

new  
evangelists  
monthly

*February*  
**2013**

# New Evangelists Monthly #2

February 2013

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# New Evangelists Monthly - February 2013

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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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# How My Kids Didn't Ruin Mass [at Carrots for Michaelmas]



**Confession:** my kids are not typically little angels at Mass. ‘Typical’ Mass behavior being our 3-year-old banging the kneeler open and closed and then dropping it on his own foot. *Commence siren-like wailing.* Or the kids tussling over who gets to hold the Baby Jesus finger puppet. And, to no one’s surprise, the preschooler throwing the St. Joseph finger puppet at his baby sister’s head doesn’t solve the dilemma. The newborn is startled out of a deep slumber by the bells heralding the Consecration and starts screaming. The toddler yelling (and I mean *yelling*) “Jesus! Jesus COME OUT!” as the Consecration approaches and he knows that “Jesus is coming.” And, yes, I said “typical” behavior. Don’t even get me started on the extraordinarily humiliating days.

**Have you been there? When you just want to crawl into the floor and die of shame because surely your kids are ruining Mass for everyone?** Your cheeks are burning? You consider a cross-country move?

You see, [I grew up Protestant](#) in a tradition in which young children do not attend “the service” until they can sit quietly with their families. It’s quiet, it’s composed, and you can actually hear the words of the sermon. I am still getting used to “the hum” that graces the background of every Mass: squirming toddlers, whispering preschoolers, fussing babies. Children are not banished to the nursery. Our Parish doesn’t even have a cry room. You see, children are not just tolerated, they are welcome. And what my parish has shown me, is that my children are *wanted*.

So that moment when I thought I would surely die because my 3-year-old made a mad dash for the

altar when I was about to receive the Blessed Sacrament and I had to make an awkward wrangling motion to grab hold of his Houdini body in between the “Amen” and the moment the Host touched my tongue...well, the priest’s eyes didn’t narrow. He didn’t give me a stern look that said, “I hope the grace of Our Lord helps you recover from being *the worst mother ever.*” Nope. His eyes sparkled. He smiled. And, dear me, was that a quiet chuckle?

**It’s the moments when I think my kids are the ultimate distraction that my parish family shows me that they are gifts of God’s grace.** When the baby is fussy and the toddler is grumpy and loud and I think that surely the homily is going to be a desperate plea for our family to high tail it out of the church so everyone else can enjoy Mass in peace, the priest says, “*Look around you. Look at all the babies and children in Mass today. As I’ve been hearing the sounds of infants and children this morning, it reminds me of the amazing gift of new life. What a blessing. I am so glad they are all here.*” Gift? Blessing? My kids could have passed themselves off as small dragons this morning, and you heard their whispers and shrieks as echoes of God’s grace?

Or when the baby is insistent on nursing, even though I nursed her *right* before Mass and the only way to avoid a screaming fit is to nurse right there in the pew. I can feel my cheeks get warm and pink. *Is my scarf covering us up? Am I flashing anyone? Is this ok? Is everyone looking at us? That lady in the back certainly is. Is she glaring at us?* After Mass, *there she is again. She’s probably coming to tell me off...* But to my surprise she touched my shoulder and said, “*I just wanted to tell you what a good job you did nursing that baby. You are such a good mom. It was so special to see a mother nursing in Mass. I remember having small kids in Mass and how hard it is. Your kids are always excellent.*” Well...that last part was surely a kind-hearted fib, but could our family have blessed her by being there? By not sending our kids to the nursery? By trying to make it through Mass without causing a fire or anyone needing stitches? By choosing to nurse my baby, did that image of love between a mother and child actually make Mass *more* meaningful to her?

**Because I think that’s part of what it means to be pro-life. To see children *always* as gifts of grace, not inconveniences. As always welcome as part of God’s family, not as distractions to be avoided. To encourage and love them and show them that they are wanted. That we want them there because Jesus wants them there.**

There’s one sweet couple and their adult daughter who have adopted our family during Mass. They make it a point to always sit near us. The mother is a bonafide baby whisperer and when Lucy gets fussy she will say in my ear, “*You pass me that baby!*” and she will snuggle a shockingly calm Baby Lucy sometimes for the entirety of Mass. Benjamin adores their daughter and on one occasion, we weren’t sitting close enough to “Miss Kerri” for his satisfaction. So he snuck out of our pew, tip-toed across the aisle, and plopped down right on her lap. As I prepared to stand up, bring him back, and reprimand him for leaving his spot, this dear soul gave me a look that said, “*Don’t you dare! He’s FINE.*” He sat like an angel with them for the rest of Mass. He even knelt quietly during the whole Consecration (usually our wrestling-match time). And as I knelt and peeked at him out of the corner of my eye, I started to feel tears roll down my cheeks. Because he looked so wanted, beloved, and cherished. **Because this family’s love for my**

