needs to be added to that. And keeping the Commandments needs to be added to that. Jesus Christ saves those who obey Him.

He does not save unrepentant sinners.

Revelation 22:13-15

King James Version (KJV)

13 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

14 Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. 15 For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.

Hebrews 5:9

And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;

Our Lutheran traditions(in our congregation), all revolve around the gospel.

Luther's version of the Gospel. But not Christ's Gospel.

So we keep them.

Your Lutheran traditions?

We don't have to, though.

If you want to be saved eventually, you need to have faith in God and keep the Commandments. If you want to be saved in this life, you need to have faith in God, keep the Commandments and submit to the Sacraments of the Catholic Church.

We are free to take them out if we wish.

The traditions of the Lutherans? Perhaps. But not the Traditions of Jesus Christ which are passed down by the Catholic Church.

Romans 6:17

But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.

That is a difference between Catholics and Lutherans. The form, for us, is flexible. As long as the gospel is purely preached and the sacraments are administered in accordance with that gospel, then the church is there.

That is your error. The Gospel is not flexible. There is one Gospel of Jesus Christ and it is taught by the Catholic Church:

Galatians 1:8

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

I was a Catholic for 35 years. But then I heard the pure gospel and I was hooked. Christ with NO add-on's. It's quite rare out there in churches these days. One doesn't hear it very often in most Protestant churches. One can hear it anywhere. Catholic Church included. But it is rare that someone isn't handing you a list of stuff that you need to do, on top of what Christ has done.

You have been fooled. The True Gospel, the Pure Gospel is taught in the Catholic Church.

In the Catholic Church you have the best help in achieving holiness and righteousness. And only the holy and righteous will be saved by God. God does not save people simply because they claim to be saved.

Matthew 5:20

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

2 Corinthians 3:9

For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.

Hebrews 12:14

King James Version (KJV)

14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

Thank you, friend.

You're welcome,

De Maria

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Sneak Peek Saturday ~ Week 2 [at Gaudete in Domino]

Take a

[Sneak Peek on Saturday](#)

by looking at tomorrow's Gospel reading with me! This Sunday we will read Chapter Two, verses 1-12 from St Matthew's account of the Gospel.

You can share what strikes you most, what resonates with you, where God is leading you, what He's asking you of you in your own blog post and link here or in the comments section. I'd love to hear your thoughts!

What struck me most this week?

I feel as if I am one of the wise men. I can live in this world and move closer and closer to Jesus, bringing him my gifts or I can live in the world that embraces Herod. Which do I choose?



Some 2000 thousand years have passed and while I try to pick up my cross and follow our Savior come what may, still many times I do not. King Herod was so threatened by the arrival of Jesus and feared he would take second best, he let his pride got the best of him. Pride.

Yes, I have the Holy Spirit in my inner dwelling but do I also have a little of Herod? Do I carry pride that I choose not to follow the will of God but my own will. My inner Herod?

Lucky for me, and you (if you are at all like me) we have a patient God who patiently waits for me to discover Him. He uses Scriptures, the Saints, His Holy Church, Sacraments, apostolic succession, faithful clergy & religious, my husband, children, family, friends, nature's beauty. He's so patient and merciful.

It can be so easy to find Him, I just have to be like the Magi and walk by faith. My gift can be to follow His will. I can ask for His help to open my eyes so I can see all His gifts and give Him praise and thanks. Respond to love, with love.



Share your thoughts?

Tina

This contribution is available at <http://www.gaudeteindomino.com/2013/01/sneak-peek-saturday-week-2.html>
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Peace on Earth [at Garden of Holiness]

Like most us, I am still under the spell of the tragedy in Newtown, still resonating with the remnants of communal grief. Like you the tones of it are quieter now and taking the shape of a tear or two still, but for me they are coming more in the form of sudden hugs as my five year old walks past my chair or a stunned realization and quick prayer when I fold a pint sized sock from the laundry.

I have waited to write about it. I waited until now, when most of the media has moved on, because I have only one insight to share. I waited until I am settled enough with my feelings and because anything I can say is less for those involved than it is for all of us who do or will grieve. It is simply this: give the grieving quiet. Be there, do everything you can, but don't feel you have to fill the silence with anything more than a hug, a touch, or even your shared tears. Having watched my parents grieve all my life for two gone ahead older brothers, I know that there is nothing that you or I could say or do in the face of such a tragedy or any tragedy. Those who are grieving do not grieve any less or any better by anything from us. It is more in the resonance of silence and the knowledge that our griefs are shared that comfort comes.

But sometimes not even then.

We must do what we can but do it with care. Those platitudes we speak at such times and especially online? They are nothing. They mean nothing. Sometimes they even hurt. Don't be afraid of the grieving, don't avoid doing all that you can, but don't be afraid to allow silence to sit with you when you sit with them. "I'm so sorry" or "I'll remember" is all you really ever need say because it is true. Let the half truths and false notes of our platitudes fall somewhere other than the ears of someone who can barely raise her head above her burdens.



Time does not heal such wounds. We simply need the time to gather our strength to bear the burden of life's heavier loads. Nothing like this heals.

God did not will for death. In the Garden it was not so. Our very bones know that death is not what was meant to be.

More faith and mere faith does not prevent our suffering. Mary, who knew more perfectly than you or I ever will who He is, suffered her own agony as she stood at His feet and watched that life slip away in torment and anguish, drop by precious drop. Surely no one has had more faith in the Son than His own mother?

Do not offend any such moments of ours with clumsy and heavy platitudes, be quiet instead.

If you are called to sit and grieve with those who grieve, your main task is to listen, to hold out a moment of peace in the maelstrom. We have all grieved something. We all know how it is. Grief differs only in the matter of degree. Let that be enough for you, let that be your gift, that dim understanding shining out across a dark ocean of tears. A rocky shore is near, treacherous and dark, but near enough for the drowning to seek it and come in from the wreckage if they will.



Be peace for someone in this year. Just a glimpse of peace.

That's all I really have to say here, my readers. Thank you for suffering this fool awhile. I hope this helps you because writing it has helped me some. I'll see you on the other side of Christmas. I will be spending some time with my loved ones and hope you are graced to do the same.

Merry Christmas.

This contribution is available at <http://gardenofholiness.blogspot.com/2012/12/peace-on-earth.html>
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Ways to Help the Victims of Sandy Hook & Newton [at Revolution of Love Blog]



[Source](#)

What Can I Do?

All of us have been affected by this tragedy and it is only natural that our first reaction (after the shock, horror and tears) is ask what can I do to help ease the suffering? There have been a number of initiatives spring up and here are a few of them.

PRAY

Our first response, particularly as Catholics is to pray. Leila at [Little Catholic Bubble](#) had a beautiful Quick Takes this week dedicated to the Newton tragedy. Her first Take says:

In First Century Palestine, the evil King Herod ordered the slaughter of all the male children two years and under, hoping to kill the Christ Child. Horror and grief filled the land, and their mothers could not be consoled. We ask the Holy Innocents for intercession in our own day.

A Prayer To The Holy Innocents

Holy Innocents, you died before you were old enough to know what life means, pray for all children who die young that God may gather them into His loving arms.

Holy Innocents, you were killed because one man was filled with hatred, pray for those who hate that God may touch their hearts and fill them with love.

Holy Innocents, you experienced a violent death, pray for all who are affected by violence that they may find peace and love.

Holy Innocents, your parents grieved for you with deep and lasting sorrow, pray for all parents who have lost young children that God may wrap a warm blanket of comfort around them.

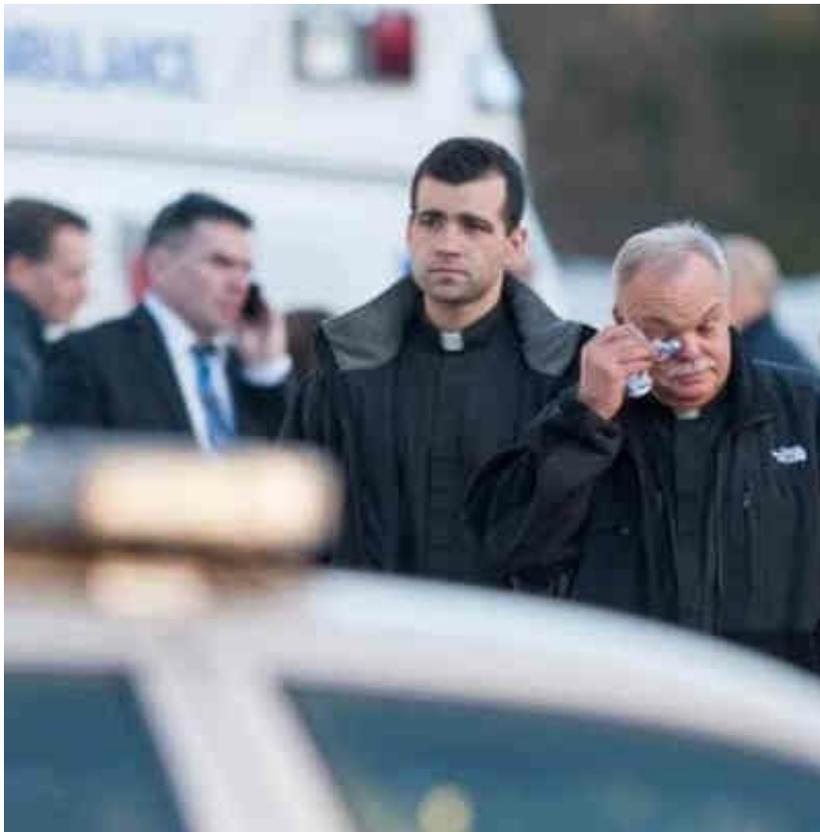
Holy Innocents, those around you certainly felt helpless to prevent your deaths, pray for all who feel helpless in their circumstances that they may cling to God for courage and hope.

Holy Innocents, you who are now in Heaven, pray for all of us that one day we may join you there to bask in God's love forever.

Amen.

Our Catholic Family

I first heard about this from [Allison](#) but it has seen been posted all over the internet. I am posting it again here in case some of you haven't seen it yet.