**children communicates a vital message: Jesus loves them. Jesus wants them. They are not inconveniences and distractions. They are blessed outpourings of God's grace.**

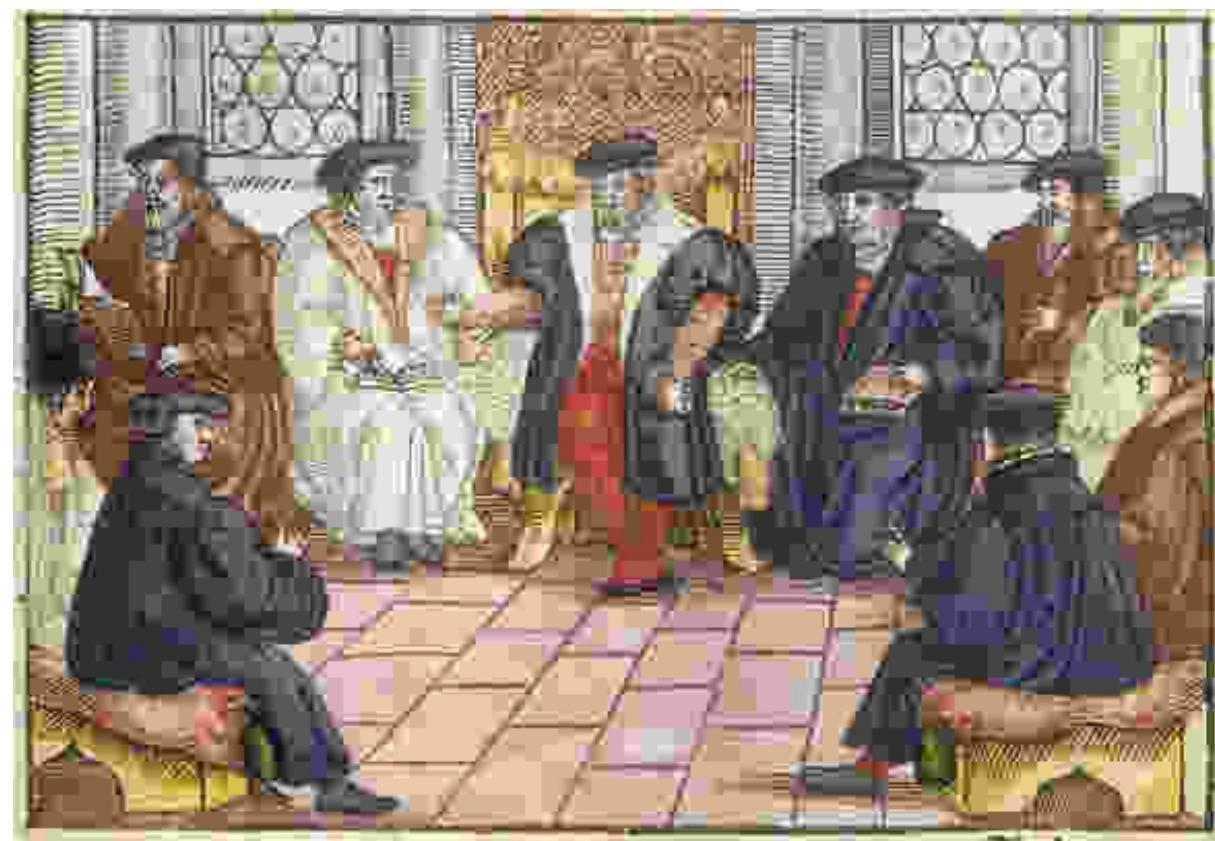
I pray that during Mass, and every day, I can remember to see my children the way Jesus sees them. The way my parish sees them. I am so thankful for the love my children receive, even at their worst. And thankful for the reminder that Jesus wants all of us, even at our worst, to come and love and be loved.

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# Outside the Canon and Judged Apocryphal [at Forget The Roads]



Reformers at Marburg

This is Part 7 of my series on the canon of Scripture. In order to follow this mystery story, [you need to begin here](#).