When I first saw the photos from the tragedy at Newton, I noticed this one of two priests. I figured they must have been local priests who came to help support the families. Later, on Facebook, there was a letter posted from the sister of the younger priest in the photo. It reads:

My friends,

All of you, I am sure, have heard so much about the tragedy in Newtown, CT. Many of you

have received emails from me about my younger brother, Father Luke Suarez, who is a priest at St. Rose of Lima parish, a Catholic church just down the road from Sandy Hook Elementary. He, and his pastor, Monsignor Weiss, arrived at the school within moments of the shooting, and have been caring for the community ever since. The picture I have included was taken at the school.

Father Luke has an impossible task before him. His diocese is without a bishop right now.... Monsignor ... is personally devastated by the losses. The parish is very large.... The rectory has received serious threats, and as my brother gave the homily Sunday at the noon mass, the church had to be evacuated by SWAT teams. After experiencing identity theft and online hacking incidents, he had to erase all of his internet accounts. After a weekend of endless media requests, notifications and vigils with heartbroken families, and little sleep, he now has two wakes and two funerals every day, until the fourth Sunday of Advent. Father Luke has not even been ordained two years.

My large family has been trying to send Father Luke our love and support from afar, and one of my brothers was able to visit with him briefly a couple times. All he asks for is prayer.

I have been wracking my brain, trying to think of a way that our beautiful, loving community could tangibly reach out to Father Luke, Monsignor Weiss, and the St. Rose parish, to support them in this most awful of times. I have sent many prayer requests, and I am asking for more prayers again. But I also want to ask everyone to search their hearts, and if the Holy Spirit moves you, please consider sending one of your family's Christmas cards to the rectory, with a few words of love and encouragement. Here is his address:

Father Luke Suarez
46 Church Hill Road
Newtown, CT 06470

My brother has said over and over again that without the prayer support he is receiving, he could not keep going. And this week is only the beginning. Everyone there is still in shock. Their peaceful home has been desecrated by violence. They will need to live with this sorrow forever.

But in our weakness is His strength. Grace abounds. Can you help me carry him through this time of trial?

On a hopeful note, Father Luke did say that no media coverage has even touched the deep, beautiful awakening of faith that has occurred there. Their tiny church, where my children have received sacraments and where Luke was ordained, has been full of people in prayer without ceasing since this tragedy happened. Love is stronger than death.

Please feel free to share the address with your family, friends, and community. An outpouring of love will sustain these good priests through their impossible ministry—impossible on their

own, but possible with God.

I am so grateful to live in this community. We are all so blessed with one another. Every day, I see you all loving one another as Christ loved. Thank you for letting me reach out to you now.

With humble appreciation.

There is also an article about Fr. Weiss, the older priest in the photo, [here](#).



Sandy Hook Students' New School

Members of Connecticut's Parent Teacher Student Association have posted ways people can help out the community of Newton. Their website states:

Connecticut PTSA is deeply saddened by the tragedy that has struck our Newtown community. We have met with the PTA and community leaders in Newtown and Sandy Hook Elementary to offer our assistance at this very difficult time. They have asked us to spearhead the following efforts on their behalf:

Snowflakes for Sandy Hook

Please help the students of Sandy Hook have a winter wonderland at their new school! Get Creative!! Make and send snowflakes to Connecticut PTSA, 60 Connolly Parkway, Building 12, Suite 103, Hamden, CT 06514, by January 12, 2013. Snowflakes can also be delivered to CT PTSA. Please call us before for office hours at 203-281-6617.

Coins for Sandy Hook

Students can collect spare change to support their peers at Sandy Hook. Other fundraising

ideas include Walk- A -Thons, Spirit Days, Pajamas Days, etc. Please send contributions to “Connecticut PTSA Sandy Hook Fund” by February 14, 2013.

There are more ideas and direct link to donate [here](#).



#26Acts

Ann Curry of NBC News has suggested that we do [20 acts of kindness](#) in honor of the 20 children who were killed at Sandy Hook. (It was later changed to 26 to include the adults.) People have joined in and posted on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram using the hashtag #26Acts or #26ActsofKindness. (I added an extra act for the gunman’s mother who was killed.)

Some people have complained that it is merely a trend and that we as Christians/Catholics should be doing these things anyway without publicly boasting about them. That’s true but the brutal violence of Newton has shaken people to the core and they are feeling vulnerable, cynical or depressed. It difficult for people who have some concept of the value of redemptive suffering and the hope of the cross, so imagine how it is for those who don’t have God in their lives.

I see these acts as a reminder that there is still good in the world and that God can bring light and hope out of evil. These acts allow the Holy Spirit to work in people who don’t even know who the Holy Spirit is. As for wanting to keep it private, I have offered up acts of kindness that I kept to myself. Others I have posted on Twitter to inspire someone else to join in. With each act I tried to add a specific prayer.

Here are a few ideas I’ve done so far:

- Tried to spend the day caring for my rambunctious boys without complaining. Prayed for the mamas who are no longer able to hold their babies in their arms.
- Gave an extra large tip to my food server. Prayed for the dads who came home from work and no longer had their son or daughter waiting for them.

- Helped an elderly woman at Costco. Prayed for the service people who first responded to Sandy Hook.
- Sent a \$50 gift card to a family that is struggling financially. Prayed for those who are suffering from despair.
- Gave money to a homeless person and talked to my kids about respecting human life and treating all people with love and dignity. Prayed for those suffering from mental illness and for moms contemplating an abortion.

There are numerous things you and your family can do and they don't need to cost any money and you don't have to post it anywhere, unless you want to. We can all use that reminder to put the corporal and spiritual works of mercy into action.

If you need a few ideas to get inspired, visit [here](#) and scroll down.

Whatever you chose to do just pray, act and pay it forward.

Bobbi ☺

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Capturing Christmas {2012} [at Glimpse of Peace]

The Mass of Christ. Christmas.



O Holy Night!

Spending time with our extended families and friends before Christmas ~ the appetizer.

Spending time with our extended families and friends after Christmas ~ the dessert.

The main course ~ assisting and worshiping at midnight Mass and Christmas morning Mass (with a few hours of sleep in between) offers pure satisfaction to our hungry hearts.



Weston, Peter, Violet, Joseph, Sawyer and Zachary: a complete set of cousins on Tim's side



Nearly the complete set of cousins; plus a few spouses and our little (and grown) ones on Bridget's side

The heart-breaker:

digesting the reality that so many baptized Christians will not choose to worship God in His Church on this holy day, nor faithfully on Sundays, nor on any day. With lives so full and so blessed, they lack the desire ~ or the will ~ to physically and habitually return to God's house to

give Him praise, thanks and glory. The call God Himself placed upon their hearts has been somehow muted or crowded out in the noisiness and business of life. Yet He waits patiently for

each one of us

to return to Him. Our Returning King offers His

endless mercy

as a perpetual Christmas gift, free of charge to anyone who simply, humbly asks.



Rocky at Christmas

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Like Clay [at worthy of Agape]

“Indeed, like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand...” – Jeremiah 18:6

So it is that we are like clay in the hand of the potter. This image has resonated with me for many years. I find it comforting to think about being held so closely in His hands. The truth is that the clay that is me is imperfect and in need of a world class Potter to fix me up and make me beautiful.



When you look at the potter and his work, you realize that he has to get his hands dirty. He can't sit there and will the clay to magically turn into a pot, he must be actively involved in its making. When one side of the pot starts to falter or crumble, the potter must rush to fortify it, lending his own strength to the failing wall. The potter molds the clay with a gentle, but firm hand. He cannot press too firmly, lest he pull the clay apart. He cannot keep his hands off of his creation, lest the clay fly all over the room as it spins round and round. When the pot is at last fortified, the potter fires it in the kiln, hardening it and preparing it for its purpose, for a purpose which he intends when he creates it.

Do you see how we are the clay and God is the potter? Because He loves us so deeply, He doesn't sit on the sidelines and simply will us to become a pot or a bowl or whatever it is that He is making us. He gets His hands dirty. He humbles Himself to take on our humanity and literally get dirty with us (except for the fact that He doesn't sin, of course). He is actively involved in our lives, whether we acknowledge His presence or not. When the world is spinning all around us, His are the hands that hold us steady and give direction to our lives. When we start to falter or crumble, He rushes to fortify us, to lend us a share of His mighty strength. He cannot press too firmly, lest we break, nor does He take His hands off of us, lest we fly all over. He holds us as we spin on the potter's wheel, He keeps us close to Himself as He perfectly molds us into something beautiful. He makes each of us for a specific intention, a distinct purpose – a purpose only He knows. When the time is right – when *His* time is right – He places us gently in the kiln. He keeps His eye on us so that we don't get over-cooked and burn and explode, but He makes sure that we are cooked exactly how long we need to be. We are made ready for His purpose.

Once we've spent the perfect amount of time in the kiln, He takes us out and allows us to be used

for a specific purpose, which He has intended for us since He put together that first heap of clay.
We serve His purpose and by so doing, we glorify Him, our Potter and our Creator.

“Yet, LORD, you are our father;
we are the clay and you our potter:
we are all the work of your hand.” – Isaiah 64:7

This contribution is available at <http://worthyofagape.com/2012/12/12/like-clay/>
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The Immaculate Misconception [at Musings of a Catholic Mom]



(I was hoping to get this post up in time for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, but it was not to be. This has been a crazy-busy week, the most important event being the birth of my new nephew, "Baby E!" Many blessings to my brother and sister-in-law as they start the journey of parenthood. They live an hour away and we haven't had a chance to meet the little one yet; we'll see him next weekend for sure, Lord willing!

Oh, and the statue in the photo above adorns the lovely Immaculate Conception Church in Fairbanks, Alaska. For more photos of this beautiful little church, [click here.](#)

I remember when Joe and I were dating and

[I was still a Baptist.](#)

we had many in-depth conversations about Mary. I had always known that Catholics gave Mary special honor, even naming churches after her and reciting prayers to her. I never really understood why this was. Joe explained to me that Catholics honor and venerate Mary because she is the mother of Our Lord, and the Church teaches that Mary was preserved from sin--and never sinned-- so that Christ would have a pure vessel to enter this world through. In fact, he was surprised to learn that other Christian faiths did not teach this. I dismissed this concept at first, saying that I did not believe that at all; Mary was no different from you and me, and she was a sinner just like everyone else. I figured God must have chosen her because she was particularly

faithful and holy--after all, some sinners are more faithful than holy than others.