Protestants have propagated many myths concerning the canon – our protagonist has just shattered Major Myth #1: “The Catholic Church ADDED 7 books to the Bible at the Council of Trent.” As our hero has discovered, John Wycliffe included the Apocrypha (with even more books than in the Catholic Bible) in his English translation of Holy Scripture 150 years BEFORE the Council of Trent supposedly added the books to the Catholic Bible. Was this a one-off? Hardly – Martin Luther insisted on including the Apocrypha in his Bible translation, although he placed those books in a special section at the end of the Old Testament, just as he placed Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation in a special section at the end of the New Testament!

ALL the early Protestant Bibles included the Apocrypha – pretty strange if those books were added to the Bible by the Catholic Church in 1546 as many Protestants claim.

Thus far, our hero has attempted to determine why the books of the Apocrypha were

**included in a section behind the Old Testament in all the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Protestant English Bibles, and why some of those same Bibles shunted Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation to a section behind the New Testament. His quest has led him to Martin Luther, who initiated these practices, and started a trend that others continued and expanded upon....**

Delving deeper, you determine that Wycliffe apparently translated the Scriptures into English from the Vulgate version of the Bible. Luther, on the other hand, translated the Old Testament into German from the Soncino Hebrew Bible used by the Jews of his day – the Apocryphal books were not in that version, and they had to be translated from the Septuagint (a Greek manuscript) and the Vulgate (a Latin translation). *But why did Luther see fit to drag the Apocryphal books into his Bible at all??*

The common explanation of the presence of the Apocrypha in Protestant Bibles (when you can find mention made of this at all!) seems to be that those books were there for “historical reasons,” to “provide historical background....” In the Geneva Bible you find the statement that the Apocrypha is included “as books proceeding from godly men” which “were received to be read for the advancement and furtherance of the knowledge of the history and for the instruction of godly manners, etc.” But you can’t find that “historical background” reasoning in other versions, for example, in Luther’s German Bible which predates the Geneva. *Why exactly would Martin Luther go out of his way to include the Apocrypha in his German Old Testament when those books weren’t present in the Hebrew text from which he translated the canonical books?* He said that he included the Apocrypha because it was “useful and good to be read.” Okay, that could be said about a lot of books... *but why include them between the covers of the Holy Bible???*

You find that various 16<sup>th</sup>- and 17<sup>th</sup>-century Bibles give differing reasons for the presence of the Apocrypha between their covers:

The Apocrypha was included in the **Zurich Bible** “so that no one may complain of lacking anything, and each may find what is to his taste” (which sounds to you like the smorgasbord approach to Bible publishing!)

The 1551 French **de Tournes** edition of the Scriptures puts the Apocrypha in a separate section, à la Luther. It goes on to inform the reader that these books are rejected by the Jews. No matter, the editor assures us: “Wherefore, reader, seeing that from all flowers the fly may draw liquor to make honey, without regarding where it is planted, whether in the field or in the garden, so from all books thou shalt be able to draw matter suitable to thy salvation without being guided by the Jews. .... Since, therefore, all have the same source and wholesome root, in spite of any pruning the

Jews may have made on them, do not fail to read them and to take from them doctrine and edification.”

**Becke’s Bible** seems to indicate that the Apocryphal books are inferior to canonical books simply because they were written in the wrong language: “And although these books be not found in the Hebrew nor in the Chaldean and for that do not take of so great authority as be the other books of

the Holy Bible, yet have the holy fathers always so esteemed them and worthily they call them ... books of the church, or books mete to be read among the whole congregation namely for that they do agree with the other books of the Holy Bible and contain most godly examples and precepts of the fear and love of God and our neighbor. Wherefore they are diligently to be read, and the learning in them earnestly to be followed that by our good example of living our Heavenly Father throughout all nations may be praised and glorified....”

**Coverdale**, in his preface to the Apocrypha, states that in his opinion the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men do not belong in the Bible; “Nevertheless, both because of those that be weak and scrupulous, and for their sakes also that love such sweet songs of thanksgiving, I have not left them out, to the intent that the one should have no cause to complain, and that the other also might have the more occasion to give thanks unto God in adversity, as the three children did in the fire.”

**The 1611 KJV** included the Apocrypha with no comment at all concerning why it was there.

The fifth edition of the **Great Bible** calls the books, not Apocrypha, but merely “the fourth part of the Bible.”