One night during a get-together with some of Joe's high school friends, many of whom were Catholic, someone brought up the subject of the Immaculate Conception. I had heard this term before, and never thought much of it; I assumed it referred to Christ's conception by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb. That was one thing all Christian faiths taught, and I could wrap my head around it. Someone asked the group if they knew what the Immaculate Conception referred to. Several people said, "why, it's Jesus' conception in the womb of Mary, of course." The person then explained that even though many Catholics have this notion, it actually means that Mary was preserved from original sin at the moment of her conception. (I'm pretty sure Joe knew the right answer, by the way.) This REALLY confused me, because now I'm like, "WHAT?? The Church teaches that Mary was conceived in her mother's womb in the same way that Jesus was? Like without sex??" Well, no, I was assured; Mary was conceived in the usual manner, but God protected her from the sin of Adam and Eve. (I later learned that many Protestants hold the mistaken view that Catholic Church teaches a virginal conception of Mary. This is not the case.) Surprisingly, this made perfect sense to me, even though I had earlier pooh-pooed the idea of a sinless Mary. Why, after all, would God

no

t want a pure vessel for His Son? Why

wouldn't

he make a sinless mother to bear Him? Over the years, since

[becoming Catholic](#)

, I have come to a better understanding of it. Some ask, "Why does Mary refer to God as her savior in the Magnificat? That proves she's a sinner." Remember, Christ is beyond space and time.

Mary was saved by the merits of her divine Son on the Cross at the moment of her conception.

I sometimes think of it as if Mary was baptized at the moment she was conceived--thus having the stain of original sin removed--but an even more powerful one because she lived a completely sinless life.

I found this wonderful video by Scott Hahn, who explains beautifully why Catholics celebrate Mary's Immaculate Conception.

I have no idea when you'll hear from me again, on this blog anyway (although I expect I'll be around on Facebook and Twitter). This week, with what little free time I have, I'm hoping to get a good chunk of Christmas shopping done, start sending out Christmas cards, and spend some quality time with little E. and his mommy and daddy. I might try to see what I can do about moving my blog over to Wordpress, or at least clean up my web albums to make room for more photos to post here, although that might not happen for a while. Have a great week, and happy Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe!



Here's Moe when he dressed up as Saint Juan Diego for the All Saints Day parade at school last year.

This contribution is available at <http://momn3boys.blogspot.com/2012/12/the-immaculate-misconception.html?m=1>
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Last night, during Mass, I was so swept up in the beauty of it all. On the way into Church Jack and I were commenting on how we didn't feel like it was Christmas yet. On the way out, after Mass, we felt totally different. Our Mass was so so sacred and perfect. Monsignor focused on the second reading and the Gospel. He talked about waiting and watching. I wish I had a transcript of his homily.

When Mass began, I have to admit, I was feeling sorry for myself. I was frustrated w/ my husband over some disagreements we've been having, worried about our home being taken, thinking of Max, stressed about money, aggravated w/ all the materialism this time of year, and apprehensive about the future. As I walked into our beautifully decorated Church I about begged God to give me some peace in my heart. I was feeling so dissatisfied w/ our circumstances. I was looking for some hope... something that would tell me the future will be better than the present.

The second reading was from the Book of Titus and I don't know if I have ever heard it before. Well, I am sure I have heard it but I don't think I ever really listened to it before. It really spoke to me. I feel very much that I am being trained to live "temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age, as we await the blessed hope....". How foolish of me to think that something other than the Savior will deliver me from my anxiety.

Beloved:

The grace of God has appeared, saving all
and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires
and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age,
as we await the blessed hope,
the appearance of the glory of our great God
and savior Jesus Christ,
who gave himself for us to deliver us from all lawlessness
and to cleanse for himself a people as his own,
eager to do what is good.

Then, during the Homily, Monsignor talked about waiting patiently for the Lord. He talked about how the shepherds watched alertly at night for anything that might happen. Their job was one of patience and many nights nothing happened at all. Then, on Christmas night, they were given the most surprising and joyous message- and they were the first to receive it. They had waited and watched so patiently for this... not even knowing that this would ever happen or was what they were waiting for. (Gosh- I could NEVER be a shepherd.) But I realize that could very well be what the Lord is asking of me right now... to wait and watch. To be faithful and patient... to have hope.



Monsignor also spoke of Psalm 147. This scripture also has a message of hope.

"He does not delight in the strength of the horse;

He takes no pleasure in the legs of a man.

***¹¹ The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him,
In those who hope in His mercy."***

Finally, after my heart had been softened by the sacred words of scripture, the moving message of our Monsignor, and receiving the Eucharist- I was then able to enter into the Christmas spirit and truly offer praise and thanksgiving to God for sending His Son to us. I was overcome w/ thankfulness for my husband and children and all we have been given. I felt truly blessed and instead of petitioning for my desires I was thanking God for my blessings. After Communion my favorite Christmas Carol was sung. I sang as I cried and thanked God for all that I have. This has been my favorite Christmas song since I was a child.

***Oh Holy Night! The stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of the dear Savior's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining.
Till He appeared and the Soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.
Fall on your knees! Oh, hear the angel voices!
O night divine, Oh night when Christ was born;
Oh night, divine!
Oh night, Oh night divine!***

"A thrill of hope.... for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn." How beautiful. I kept saying it over and over today- "A thrill of hope. A thrill of hope." (I have a few stories to tell you about hope soon.) I mean- "Jesus Christ gave himself for us to deliver us from all lawlessness." Now that is some serious hope there. Oh night divine indeed! I am so thankful that the Lord was able to reach my stubborn and selfish heart in so many ways during Mass last night. On days like this I truly wonder if I will ever get to be holy. I am so inclined to vice that it just doesn't seem like I will ever get it all together enough to be a good person. "Long lay the world in sin and error pining. Till He appeared and the Soul felt its worth. A thrill of hope...."

Heavenly Father, thank You for sending You Son. Thank You for the hope that comes with Jesus. Thank You for Your patience with me. Sorry I am so slow to figure things out. Amen.

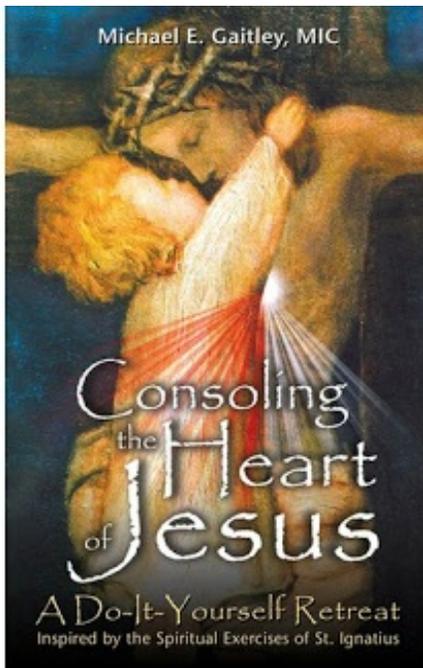


Rejoice! Merry Christmas!!!

This contribution is available at <http://letusbuildthecityofgod.blogspot.com/2012/12/oh-holy-night.html>
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Consoling the Heart of Jesus - Book Review [at Notlukewarm]



I read many books of all sorts. I devour books that have anything to do with Ignatian Spirituality. I pulled this out last night, intending to browse through and then plan when I would read it. Hah! I finished it this morning.

Consoling the Heart of Jesus: A Do-It-Yourself Retreat

by Br. Michael E. Gaitley, MIC is a great read. It reminded me of talking to good friends who have lots to say, only the book is organized. He weaves in the different ideas of Saints Ignatius, Faustina and Therese de Lisieux with the theme of mercy and trust underpinning it all. When Gaitley transitions from teaching to praying he tells you. He makes little jokes in the text. He encourages you to do what you can and not worry about the 'right' way of doing this retreat; the idea is to do it, on a weekend, in little pieces of time, whatever fits into your lifestyle and schedule. The best part of the book was the conclusion. Not because I was done reading but because of the great ideas as to how to add prayer in your daily life. His breakdown of St. Ignatius's examen is one of the best I have read. Br. Michael includes two appendices; one on the Rules for Discernment of Spirits (for Little Souls) and the other is selections from the Diary of St. Faustina. He includes an extensive Reference and Notes section as well.

If I were to use one word to describe this book it is accessible. Doing this retreat would be a great way to start the new year or Lent. Don't pass this up if you are looking for a way to give a boost to your spiritual life.

This review was written as part of the Catholic book reviewer program from The Catholic

Company. Visit The Catholic Company to find more information on [Consoling the Heart of Jesus](#). The Catholic Company has great gift ideas for all seasons of the liturgical year, be sure to check out their [Advent](#) selection and [Catholic Christmas Gifts](#).

This contribution is available at <http://notlukewarm.blogspot.com/2012/12/consoling-heart-of-jesus-book-review.html>

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Nativity of Our Lord [at 50 Days After]

An auto-post set back in January:

Wouldst that Thou should condescend

Born to bear all my sins upon the cross

Born that my separation from You should mend

A Baby Boy born to a carpenter and his wife

No visible sign that He is both God and man

No sign that this Child's flesh and blood are life

He was born to preach forgiveness and repentance to our race

He was born to die upon the cross, our sins' propitiation

He gave the fruit of the Tree of Life, that mystery of great grace

May God bless all who read my ramblings,

[Adopt A Catholic Blog](#)

This contribution is available at <http://50daysafter.blogspot.com/2012/12/nativity-of-our-lord.html>
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What I Learned From My Parish Priest's Criticism of Our Use Of NFP [at Colleen Duggan]



When I was newly pregnant with Camille, I snuck out of the house one Saturday afternoon to attend Confession. Father Bob*, our parish priest, saw me enter so when it was my turn to go into the Confessional, I didn't bother "hiding" behind the screen. As our pastor for 8 years, he knew me and he knew my voice. Besides God already knew what I'd done, Father Bob might as well know too.

I was crying before I even sat in the chair, mainly because I was sick, hormonal, and overwhelmed with the reality of an impending new baby. I sank down heavy and through muffled sobs, managed to squeak out a list of sins.

"And I just found out I'm pregnant," I said when I finished. "I feel lousy and I don't know how I'm going to do this for the next 9 months."

I grabbed a few tissues from the table sitting next to me and wiped at my red, swollen eyes.

Father looked at me intensely.

"Was this baby planned?" he asked suspiciously.