Apparently the memo that the Apocrypha was being included to provide “historical background” hadn’t reached everyone yet!

So Luther was in essence a “trendsetter” – he had two “special” sections in his German translation, one in the Old Testament (for the 7 books you know are Apocrypha) and one in the New (for the 4 books you know and love as Holy Scripture!). Now you understand the references concerning “Luther’s arrangement of the New Testament canon” that you read in connection with the old English Bibles – some of the English were following Martin Luther’s lead in shunting Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation to the back of the Bible. Luther’s example started the ball rolling. In fact, the reference books tell you that low German Bibles around the year 1600 actually went so far as to label Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation “apocryphal” or even “noncanonical,” “that is, books which are not held equal to other holy Scripture.” The Swedish Gustavus Adolphus Bible of 1618 does the same, calling those books “Apocr(yphal) N.T.” The Canon of the New Testament tells you that this “threefold division of the New Testament: ‘Gospels and Acts’, ‘Epistles and Holy Apostles’, and ‘Apocryphal New Testament,’ was “an arrangement that persisted for nearly a century in half a dozen or more printings.”

*That’s horrible! How could such a thing be allowed to happen?* Four books of inspired Scripture were presented to a generation of Bible-readers as “apocryphal,” all because Luther felt that they were somehow substandard. *Who was he to sit in judgment of Holy Scripture, anyway?*

Dismayed, you read on concerning the other Reformers to see if their beliefs on the NT canon were any more orthodox than Luther’s! You find that:

**John Calvin** called 1 John “THE Epistle of John,” and did not write commentary on the other two

epistles of John the Apostle.

**Ulrich Zwingli** declared concerning Revelation: “With the Apocalypse we have no concern, for it is not a Biblical book” after it was used in a debate against him to support the invocation of angels. (This sounds a great deal like Luther and his rejection of 2 Maccabees!)

Luther’s colleague from Wittenburg, **Andreas Karlstadt**, thought that SEVEN New Testament books (Hebrews, James, II Peter, II John, III John, Jude and Revelation) were questionable, adding that there was really very little reason to include Revelation in the canon. He declared both the Epistle to the Laodiceans and the ending of the Gospel of Mark (Mk 16:9-20) to be apocryphal. He also divided the Apocryphal books of the Old Testament into two categories, declaring Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Judith, Tobit, and I and II Maccabees to be “holy writings,” while 1 and 2 Esdras, Baruch, Prayer of Manasseh, and the additions to Daniel were “obviously apocryphal.”

“The second Martin,” **Martin Chemnitz**, also declared the books of Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, Jude and Revelation to be disputed, insisting that they be used “for edification,” but that “no dogma ought to be drawn out of these books which does not have reliable and clear foundations in other canonical books.”

**Johannes Brenz** calls the seven books “apocryphal,” asking by what right they should be put on the same level as the canonical Scriptures. He considered them, however, “valuable for reading.”

**Mathias Haffenreffer**, in speaking of the seven disputed New Testament books, said, “These apocryphal books, although they do not have canonical authority in judging of doctrine, yet because they make for instruction and edification, contain many things and can be read privately and publicly recited in the church with usefulness and profit.”

**Andreas Osiander** insisted that the seven books “do not have in themselves value for establishing doctrine.”

**Johannes Oecolampadius** had no problem with Hebrews, but stated that “we do not compare the Apocalypse, the Epistles of James and Jude, and 2 Peter and 2 and 3 John with the rest.”

**Aegidius Hunnius** remarked that the seven disputed NT books “are outside the Canon and are judged apocryphal.”

**Heinrich Bullinger** was the first major Reformer to write a commentary on the book of Revelation as other Reformers considered the book to be either substandard or outright unbiblical. (Calvin’s position on Revelation is unclear – he may simply have died before he could write any commentary on it, or he may have concurred with other Reformers and considered it apocryphal.)

In the years following the Reformation, various individuals questioned the presence of the Song of Solomon, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Luke, and Acts in their Bibles....

And you note that several German Bible editions of the 16th century included the “Epistle to the Laodiceans” in their New Testament, as did editions of Wycliffe’s translation, as well as Czech Bibles....