Father knew John and I don't use any forms of artificial birth control and use

Natural Family Planning

instead. The NFP mentality always presumes an openness to life and the happy acceptance of the intrinsically connected unitive and procreative ends of sexual intercourse. Even when avoiding pregnancy, a couple using NFP is open to its possibility. The contraceptive mentality and artificial contraception itself severs the unitive and procreative ends of sex, doing often unacknowledged damage to a marriage, for the sake of "being in control."

If he knew we used NFP, wasn't it fairly obvious that we were always open to the possibility of life--planned or otherwise? And really, isn't a baby

always

a possibility whenever a couple has sex, even if they

are

using artificial birth control or faithfully practicing NFP? Why was he asking me if the baby was planned?

I didn't know how to answer so I stared at the crumpled tissues I was holding in my hands.

He sighed in exasperation.

"Your silence suggests this baby wasn't planned," he said, shaking his head in frustration.

"Did we desire another baby at this particular moment in time, Father? No, I guess we didn't but I still want the baby," I answered defensively and began to cry again. All of a sudden, I felt unnecessarily guilty and ashamed.

Father sighed again loudly.

"

Do you think God is going to continue to provide for you and your family? Do you think you can just keep having kids and He'll take care of you?

Are you aware this is why the birth control pill was

invented

?" he said, leaning in close to me.

I was stunned. This guy was supposed to be on my team. He was supposed to congratulate me on my new baby and tell me how to persevere under the uncomfortable cross of pregnancy. He was

supposed to tell me all life is a gift, even when we don't feel emotionally prepared for that life. He was supposed to tell me that God, the Creator of all things, wanted the baby I was carrying even more than I did and that this baby was the perfect fulfillment of God's will for our family.

That's what I was looking for when I sought the Sacrament of Confession that random Saturday afternoon in February. I certainly wasn't looking for criticism from him regarding our decision to adhere to the Church's teachings on Natural Family Planning. I can go to my OB/GYN for that. I can go to the playground or the pool and listen to all the other mom's give me their opinion on my type of crazy. I expect the attitude there; I didn't expect it from my parish priest.

"I won't ever go on the birth control pill, Father," I stammered back. "I don't believe in it."

He sat back in his chair in disgust and when I finally left the Confessional, I was still crying, but now it wasn't because of my sin.

After some discernment, John and I decided shortly thereafter to leave our parish, our home of 8 years, because our NFP mentality was fundamentally at odds with our pastor's contraceptive mentality.

We never went back.

Even four years later, when I think about what happened with Father Bob in the Confessional that day, I still feel hurt.

John and I knew Father was not faithful to all the teachings of the Magisterium, but we thought our presence and our love and fervor for the faith might change his mind. We were naive.

That afternoon in the Confessional I realized Father Bob was never really accepted me or my family at his parish. He wanted to like us, but he couldn't because our approach to our faith was so fundamentally different than his. He thought we were wrong and he eventually let me know. I forgave him because he's misguided. I also truly believe he was trying to help me, not hurt me. By the grace of God, I'm not angry at him, but I was and still am, wounded by his words.

As painful an experience as it was, I'm grateful it happened because it taught us an important lesson. We no longer attend a parish because we think we may positively influence the misguided priest--that's not our job. It is, in fact, the priest's job to guide

us

. It is the priest's responsibility to educate me about the Church's teachings, not rail against them. It's the priest job to encourage me to love my unexpected crosses (like unplanned pregnancies), not fight them and instruct me to join the ranks of the contraceptive world. It's the priest's job to support me in the cultural battle I'm fighting, not criticize me for going against the grain. And this

is the kind of priest I look for now whenever faced with the decision of selecting a new parish--one who loves the Church and will even die for it if and when the time comes.

Last year when we moved and we needed to find a new church, I did some research. I visited the churches, I read the websites, and I prayed about where it was God wanted us. The Holy Spirit nudged me towards St. Agnes* and one Sunday morning we attended the 10 am Mass there. Afterwards, we introduced ourselves to Monsignor, the pastor of the parish. He noticed our clot of children and began counting.

"Five," he asked me and I nodded. He grabbed my hand and said, "Bless you. In today's world, you're in a battle. Welcome to St. Agnes."

I knew we were home.

*names and places have been changed

h/t to my good friend, [Rhonda](#), for helping me with revisions

This contribution is available at <http://www.colleenduggan.net/2012/12/what-i-learned-from-my-parish-priests.html>

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God's Mercy Is Greater Than Your Sins

by Fr. Christian Mathis on December 18, 2012



Endure the trial of yourself and your own faults and sins peacefully and serenely, because you know that God's mercy is greater than your wretchedness.

Maxim #53

Sin is a hard reality to deal with. There are some fairly common ways to approach sin that are typically unhelpful. One approach is to see our sinfulness as something that with enough effort can eventually be conquered. It's good to keep in mind that God's mercy is given to us free of charge. It is not something that can be earned. Catholics are often accused of believing that it is possible to secure our place in heaven through good works. While I am sure that there are individual Christians who believe this, the Church, on the other hand, [condemned this idea in the 5th Century](#). Perhaps for some, this belief comes from the practice of receiving a penance during the sacrament of reconciliation. There are many Catholics who believe incorrectly that the forgiveness received during confession is dependent upon completing their penance. In reality, a penance is given in the same way that medicine is given to a person who is sick. It is meant to be a way of strengthening a person for the next time they are tempted to sin again. The lie that many buy into is that God is angry with us when we sin. The truth is that he misses us when we choose to walk away from him and he will help us up as many times as we fall.

Another unhelpful approach is to downplay the seriousness of sin and the negative effect it has in our lives. There are Christians who fall into the [*sin of presumption*](#), which I would describe as confusing God's mercy with a false sense of permissiveness on his part. While it's true that God's mercy is limitless, that doesn't mean God wants us to keep on sinning or to give up our struggle with temptation. Sometimes we can even go so far as to convince ourselves that a particular sin isn't wrong in order to avoid dealing with its presence in our lives.

The best approach is the one described in Fr. Hopko's maxim. First we have to take the time regularly to honestly examine our lives so that we can clearly see our faults. Once we have exposed them, we can make an effort to change while asking for God's mercy each time we fall. And we can do so peacefully knowing that *despite the increase of sin, grace has far surpassed it.* (Romans 5: 20)

This contribution is available at <http://www.blessedisthekingdom.com/2012/12/18/gods-mercy-is-greater-than-your-sins/>
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Christmas is More Than Just "Jesus" Birthday [at Our Ordinary Life]

Some theological ponderings. If this doesn't interest you, feel free to skip this post.

This post involved so much discussion and editing with my husband during the course of its writing, that I have to give him full credit as a co-writer



In recent years, I've heard a number of well-intentioned people referring to Christmas as "Jesus' birthday". Factually, there is nothing wrong with this characterization. We are celebrating His birth, after all. But something about it always bothered me, and I just couldn't put my finger on why. It's a term that people use in an attempt to "take back Christmas" and remind themselves of what the day is really about. I can respect the sentiment. Reflecting on it, though, I realized that this is ultimately a misguided and overly simplified way to explain the meaning of Christmas.

The first time I heard anyone refer to Christmas as "Jesus' birthday" was in the classic movie

The Bells of St. Mary's

. A group of schoolchildren, after performing an adorable Nativity Play, sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus (complete with sweet little bowed heads as they speak His name - ah, be still my heart!).

[A clip of this scene used to be on Youtube, but it seems to have been taken down, and I'm really bummed about it.]

I don't have a problem with children referring to Christmas as Jesus' Birthday. Birthdays are something they "get". But the same term sounds rather puerile coming from an adult. Cutesy customs like baking a birthday cake for Jesus and singing Him "Happy Birthday" on Christmas morning might be better than just doing the whole Santa/presents/mistletoe thing while ignoring the real "reason for the season", as they say. But it's still missing the point somewhat. And even when you're dealing with young children, I think you can go a lot further than just teaching them to think of Christmas as someone's birthday, even if that Someone is the Lord Himself.

A birthday is the

commemoration

of the day someone was born. However, the day a new baby is born into the world is always a "bigger deal" than all his or her subsequent birthdays which merely

commemorate

that day. From a liturgical perspective, when we celebrate Christmas (or any other feast day, for that matter), we are participating in the reality of that event. As my husband put it, "our Faith is not a commemoration of history, but a living faith." On Christmas we experience the reality of God made Man - it's not merely a memorial. And this isn't just the birth of any child. This child is our Savior - the one we've been waiting for and preparing for for so long. Now that is

awesome

, in the true sense of the word. On Christmas morning, we can joyfully say, "Christ is here with us! He is come to save us!". I think that needs to be celebrated with something of a different character than a concessionary birthday cake on Christmas morning, squeezed in before the present-opening and otherwise secular-influenced festivities.

On Christmas, we are presented with the Incarnation of Christ - the fact of God made Man - a crucial aspect of our salvation. While the moment of Christ's birth as Man had an exact historical date, Christ Himself is eternal and uncreated. The Incarnation is ongoing. The recognition of a feast day goes beyond mere remembrance of some past event. It is the active participation of the faithful in a divine reality.

The term "Jesus' birthday" focuses only on Christ's human nature - the birth of a particular baby in Bethlehem. But Christmas is meant to celebrate the truth of the Incarnation - the unimaginable condescension of our God Who became one of His creatures. When calling it His "birthday", there is no recognition of Christ's divine nature. "Jesus' birthday" is a celebration of a long-past historical event, which had a definite beginning and end. "Christmas" is the contemplation of the

ineffable mystery of the Incarnation, which is eternal.

I know this might all sound nit-picky. Is it really a big deal if people use a term that doesn't recognize the

full

reality of Christmas? I would argue that it is. Sloppy wording leads to sloppy thinking and in turn, possible error or loss of faith.

This contribution is available at <http://ourordinarylifeextraordinary.blogspot.com/2012/12/christmas-is-more-than-just-jesus.html>

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Top 5 Posts in 2012 [at Arleen Spenceley]

It's been a busy year for blogging and as 2012 comes to its conclusion, five posts of mine finish as most read this year. Below are links to each, plus excerpts. Enjoy the ones you haven't read yet (or re-reading what you liked enough to read again). Happy new year!

The Most Popular Posts I Wrote in 2012:

5. [Why I'm a virgin: the feedback.](#)

A week ago today, what I wrote about saving sex for marriage printed in the Perspective section of my paper, the Tampa Bay Times.

Readers called me unintelligent and unattractive (So that's why I'm a virgin.).

A web editor had to shut down the comments online before the essay even appeared in print. "Too many personal attacks," he said.

4. ["Is there room for erotica in Christianity?"](#)

"I knew there wouldn't be a second date the moment the guy asked this question:

"How do you feel about strip clubs?"

Not for 'em, I said.

"What about porn?"

Are you kidding?

In the conversation that followed, I rebutted his defenses of both. He, a Christian (nominally, at least), was a consumer of erotic media, convinced that using it can be good. He is the only Christian I've met who has defended pornography. But he is not the only Christian who defends other kinds of erotic media."

3. [Virginity: a disadvantage in dating?](#)

That people won't date you for more than a month because you're saving sex does not mean virginity is a disadvantage. It means you're dating the wrong kind of people.

2. [Why I'm a virgin](#)

"I like to talk about sex.

This is natural for a woman who grew up in a culture that surrounds us with it, who is the product of parents who taught me no topic is taboo. But few who discuss sex with me are prepared for what I divulge:

I'm a virgin."

1. [I am not saving myself for marriage. \(I'm saving sex.\)](#)

I'm not saving myself for marriage.

First, I know no follower of Christ who thinks any of us can save ourselves. Secondly, to say "I'm saving myself" when you mean "I'm saving sex" equates who you are - and therefore your worth - with sex. But your worth is wrapped up in nothing except your existence. It is intrinsic.

So I'm not saving myself.

But I am saving sex.

This contribution is available at <http://www.arleenspenceley.com/2012/12/top-5-posts-in-2012.html>
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Pitchers 15: Shoot [at Smaller Mannhattans]



We want a real Messiah

Here's the board from the 11/28/12 Isaiah class. This is when the kids remind me that the Jews want the good old days back, when David and Solomon whipped Israel's enemies, and the Chosen People weren't little dogs living in a big-dog world. Some drawing accompanies me reading a series of Isaiah prophecies while the children figure out what they might mean.

The lower left sketch shows how highway builders trim down the high points and use that material to fill the low points to make a smoother road, as in: "prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level."

Above that is the Temple on the Mountain, both of which figure repeatedly in Isaiah.

To the right is the sort of Messiah/ Mashiah/ Christos/ Anointed One which the Jews are hoping God will send them: a fighter who's gonna get Israel some payback from the likes of Babylon. Once this cartoon is drawn, we start on the prophecies.

"Y'all tell me who David's daddy was.

Joseph!

No, but close...

Jesse!

Yes. And David's son?

Solomon!

Yes again. And what sort of Messiah were the Jews hoping for?

One like David and Solomon.

Yes. Now we're going to learn about a lot of Isaiah's prophecies to see what sort of Messiah the Jews were actually going to get.

Y'all tell me about the Jesse Tree from last week.

It's a tree that grows out of Jesse and Jesus is at the top.

Yes...here's Jesse, he's kind of lying on a sofa so the tree can grow out of him...here's the tree, it goes way up.

That doesn't look like a person!

So what? I just said it's Jesse. Use your imaginations, you're 6th-graders. Anyway, Israel's enemies have conquered Israel, and cut the tree down (I erase it). All that's left is...this...

stump.

There ya go. I need the green marker now...OK, what would Israel like to happen to this cut-down tree?

For it grow big again?

Yes, like so, tall and green with a conquering King at the top. But let's hear what Isaiah has to say about this stump: "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse..." Do y'all know what a shoot is? No? Look, it's like this...just a little green sprout with a leaf or two:



Could you build a house from that sprout, that shoot? *No it's too flimsy.* Make a fishing pole? *No it's too small.* So what's it good for? *Nothing.* Right, it's not very practical. But who is that little shoot coming out of Jesse's stump? *David?* Umm, no, this is a prophecy, David's in the remote past. *Ummm...Jesus!* Yes! So why is Jesus a little green shoot instead of a big strong tree? Isn't the Messiah supposed to be big and strong? *Yes! So...?* *Well, Jesus wasn't big and strong.* Right. Isaiah is telling Israel that the big strong David and Solomon tree isn't coming back, but a humble little twig will grow that's related to Jesse and his kingly descendants."

With this foundation we then look at about a half-dozen Jesus-specific prophecies, time permitting. The little shoot sets the mood for the rest of them. Now I could have just said hey, listen to this verse, it means that Jesus is meek and humble like a little sprout and he's not what the Jews expected in a Messiah. But the kids learn so much better if they can access the emotional content, and see some fast sketching that helps them think.

As you can see, even bad drawings work well with narration.

This contribution is available at <http://platytera.blogspot.com/2012/12/pitchers-15-shoot.html>
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God and the Holocaust [at Outside the Asylum]

I tried writing a new post to capture my thoughts on the tragedy in Newtown, Connecticut. It was, after two days' work, completely inadequate ... I wasn't saying anything new. This post, from August 17, 2010, comes closest to what I was trying to say.

* * *

I just recently re-read *Salvation is from the Jews: The Role of Judaism in Salvation History from Abraham to the Second Coming*, by Roy H. Schoeman (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003).

Schoeman, a convert to Catholicism, spends a good portion of the book analyzing the religious and philosophic roots of the German cultural anti-Semitism which Adolph Hitler and the Nazis manipulated and magnified with such malignant, satanic genius. (This in turn led me to start re-reading William L. Shirer's classic opus *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*

to see how that background mixed with the political and social semi-anarchy that characterized the Weimar Republic.)

It's difficult to overstate the impact the Holocaust has had on both Jewish and Christian theology ... but it can be done. The philosophical influences responsible for the domination of secularism among the intellectual elite were making themselves felt among theologians even before Hitler rose to power, challenging the orthodox understanding of human suffering and the God who allows it to exist. David Hume, the grandfather of modern secularism, made a stunning indictment of God's mercy and benevolence in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*:

[God's] power we allow [is] infinite: Whatever he wills is executed: But neither man nor any other animal are happy: Therefore he does not will their happiness. His wisdom is infinite: He is never mistaken in choosing the means to any end: But the course of nature tends not to human or animal felicity: Therefore it is not established for that purpose. Through the whole compass of human knowledge, there are no inferences more certain and infallible than these. In what respect, then, do his benevolence and mercy resemble the benevolence and mercy of men?

It's easy to nitpick here and grumble that Hume, like many modern atheists, paints with too broad a brush: if everybody without exception isn't happy every minute of every single day, then nobody's happy. And, in fact, if nobody ever had experiences of goodness, health or happiness, we would never think something was wrong with suffering.

Nevertheless, Hume's charge isn't readily dismissed: How can we believe in a merciful, benevolent God when so much suffering exists? One writer flippantly said he believes God to be "one hundred percent malicious but only thirty percent effective"; however, a malevolent God who isn't intelligent or powerful enough to create unremitting universal misery is incompatible with the notion of a God powerful and intelligent enough to create a cosmos. Far easier to believe that, if He exists at all, He is indifferent.

If anything, a secularist committed to a Darwinist naturalism could accuse Hume of typical British understatement. "Survival of the fittest" and "Nature red in tooth and claw" are such cliché expressions that we lose sight of a simple fact: Nature itself doesn't teach us compassion or self-denying love. Rather, it teaches us bloody competition for survival. The closest approach it makes to such elevated attitudes is less a communitarian cooperation than a utilitarian huddling around the tribal campfire, the gathered survivors as fearful of the predator hiding among them as they are of the predators outside the circle of light.

The Holocaust attacks faith — particularly Judaism — right at the concept of God's intervention. Here, we're not simply talking about miracles, such as the Eucharistic miracle of Lanciano, but about God acting within the context of human history. Only within Judaism and Christianity is the concept of divine intervention fully developed; even Islam falls short. But the secularist—especially the one posing as a Judeo-Christian liberal—asks us to juxtapose a more pedestrian event, such as a miraculous healing at Lourdes, with the death of millions of Jews, Gypsies, Slavs and other unfortunates in the concentration camps and killing fields of the Third Reich. How, the secularist demands, can you believe God would bother to cure your grandma's breast cancer yet refuse to stop the Nazis from devastating European Jewry? How can you believe God would cast fire and brimstone on Sodom because a few guys tried to rape an angel, yet wouldn't do as much for Auschwitz or Dachau? What Moses was sent to *der Führer* to demand, "Let my people go"? And let's not get into the Stalinist purges, or the Cambodian killing fields, or the "ethnic cleansing" of Bosnia!

It's just as easy to ask why God would allow one small child to die of starvation as to ask why He would allow thousands upon thousands to die of asphyxia in the "de-lousing showers". But it's just as easy — and more pertinent — to ask why *we* allow such things to happen. For much of the evil in this world is of Man's creation: products of his cupidity, stupidity, malice, lust, greed, vengefulness, hatred and selfishness. Strip both God and Satan from the universe, and Man is left with no one to blame for evil but himself.

Judaism, and by extension Christianity, have always existed in the face of suffering; the only difference between the atrocities of the twentieth century and of the thirty-nine centuries that preceded it is the dry numbers. Classically, Judaism has explained suffering as temporal punishment for individual sins; by contrast, Christianity has explained it as a physical and moral consequence of original sin. Christianity has never foreseen the end of suffering at any time prior to the Second Coming; indeed, for those who die outside of God's grace by their own choice, suffering continues into eternity.^[1] Neither Judaism nor Christianity has ever seen a logical contradiction between the occurrence of evil and an interventionist God who performs miracles.

God desires us to be happy. But, even more than that, God wants us to be *holy* ... not under compulsion but from our own desire. The late Harry Kemelman, speaking through his fictional Rabbi David Small, wrote that Judaism's intent is to make man whole rather than holy.

Christianity teaches, in contrast, that man can't become whole *without* becoming holy, that sanctity is a necessary precondition to wholeness. In human terms, that sanctity finds its natural expression in acts of love, mercy and compassion for others, especially those who suffer. To be holy — and so to be whole — we must seek not only to avoid evil but to do good, even if doing so causes us suffering and loss.

Because we possess free will, it's *our* responsibility — not God's — to prevent ourselves from causing others to suffer, or to prevent others from causing suffering. Human beings created the social contexts that allowed psychopaths like Hitler and Stalin to come to power; human beings developed and taught the inhuman philosophies which fed their murderous minds; human beings remorselessly translated their orders into atrocities with little resistance. Ultimately, you can't blame God for any act of human evil without implying that the humans who did the evil were little more than robots carrying out an inflexible programming, or mindless hive creatures like bees or Borgs. Such an implication is incompatible with the existence of free will; without free will, reason and scientific knowledge are illusions.