You cradle your aching head in your hands. You don’t even know who some of those guys were, but you get the main idea: *the Reformers had no more of a clue concerning what was Scripture (and what wasn’t) than Wycliffe and Luther did.* So many of them treated Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude and Revelation as if they were Apocrypha – placing them in a “special” section, with no “canonical authority in judging of doctrine” but “valuable for reading,” just like Luther’s “useful and good to be read.” *How did they justify this unholy nonsense?*

Luther used his “true touchstone,” his system of which books “preached Christ” to determine which New Testament books to segregate, a rather subjective system that seems pretty dangerous to you. It seems obvious that Luther decided his doctrine FIRST based on his understanding of “the just shall live by faith,” then looked for it in the books of the New Testament. Whenever he couldn’t find this doctrine explained as clearly as he would have liked in certain books, he declared them deficient, perhaps not even really Scripture. In fact, the Hastings Dictionary of the Bible, in discussing Luther’s system, says as much:

Thus the doctrine of justification by faith is not accepted because it is found in the Bible; but the Bible is accepted because it contains this doctrine.

You shake your head. *This is backwards – we don’t form our theology first and then pick and choose among the books of Scripture! That makes US the final arbiter of truth, doesn’t it?* Let’s say you started pondering New Testament truths such as Jesus’ statement “Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you,” and then began noticing Old Testament passages which seemed to preach a different message. If you went into your church on Sunday and announced to the pastor that you had decided, based on your reading of the Gospels, that God is love and therefore the Old Testament is obviously not really Scripture – after all, it presents God as telling Israel to wipe the Canaanites off the face of the earth! Your pastor would sit you down and have “a little talk” with you! *We do not sit in judgment of the Scriptures, he would insist – we allow Scripture to teach us!* If sections of Scripture seem to be in conflict with each other, there are whole reference books devoted to harmonizing them! *Once we know that a book is Holy Scripture, we must acknowledge that any discrepancies or “errors” in that book can be reconciled with what we find in the rest of Scripture.* That is apparently what Protestants who lived after the Reformation eventually did; ignoring Luther’s qualms, they reconciled James’ insistence that “by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” with Paul’s “we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law,” *because both of these books are Holy Scripture!!!*

*Why did the Reformers feel the need to fiddle with Scripture???*

The question remains, did the other Reformers follow Luther’s “true touchstone,” his odd justification for cutting and pasting books of the Bible into his own little arrangement using the criterion of how well a given book “preached Christ,” or did they have their own justifications for

cobbling together their custom-made canons?

*Do you really want to know?*

[For Part Eight, please click here](#)

## **On the memorial of St. Anthony of Egypt**

***Deo omnis gloria!***

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This contribution is available at <http://forgettheroads.com/2013/01/17/outside-the-canon-and-judged-apocryphal/%20>

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# Till We Have Facebooks [at The Back of the World]

*“As for all I can tell, the only difference is that what many see we call a real thing, and what only one sees we call a dream.”*

— [C.S. Lewis, Till We Have Faces](#)

This week, America has been introduced to the term “Catfishing”: that is, when someone makes a fake online profile in order to seduce another person. It’s apparently become a very widespread problem. We all suddenly took notice of it when the news broke on Wednesday that Manti Te’o, a star football player for Notre Dame, is apparently the victim of a very elaborate “catfishing” scheme. It seems that Manti fell in love with a girl who never existed. For reasons that are still unclear, someone created a “woman” named “Lennay Kekua”, made “her” a Facebook and a Twitter, and “borrowed” the face of an attractive acquaintance to seduce Manti into an online relationship. It seems that Manti considered “Lennay” his girlfriend, only learning that she never existed a few weeks ago.

And it probably would have stayed a private heartbreak for Manti... except that he told the entire nation about his phantom sweetheart. He passed on to many a journalist what he himself seems to have believed about her: that she died of cancer in September. Her “tragic death” seems to have provided him the motivation he needed to lead his team to this year’s national championship game. Now it seems that the phrase “fake dead girlfriend” is destined to be a part of American parlance, and Manti’s friends and teammates are left to wonder whether their wildly successful season was pushed along by a lie.

How does this sort of thing happen? How do you “fall in love” with a woman you’ve never even met?

At first glance, “catfishing” seems like a particularly post-modern phenomenon... the internet age has definitely exaggerated the Gnostic tendencies that American culture inherited from the Puritans. Everything that happens in cyberspace has been exalted above what happens in the physical world: ask any teenager, and he’ll tell you that a girl isn’t really your girlfriend, no matter how many dates you’ve been on, until it’s “facebook official”—i.e., you’ve both updated your relationship statuses on the relevant social media sites. And it would be a mistake to think that this is limited to the romantic arena: you can have thousands of “friends” social media sites, you can start a successful online business, you can take care of all your family’s grocery shopping on a website, you can even attend an “e-church,” all from the comfort of your living room. We haven’t completely eliminated your need to inhabit physical space and time, but goshdarnit, we’re close, and as good Manichean-Americans that absolutely thrills us.

Through that lens, Manti’s heartbreak couldn’t have happened in any previous era. But I wonder if “catfishing” isn’t just the latest manifestation of a deeply human problem. Maybe we all know we

need true love, but we can't seem to look at it face-to-face...

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*"I wonder if the gods know what it feels like to be a man."*  
— [C.S. Lewis, \*Till We Have Faces\*](#)

In his very last novel, *Till We Have Faces*, C.S. Lewis retells the myth of Cupid and Psyche. Lewis said after the novel's publication that the myth had always haunted him, and that he had been trying to write the novel for over 35 years...

The story goes that Psyche is the most beautiful woman in the world. Her great beauty arouses the jealousy of both her sisters and Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Aphrodite orders that Psyche be presented as a human sacrifice to her son, Cupid. Instead of killing Psyche, Cupid takes her as his wife. But they have an unusual marriage: Psyche is forbidden from seeing Cupid's face. He comes to her only at night, his image hidden by the darkness. Psyche's sister tells her that Cupid is probably not even a god, that he must be some sort of monster, otherwise he would not hide his face. When Psyche has the audacity to try and see her husband's face, she is banished forever from the castle in which she has lived with him.

I think that when we're honest with ourselves, we admit that we're sometimes terribly afraid that God might be all too much like Cupid. We're scared that He won't let us see Him because *He's hiding some awful truth from us...* that maybe His face isn't so beautiful when beheld in the light. That maybe love is only a hoax, and the people in our lives only shadows.

And so, like Eve our mother and Psyche our sister, we feel as though we've been cast out forever. And we can all identify with Manti Te'o a little more than we care to admit, even as the media casts him out into the darkness of infamy. We may not seek solace in online dating, we may not all be so easily duped, but we all have a terrible longing to go home, to be in the presence of someone who truly loves us...

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*"Till that word can be dug out of us, why should they hear the babble that we think we mean?  
How can they meet us face to face till we have faces?"*  
— [C.S. Lewis, \*Till We Have Faces\*](#)

The book of Genesis tells us that after Adam and Eve sinned, they hid themselves from God. They were ashamed to be seen naked. The darkness of sin had robbed them of "real life"—they could no longer be face-to-face with their Lord. Mankind was cast out of the Garden of fellowship with God, and forced to speak with Him from afar.

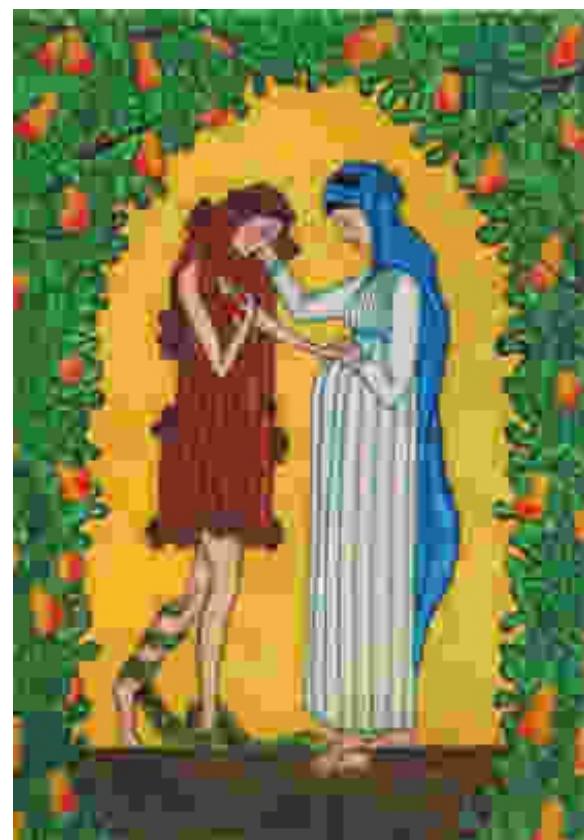
Throughout most of the rest of human history, we had a long-distance relationship with God. As He told Moses, no man could see His face and live. The Prophets told us over and over again that

the Almighty loved us... but it's hard to feel loved when you are living in the darkness of your own sin, unable to catch even a glimpse of your soul's true love.