“As we bless God for the good, so we must bless Him for the evil.” Those are the words of the Talmud. They're words beyond understanding, but if we cannot say them, we cannot hope. Bitterness, yes ... but hopelessness, no. The Jewish way is to bless and to hope, and to bless and to hope, until blessing and hope surmount the pain and even the bitterness, and the living learn how to go on. ... God is righteous. God is good. It's people who sometimes forget; who let evil rule them; who lose the sense of the image of God within them and become beasts of prey. ... “Blessed is the God who will judge righteously.” He does not forget. Sometimes it seems as if He needs time to assimilate everything He has seen, and to react to it and give

recompense. But you'll see it *He does not forget!*[\[2\]](#)

In a universe without a God, it's impossible to hope for final justice against Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot or Slobodan Milosevic, although with the first and the last we can take some bitter comfort that they lived to see their efforts fail. But more than that, in such a universe it's impossible to assign any transcendent value to the suffering they caused without being mocked by the knowledge that such an assignment is illusory. If their suffering serves no Final Purpose, even one beyond the murky edges of our vision, then their suffering was pointless.

The story of Job teaches us that the ways of a transcendent, eternal God are beyond our complete understanding. But "beyond understanding" doesn't mean "beyond belief". If, in the end, we can't fully comprehend how suffering plays a part in God's design, it doesn't follow that the design is either hostile or indifferent to man. We still know that God calls us to avoid evil and to do good. This, by itself, is our best indication that God is indeed good.

[\[1\]](#)

Although the Catholic Church still holds it as dogma that "there is no salvation outside the Church," the line between "outside" and "inside" isn't held to formal membership, and isn't meant to impose a restraint on God's mercy. This flexible modern understanding is a sore point with traditionalists, especially sedevacantists.

[\[2\]](#)

Mel Mermelstein,

By Bread Alone: The Story of A-4685

, cit. in Schoeman, p. 147.

This contribution is available at <http://tonylayne.blogspot.com/2012/12/god-and-holocaust.html>
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21 Ways to Share the Faith with Your Toddler [at Messy Wife, Blessed Life]



Pope Benedict announced that this is the [Year of Faith](#), a time to learn more about the Church and grow closer to Christ. This is an invitation for all members of the Church, even the very smallest! My daughter is just barely a year old, but she is not too young to start learning about and loving the Faith! In brainstorming and searching for ways to teach my little one, I came across some great ideas. I hope you'll share some of your ideas as well. Here are my favorites:**Pray:**

1. Take your toddler to Mass. It can be difficult to get a little one to stay quiet and still, but it's important that your child experience Mass from a young age. Going to Mass is also important for learning about being part of a faith community; your little one will see that not only mama and daddy worship God, but also men and women of all different ages and races. Most people don't mind a talkative or squirmy toddler, and if they do, your little one is just helping them learn the virtue of patience! Babies and toddlers are part of the Church too!

2. Go to adoration.

Here's a quote from Anne that made me realize adoration is for little ones too: "

I have been taking my 22-month-old to adoration with me for a few weeks now. I go when the adoration chapel is empty (but would take him in even if it wasn't). He sits on the chair and I kneel to pray for about 10 minutes or so, then I gather him on my lap and we talk about Jesus and then

finish by saying the "Our Father" and singing (quietly) "Jesus Loves Me." My son is always in perpetual motion, but as soon as we get in the chapel he is always SO STILL. It amazes me." If your Church doesn't offer one, you might see if they would be willing to start "Toddler" adoration once a month or so. Kaylene wrote about recently [taking her daughter to toddler adoration](#) and was blown what a great program it is. And here is a great "[How-To Guide for Adoration with Small Children](#)" by Dianna Kennedy.

3. The Sign of the Cross. This is the perfect first prayer for a toddler. It's short. It includes hand movements. It can be regularly seen and heard many times a day. We start working on the Sign of the Cross with Lucia when she was only 10 months and she LOVES it. She smiles and laughs every time we do it and tries to follow along. She usually touches her forehead or chest while we do it.

4. Pray the Rosary.

Although they may be too little to follow along with the prayers, just having your child present during a family Rosary is a huge blessing (and teaching opportunity). This seems to be a popular prayer activity because the bloggers at both

[Working to be Worthy](#)

and

[For Love of Cupcakes](#)

suggested it (we do it in our home too).

5. Pray before naptime.

In addition to the "traditional" prayer times, in the morning, before meals, and before bed, introduce a special toddler-centered prayer time: prayer before naps! What a great suggestion from

[Working to be Worthy](#)

.

Play:

6. Music.

Make religious songs part of your child's day. You don't have to set aside a special time for these songs, it's fine if they are squeezed between "The Itsy Bitsy Spider" and "If You're Happy and You Know It". In fact, isn't it a blessing if your child sings, "Jesus Loves Me", "He's Got the Whole World", and "Lord of the Dance" as much as he sings "traditional" toddler songs? You can also sing and play music you hear in Mass, not just children-specific music.

7. Dolls.

Such a great way to help little ones visualize Bible stories and interact with Jesus and the Saints. You don't necessarily need religious dolls to do this (you can act out a Bible stories with the toys you have) but they certainly help. Gina of My Broken Fiat suggested Little People toys (there is a Noah's Ark set and a Nativity set) and has a great blog post of her son with

[nearly life-sized Jesus and Mary dolls](#)

. There are also some great ones on Etsy (just search the Saint you are looking for).

8. Crafts.

The ideas for faith-focused crafts are endless. You can make a cross out of nearly anything (beads, popsicle sticks, cardboard, blocks, etc., etc., etc.). You can make a lamb out of cotton balls. Most toddlers seem to love stringing beads, so a rosary would be perfect (a one decade rosary is great for a little one). As your child strings the beads, say the appropriate prayer for each one. A paper plate can turn into an angel, a monstrance, etc.

[Catholic Icing](#)

has so many crafts, including many that are appropriate, or can be adapted, for toddlers.

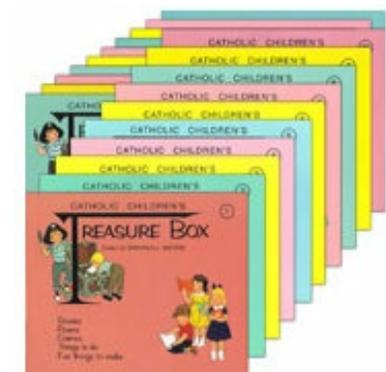
9. Include faith items in your child's dress up box.

A blue sheet to dress up as Mary. A simple brown robe (or brown pillow case with head and arm holes) and stuffed lamb to dress up as a shepherd. A multicolored sweater to dress up as Joseph. Or perhaps a few articles that represent a Saint that is important to your family - a crown for one of the many royal Saints (or for Christ the King), a crown of roses for Saint Rose of Lima, a fishing pole to represent one of the many fishermen apostles, armor to represent Saint George/Saint Michael.

Educate:

10. "Baptize" a stuffed animal/doll. A fellow teacher shared this idea when we discussed how to get our students involved in the Year of Faith. Since Baptism was when our "door of faith" was opened, it's a great place to start teaching your little one about faith.

11. Go on a nature walk. It is hard for little one to understand how BIG God is, bigger and greater than mama and daddy even! Take a walk through the mountains, on the beach, in a national park, or just a neighborhood greenbelt and show him everything that God made. This is also a great opportunity to integrate science and faith. Explain (in simple terms) how plants get food from the sun and how it is a part of the perfect plan God has for all his creatures.



12. Read.

A few board book suggestions:

[Baby, Come to Church!](#)

,

[Celebrating Mass](#)

,

[Daily Prayers](#)

, and

[Our Blessed Mother](#)

. (Actually, all of the St. Joseph board books look great!) I also love the Catholic Children's

[Treasure Box set](#)

. It has stories, games, songs, and crafts for children age 2-5. I was lucky to come across them at a used book sale at my church for only \$30 (and they looked brand new), but I still think that at \$5 a piece it's a good investment, especially if you'll have several children that will use them.

13. Help your child care for others.

Teach your little one about helping others by donating her toys and clothes to families who need it. Especially during the holidays or birthdays when your toddler gets many new things, have her choose some of her toys to give away. (Bonus, this helps reduce clutter!) Another idea is to specifically pick new toys or clothes for another child, perhaps by picking a name on a Jesse tree during Advent. Be sure to explain to your child that she is doing God's work by helping care for others.

14. Point out examples.

Use everyday interactions with family, friends, and strangers to teach about the God's love. When your spouse cooks dinner (even if he/she does it everyday), use the opportunity to point out to your little one, "See Mommy making dinner? She does that because she loves you and wants to take care of you. God does that too." If you see a stranger help another stranger pick up something he's dropped, that's a great learning opportunity too! It's important to help your toddler learn explicitly about the connections between God and love.

Celebrate:

15. Celebrate your child's Baptism Day. This is your day that your child became part of the faith! What a special day for her and for the whole Church! Some ideas to make it special:

- Take out a photo album and show her pictures of her baptism day.
- Show her the baptism gown she wore, her baptismal candle, or any other mementos from the day.
- Make a special cake or treat.
- Give your little one a special gift to help her further her faith: a prayer book, a saint doll, a rosary, a religious picture to put on her wall, etc.

16. Celebrate Saints' Feast Days. I didn't grow up celebrating Feast Days so this is very

overwhelming to me. My goal this year is just to pick two or three Feast Days and do a little something special for them, and hopefully add a few extra each year as my children grow up.

- Read a book about the Saint.
- Make a special meal or dessert that has significance for the Feast Day. I love the ideas from [Catholic Cuisine](#).
- Print out Saint coloring sheets.
- Do toddler-approved crafts. I love the idea of contact paper art for little ones that aren't quite ready for coloring or painting. Cut out various items that represent the Saint and let your little one place them on contact paper. You could do this for any Feast Day, holiday, or just for fun. [Here's an example](#) from The OT Mama. There are also countless art ideas on [Catholic Icing](#).
- If your child is named after a Saint, do a little something special on that Saint's feast day and let your child know that Saint is his special friend in Heaven.