But then, in these last days, the Divinity came down to us—and we beheld the “image of the invisible God.” His name was called Immanuel, “God with us.” God’s love could not be hidden by darkness forever, and so Love Himself came in the flesh, born of a beautiful Woman.

And it's of this truth that we must remind ourselves in the internet age. As Catholics do not worship Cupid: we are servants of the Eucharistic Lord, the True Light. As the world hides online in fear, we come out of the shadows and into the reality of His love. The gnostic lies of the world wide web are repudiated once and for all by the Word made flesh.

In the age of social networking, we need the truth the Incarnation. In the days of “catfishing”, we must cling to the Real Presence. When all the rest of the world is chasing after a “Lennay Kekua”, we can sit at the feet of our true Mother, whose courage undid Eve’s fear, making it so that, once again, we can see and touch the face of God.

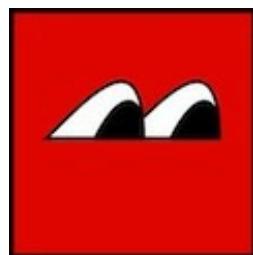


“Mary Consoles Eve” by Sr. Grace Remington, OCSO

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This contribution is available at <http://backoftheworld.com/2013/01/19/till-we-have-facebook/>  
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# You are being watched! [at JOY Alive in our hearts]



In your neighborhood, at work, school and on the soccer field; at the movies, at the mall and at church, curious eyes are on you. Why you? Because everyone around you craves something more significant than the joyless life they are enduring.

Deceived by the world, they try to conjure up a meaningful existence on their own merit. They try to find it in a book, a seminar, food, shopping, drugs and every new enticement that comes their way. They are looking for love in all the wrong places.

Most of them will never read the Bible, for the non-Christian world reads Christians, not the Bible. They are looking for the Source of your joy. Christ is the answer, but you are the messenger.

As one of his followers, the Lord commands you to shine his abundant life from within you wherever you go. He invites you to let people know where you stand and what you believe in. He makes you a big target, a lamp in the darkness of their disbelief, a catalyst for a change of heart.

Blessed Teresa of Calcutta writes that, “Joy is a net of love by which you can catch souls.” The joy and love of the Lord draws people to you. So, in evangelizing, first comes the patient witness of who you are in him.

You see, it does no good just to walk up to somebody and start talking about Christ. They must approach you. They have to ask, “Who are you? What is it about you that is so different?” Then they may ask that central question. “Who is Christ?”

You have a unique appeal to certain people the Holy Spirit has prepared to observe you, ask you questions and then listen to your story. They are ready to hear why you are different and how you got that way. They want to know where your joy comes from and how they can bring some of that joy into their lives.

And even though many people will not like your answer and some will do whatever it takes to put you down, it's still important that you keep the light burning where those who need it can find it.

But, you argue, “Do people really see Jesus in me?” You can trust that if you have given your heart over to the Lord and if you are living the life of Christ to the best of your ability, people will see Jesus in you. Just as the Holy Spirit prepares just the right listeners for your message, so does he prepare your heart and give you just the right words at the right time. You can count on him!

As the Lord continues to draw you deeper into himself he's going to provide more and more opportunities for you to give witness and testimony to him, in big ways, in public ways and in private ways. Be ready to answer who you are in Christ and why that makes you different. Shine on!

(© 2013 Nancy H C Ward)

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# 7 Myths Singles Must Resist: Myth #3 Something Is Wrong With Me [at The Veil of Chastity]

My posts over the last several weeks addressed Myths that singles must resist:

1. [Setting the Stage](#)
2. [Myth #1: Others are getting away with sin/sex is consequence free](#)
3. [Myth #2 Part 1: God has forgotten about me and Myth #2 Part 2: A Perspective on Suffering](#)

Today's topic is **Myth #3: Something Is Wrong With Me**

## Blessed Repeated Rejection

This myth will be the most rewarding one for me to bust because it is the myth that tormented me the most as a single girl. Because I was single for so long, I naturally came to believe that something was wrong with me. I mean, what was with all the repeated rejection? I could only find one common denominator in all those failed relationships: me.

I will share with you a detail about my life to prove to you that I understand rejection. I wrote about this in my book and provided the substantiating details, but I will give you the overarching trend that I experienced in my dating life. Are you ready? Every. Single. Guy. that I dated went on to marry the very next girl he dated after me. Oh, talk about a Divine sense of humor! Each guy, no matter their age or the length of our relationship, was ready to marry but just not 'inspired' to marry me. Talk about an ego buster!