17. Celebrate Advent/Christmas:



- Felt Advent wreath
- Nativity for small hands
- Fill Baby Jesus's manger: We started doing this when my brother was in preschool and he loved it. Find a small basket, Baby Jesus figurine, and pieces of straw to fill the basket. Put the empty basket in a prominent place and the straw nearby. Each time your child does something kind, have her put one piece of straw in Baby Jesus's manger. The idea is that your child is preparing for the arrival of Christ through kind deeds; by Christmas the basket should be filled and your child can place the Baby Jesus in it.
- Make a birthday cake for Jesus.
- Have an advent calendar with daily faith-based activities to do. Each day you could pray for someone different, do a kind deed, etc. You can incorporate them into traditional Christmas activities, for example, one day could be to make Christmas cookies to give to a neighbor or to pick out a toy for a less fortunate child while doing Christmas shopping.
- Don't end the Christmas season on Christmas day, keep your decorations up and celebrate the Epiphany with a few small gifts from the Reyes Magos (Three Kings). Or reverse the gift giving and have your toddler make three small gifts for Jesus to be given to him on the Epiphany.
- There are more great ideas in this [10 Ways to Keep Christ in Christmas \(for Kids\)](#) post at It's

18. Celebrate Lent/Easter:

- Bury the "Alleluia" at the beginning of Lent and dig it up on Easter Sunday.
- I love the ideas of a Lenten Chain and a Jesus Tree that I found at [Baby Love Slings](#).
- To symbolize the Easter theme of rebirth, help your little one plant a seed and care for it.
- Make a Lent tray of items as described at [Montessori Living Now](#).
- Have (make) a cross with a figure of Jesus that can be detached. On Good Friday, put Jesus on the Cross and explain (in simple terms) that Jesus died for our sins. Later that afternoon, have your toddler watch you "bury" Jesus somewhere (ex. in a cabinet). On Easter morning, have your child help you open it to see that Jesus is gone. Have your child look for Him "risen" somewhere else in the house. Again, explain in simple terms the Resurrection. (This might be a great use for a Jesus doll!)
- Hide Easter eggs that include religious messages/symbols in them. A lamb for the Lamb of God and Good Shepherd, a small cross, a prayer card, a butterfly to symbolize the Resurrection.

Decorate:

19. Put holy water fonts in your home at toddler height.

20. Place physical representations of the faith in every room of your house so that your little one learns that your faith is part of every aspect of your life. These could be crucifixes, paintings, statues, quotes, etc. We make it a point to have a crucifix in every bedroom in our home.

21. Have a little corner of your child's room dedicated to God. Include a baby cross or crucifix, perhaps a picture of the saint he/she was named after, a rosary, Biblical coloring books, and a basket of faith-filled toys (saint dolls, Noah's arc, etc.). During the holidays, help your child decorate this area with religious decorations (a child's advent wreath or nativity).

Inappropriate Thought [at A Spiritual Journey]

Any thought that makes us want to be noticed by others does not come from the Lord. Entertaining such thoughts prevents us from ever experiencing inner peace.

This contribution is available at <http://journeyofimperfectsaint.blogspot.com/2012/12/inappropriate-thought.html>

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Precious Life [at makingthetrek]

I don't know if I'll write more or if this is it.

[Yesterday's news](#) was incomprehensible. I can't imagine nor do I WANT to imagine. When my mind starts to go there....it just can't. Can't.

We live in a culture of death. The media will feed on this for weeks. Each story will bring new knowledge and grief. Only time will bring healing.

Political agenda on guns? Some will turn this into it. The reality is: You can't legislate morality. Stole that from my Hubby...he's brilliant, BTW.

As for me, I went to Adoration at lunch yesterday. Cried, prayed and cried some more. A pattern I'm certain to repeat in the coming days. Lord, have mercy.

I hugged my kids and my Hubby. Hard. Long. Even my 13 and 15 year olds did not pull away.

We let our son go skate with his friends. We let our daughter go to her birthday party. You have to live.

We watched Elf. Our son ate spaghetti and syrup for dinner (in preparation for Elf). I joined in with [this gal](#) and [this gal](#) as they hosted a "Twitter party" during Elf. I made peppermint milkshakes and let everyone finish the leftover luncheon "[Cherry Cheesecake Dip](#)" (Pinterest WIN!!) Laughing felt great. Therapy.



Stephanie Potter @Sjgpotter

8h

@e4red_tracy I feel like this was an answer to my prayers for relief in my heart. God planned it before we knew we needed it.

#clanunseen

I texted with my mom and my sister.

I read the news sparingly.

Today. I'm up. I'll walk. I'll pray. Hubby and I will decide how to proceed with broaching this topic with our kids. We'll make a more concentrated effort at living each day as a PRESENT. We'll live our lives with RESPECT to LIFE. All life. We will trust in God even when we don't understand, even when we are furious, confused, scared and anxious. Our children and our lives are not our own. We belong to Him. Let us love one another.

Jesus, come quickly. Until then,

[Our Lady of Sorrows](#), pray for us.

This contribution is available at <http://makingthetrek.wordpress.com/2012/12/15/precious-life/>
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Spiritual Growth and Personalized Saints [at Martin Family Moments]

Part 1:

On January 1, Mary's feast day, Monsignor really urged us all to make this year the Year of the Rosary in our homes. If you already say it daily, he said to really try to contemplate the mysteries and not just rattle off the words. And if you don't say it regularly...start. You can do it in baby steps, maybe just a family rosary once a week.

Part 2:

Then I read

[Mary's post](#)

about Our Lady and left a comment that made me want to write more about it here. Growing up, my family said the Rosary every night, from what I can remember. My parents said we could all say it while we were still toddlers, and every night around 7:00 my Dad would yell "Time for the Rosary!" and then he and my Mom would kneel down in front of our little altar setup in the living room and begin praying. All of us kids would come running from whatever we were doing and kneel down and pray with them. Sometimes as we became teenagers, we may have dreaded that nightly ritual and showed up a little late to the party. But my parents never said we HAD to pray the Rosary, they just announced when they were doing it, and we could join if we wanted. My Mom swears that the reason her six children all turned out so great is the Family Rosary and the

[Home Enthronement](#)

And so my own little family is trying to follow suit.

(old video...Maggie was 3, Eamon was 4, Andrew was 6, and J-P was 8)

We seem to go through cycles of saying the Rosary nightly, and then times where we can't seem to get our act together. But I promise you that on the nights we make sure to do it, I look around at my

children praying and my husband leading them and I can't be any happier in those moments. It brings tears to my eyes just thinking about it. Even though it's never a *perfect* recitation, I try to remember that the family that prays together, stays together, right? It is such a nice way to end an evening before tucking in the kids for bed.

Part 3:

Jen is sharing the link to her

[Saint Name Generator](#)

again, where you simply click a button, say a prayer, click again and "get" a Saint for the year. The database has lots of saints, and if you land on one you've never heard of, there's even an additional link to learn more about him/her. It's awesome and I don't know how people just create things like this...it's totally above my pay grade.

I decided I really wanted to take this to heart this year and make sure I not only picked a saint but continue to learn more about them and pray for their intercession in my life. So guess who I got?

[St. Gianna Beretta Molla](#)

!! I was so excited because I know her! When I was pregnant with Alexander, I was very interested in learning all about her, and got

[this book](#)

to read. Phil and I decided that if the baby was a girl, we would name her Gianna (and call her Gia). I love her because she was so pro-life, pro-family, and also worked outside the home. What a role model for me!

But then I panicked because St. Gianna is someone people pray to when they want to get pregnant. So if I focus my attention towards her, does that mean baby #6 will be coming in 2013? Maybe I just need to pray to her about being more open to another baby sooner than I plan ;)

Part 4:

Of course, being the dutiful wife that I am, I made Phil choose a saint for the year too. After

praying for the Holy Spirit to pick a "good one", he got

[St. Dominic](#)

! Do you know what Saint Dominic's claim to fame was? The spreading of the Marian devotion of the ROSARY!

I think Our Blessed Mother is trying to tell us something.

And I am definitely listening :)

Colleen

This contribution is available at <http://martinfamilymoments.blogspot.com/2013/01/spiritual-growth-and-personalized-saints.html>

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Advent Reflections, Part 1: Chastity and Waiting [at Captive the Heart: A Sprightly Wedding Blog For the Catholic Bride]



Happy Advent! I love, love, love this season for its sense of anticipation, and of course, I love its culmination in our Savior's birth! During my engagement, I can remember feeling so many similarities between preparing for Christmas and preparing for marriage--both are times of waiting, both can overwhelm you now and then, and both end in a gift of purest love.

There's a passage from Romans that I love. "We know," says Saint Paul, "all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now; and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved..." (8:22-24). At first glance, it might not seem like the sunniest verse (hello, he's talking about labor), but I can identify so deeply with the sense of longing that Paul expresses.

In the last few years, I've been incredibly blessed to develop a more in-depth understanding of the Theology of the Body. Attending a

[TOB retreat](#)

taught by Christopher West himself was such a gift to me. The retreat consisted of a 30-hour course entitled "Head and Heart Immersion," and I don't think it could be titled more aptly. During the retreat, I learned so much about the Theology of the Body beyond my very basic understanding,

which certainly satisfied the "head" aspect, but it's been letting all that knowledge sink into me that's borne such amazing fruit.

The best thing I took away from the course was a greater awareness of the longings we all feel and what they indicate. Do you ever experience an ache so deep, for love or for belonging or for Heaven, that you can barely keep it together? Those are our labor pains; our desire for adoption as God's children. Everyone feels it, and when I consider the Ache in light of TOB, it makes so much sense. Of course we long for perfect love, long for something more, because it's what we're meant for. We're restless, just like Augustine says, because we won't rest completely until this life ends and our heavenly one begins. Every fulfillment on earth is just a taste of how the Father satisfies. It's something I love to think about, and I notice it everywhere, especially in music (Mumford and Son's "Awake My Soul?" King's of Leon's "Use Somebody?" My favorite, Peter Gabriel's "In Your Eyes?" Even Taylor Swift's "Love Story?" In the lyrics and vocals, you can hear them aching!).

I remember so clearly the particular aches of engagement. Every vocation brings the greatest fulfillment on earth to those whom it calls, but to me it seems that marriage does so in the most tangible way. Specifically, the love, forgiveness, and affirmation of your spouse has the power to bear the Father's love to us in such a real way--through another human being, body and soul. I so badly wanted physical proximity to Andrew while we dated long-distance, wanted to know what my life in a new town, in a new role as a wife, would be like, and wanted every part of a shared life. I'm sure I wasn't the only one. Having a chaste relationship was

[such a struggle](#)

sometimes. Lying in wait, full of longing...sounds like a season of Advent to me. Grace and mercy will carry you through.

Know this: that every desire you feel for your husband-to-be, emotional, rational, and yes, sexual, is so good and so holy. Chastity isn't about suppressing our desires, but orienting them in the right, most loving way at the right time. Abstinence ends in marriage (with the exception of periodic abstinence when practicing NFP), but chastity doesn't. All through your Advent, embrace the groaning. Give yourself permission to feel, to hope, and to be purified.

"In hope we were saved." Jesus' birth brings a thrill of hope; our ultimate hope, the perfect fulfillment of our desires, and new life.

I hope your first week of Advent is full of grace. Also, I'd love to start a few little traditions for the season, starting with a wreath, now that Andrew and I are our own little family (as in, just the two of us for now; this is not a baby announcement!)--what are yours?

 Stephanie

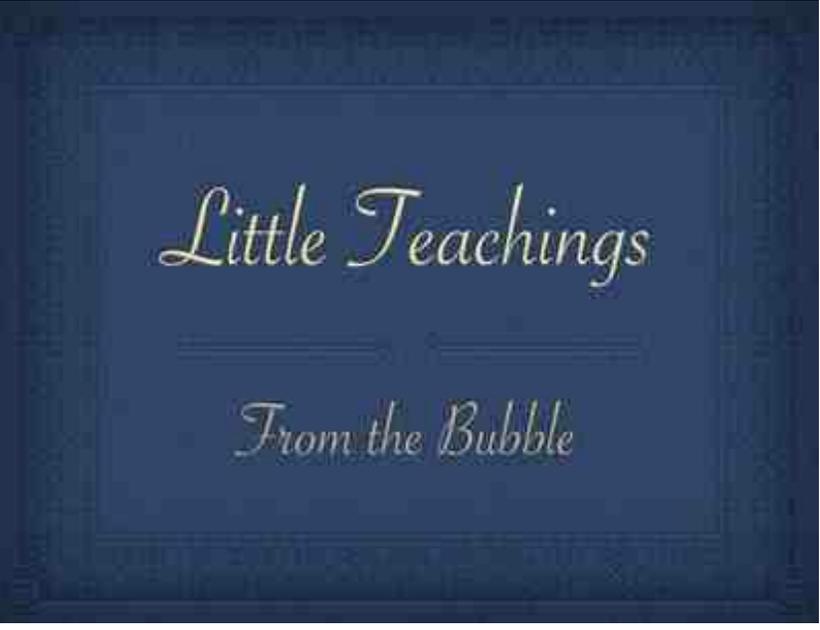
P.S. The photo at the top is of a wonderful Nativity sculpture on my college campus--don't you love how peaceful Our Lady looks lying next to her son, and what a protector Joseph is?

This contribution is available at <http://captivetheheart.blogspot.com/2012/12/advent-reflections-part-1-chastity-and.html>

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Purgatory is... [at Little Catholic Bubble]



Little Teachings

From the Bubble

- Purgatory is *a doctrine of our Faith.*

[From the Catechism of the Catholic Church](#)

: "All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven. The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned." (1030-1031)

There are only two ultimate destinations for a human being: Heaven or hell.

[Purgatory is the "wash-room" of Heaven.](#)

The Bible, in Revelation 21:27, says,

["Nothing unclean shall enter Heaven"](#)

-- and God was not joking. Are you utterly pure? Perfect? Sinless? Completely without fault or blemish? I'm not either. To get from here to there requires an actual change from imperfect to perfect. The purification of Purgatory is that transitional bridge. If you die in the friendship of God, and unless you are the rare soul perfected in love before that moment of death (think of a Mother Teresa or a newly baptized infant), you

are

going to be cleansed before you enter Heaven. You simply cannot enter otherwise.

If I repent of a sin, I not only ask forgiveness, but I make recompense. We instinctively form our own children this way, as we teach them to make amends when they have committed a wrong. Not only do we require a child to make his apology ("I'm sorry I recklessly ran over your flowerbed, Mrs. Jones"), we require that he make things right as well ("I will purchase new flowers and replant them for you"). Purgatory is the final "making things right" -- both in our own souls and in the Mystical Body of Christ, i.e., the Church, which is harmed by its members' sin.

That "making things right" after we are forgiven is called the temporal punishment for sin, and it can and should happen while a person is still on this earth. However, if temporal punishment (or "expiation") for our forgiven sins has not occurred fully by the time of death,

[the expiation is still logically required after death](#)

C.S. Lewis, a non-Catholic Christian, understood

[the mercy of Purgatory](#)

, and how the soul cries out for it:

Our souls demand Purgatory, don't they? Would it not break the heart if God said to us, 'It is true, my son, that your breath smells and your rags drip with mud and slime, but we are charitable here and no one will upbraid you with these things, nor draw away from you. Enter into the joy'? Should we not reply, 'With submission, sir, and if there is no objection, I'd rather be cleaned first.' 'It may hurt, you know' -- 'Even so, sir.' ([Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer](#))

Amen, and thank God for the mercy of Purgatory.

Benevolent Grandma was a baptized Christian who stayed close to Jesus and lived a good life of caring and love, but she was a mild gossip. Serial Killer was a baptized Christian who lived a life of evil, destroying people and goodness everywhere he went, but he sincerely repented on his deathbed.

Both souls are Heaven-bound, but the soul-cleansing required of Mr. Killer is going to be a lot more severe, prolonged, and painful than the mild purification required of Grandma.

And that's as it should be. That is how justice works.

We are not all the same. We are all individuals who come from different circumstances and who make different choices. God alone can read our hearts, and His justice for each of His children is very personal, not a rubber stamp.

As Jesus said, "You will not get out until you have paid the last penny." For some of us, the

payment exacted will take longer, as the sum required to "make it right" is larger.

The clearest manifestation (and my favorite) is 1 Corinthians 3.

We read that by our life choices and works, we build on the foundation that is Jesus Christ:

If anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, the work of each will come to light, for the Day will disclose it. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire (itself) will test the quality of each one's work.

"The Day" refers to the Day of Judgement. The first Day of Judgement for most of us will be the Particular Judgement, the day of our death, when we face God. So, keep in mind that all that follows happens

after

a person's death. There are three possibilities for a soul:

First possibility: If the work stands that someone built upon the foundation, that person will receive a wage.

This is the soul who goes directly to Heaven.

Second possibility: *But if someone's work is burned up, that one will suffer loss; the person will be saved, but only as through fire.*

This is the soul who goes to Purgatory, who is cleansed by the fire of God's love before entering Heaven.

Third possibility: Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for the temple of God, which you are, is holy. This is the soul who goes to hell.

Glance back at the second one: "suffering" "loss" "saved, but only as through fire". We call that Purgatory.

The doctrine of purgatory, or the final purification, has been part of the true faith since before the time of Christ. The Jews already believed it before the coming of the Messiah, as revealed in the Old Testament (2 Macc. 12:41–45) as well as in other pre-Christian Jewish works, such as one which records that Adam will be in mourning "until the day of dispensing punishment in the last years, when I will turn his sorrow into joy" (The Life of Adam and Eve 46–7). Orthodox Jews to this day believe in the final purification, and for

eleven months after the death of a loved one, they pray a prayer called the Mourner's Kaddish for their loved one's purification.

Jews, Catholics, and the Eastern Orthodox have always historically proclaimed the reality of the final purification. It was not until the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century that anyone denied this doctrine. ([Catholic Answers](#))

The witness of the Roman Catacombs (products of the early, pre-Nicene, persecuted Church) attests to a belief in Purgatory by their etchings and inscriptions. In fact,

so overwhelming is the witness of the early Christian monuments in favour of prayer for the dead that no historian any longer denies that the practice and the belief which the practice implies were universal in the primitive Church. There was no break of continuity in this respect between Judaism and Christianity. ([New Advent](#))

Every cleansing of an open wound is painful. Every turning toward the purifying fire of God's love is an uncomfortable shock to the system, and every honest move to perfection (even in this life) is accompanied by a suffering.

Facing the judgement of our Father will not be a clean, comfortable adjustment. The man who looks through a dark veil his whole life and is then, in an instant, exposed full-on to the dazzling white light of the Son can expect to cry out in some initial pain.

But the pain of Purgatory is most rightly described, I believe, as the pain of

loss

. We are made for union with God, and we are not complete and satisfied until that union is achieved. When the soul knows without doubt that she is at long last on her way to be united with her Beloved, but also knows that she cannot yet get to Him,

and when she knows that it was her own actions and choices that are keeping her from that final, perfect and eternal union with her Beloved

, she experiences a great and melancholic longing, an aching sense of loss.

There is a reason that God speaks to His people through marital imagery: The Bride and the Bridegroom, The Wedding Feast, The Consummation, the final achievement of perfect, eternal union with the Beloved. Earthly marriage and physical consummation is the closest we can get to another human being on earth, but it is a pale reflection of true Marital Union with God. The knowledge that one could have rushed to His embrace sooner, but now must wait and long and pine, is a nearly unbearable suffering for the soul in Purgatory, as it would be (on a much lesser scale) for any bride who cannot yet, through her own fault, reach her lover.

Although the suffering in Purgatory is intense, the joy of Purgatory great, even greater than any

earthly joy. After all, total, ecstatic union with God is palpable now, as the beatific vision is nearing one's view. No jubilation on earth could ever compare to the clear knowledge that Pure Love is drawing the lovesick soul to Himself for completion.

[Fr. Alvin Kimel summarizes Peter Kreeft](#)

:

Purgatory is joyful, not gloomy. Whatever pain may attend the process of purification, it does not diminish the profound joy and triumph of Purgatory. The holy souls have passed through death into life and know that their ultimate destiny is now secure. The sufferings of Purgatory are more desirable than the most ecstatic pleasures on earth.

- After Jesus' Second Coming and the Final Judgement, Purgatory **will cease to be**.

When Jesus returns in glory and the end of the world comes, and when the Final Judgement separates the sheep from the goats for all eternity, and when the new heaven and new earth are established in perfection, there will be no more purification of souls necessary. Purgatory will cease to be, and all souls will be fixed in their final states forever.

“God is the Last Thing of the creature. Gained, He is its paradise; lost, He is its hell; as demanding, He is its judgment; as cleansing, He is its purgatory”

--Hans Urs von Balthasar

Related post:

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