“...Be still in the presence of the LORD, and wait patiently for him to act....” Psalm 37:7

I also felt very confused by what I was observing all around me. I knew that I was not perfect but I wondered why everyone else (and their imperfect and often unchaste selves) seemed to get married. Why not me? What was wrong with me?

Well, I now have the benefit of hindsight and I am here to tell you that there was nothing wrong with me. I also want to reassure you that there is nothing wrong with you.



Imperfect

All that rejection led me to imagine that every other girl was prettier, thinner, more interesting, more athletic, more fun, more ‘you name it’ than me. This belief caused me to doubt myself. These thoughts and observations led me to believe that in order to be loved and cherished, I could not have any glaring faults. So, I focused on the things that I felt I could control and change in the hopes of capturing and keeping my guy’s attention.

This feeling of inadequacy also made me feel afraid of marriage. I seriously could not imagine living with someone 24/7. I may have been able to hide my glaring faults before marriage but what would happen once my husband began to see the whole package?

In a way, this fear was actually a gift. It kept me from taking significant stupid risks and kept me committed to Chastity. Sex is supposed to be revealing and no, I was not ready to be revealed. Certainly not without the covenant of marriage.

Now, I am not saying that I did not have plenty of room for improvement. I had plenty of ‘issues’ that needed healing and some are still with me today. But those issues were not the ones that I focused on and tried to change. Thankfully, my good Lord sustained me through it all and covertly healed me in ways that I can only now see through hindsight.

## The Veil

As you may know, I have this concept called [The Veil](#) which is the idea that God places a protective veil over all of us and the purpose of the veil is to hide us from every possible suitor except the one that God intends for us to marry. I call the person God wants us to marry our ‘holy spouse.’ This protective veil makes us ‘unclear’, similar to looking through a Mylar plastic sheet, to those suitors who are not our holy spouse. These suitors may be attracted to us but they hesitate to pursue us fully because they can’t fully see us; we are hidden by the veil. This may feel like rejection but it is really God’s protection.

If you struggle with the same beliefs, rejection and fears I described above, I understand. However, once I met Gregg and realized that there was nothing wrong with me, I had to laugh at myself for thinking that there was. Well, yes there were things that were wrong with me but none of them kept Gregg from falling in love with me and marrying me. And it will be the same with your Holy Spouse too.

It is funny because I thought the problem was that these other guys, the ones that rejected me, could see me and did not like what they saw. However, now I believe that a more realistic explanation is that they could not see me. I was covered by the protective Veil. The rejection was good because it was a signal to me that those guys were not who God intended for me.

With Gregg, however, he does see me and he loves what he sees. I cannot explain this other than the idea that God lifted the protective veil. And, once God lifts the veil, our holy spouse sees us through the eyes of Love in all our beauty and virtue filled with grace and trust. Gregg loves me despite all my faults and the only explanation is a supernatural one. I believe the [Superabundance](#),

which results from our chaste marriage, significantly diminishes my faults and almost makes them invisible to Gregg, my Holy Spouse. I also believe that Superabundance somehow then magnifies, for him, my good traits.

**Side note:** The movie *When Harry Met Sally* has a scene in it where Sally finds out that her former boyfriend, Joe, is getting married to his “transitional person”, Kimberly. In the scene below, Sally says, “*Why didn’t he want to marry me?? What is wrong with me??*” She concludes, “*I’m difficult!*” Harry responds “*You’re challenging.*” Sally protests “*No, no, no, I’m too structured. I’m completely closed off!!*” Harry responds, “*But in a good way.*”

I am not a fan of Harry in this movie (and do not condone the pre-marital sex) but his response is a humorous example of how the one that loves you can see your faults in a positive light. Here is the clip from the movie:

## Sacramental Life

I cannot express enough the importance of living a Sacramental life for combating this myth. Without the grace from the Sacraments, the myth that there is something wrong with you will grow and fester like mold in a damp basement. The time when I was away from my Catholic faith and not living a Sacramental life was when this myth was strongest and most difficult to overcome.



May I recommend that you tell God you are feeling impatient so that He can send His angels to comfort you? Share with God your feelings of inadequacy. He wants to heal you and the main avenue for healing is His grace, His very own Divine Life, which is imparted through the Sacraments. Spend time with Him in Eucharistic Adoration and pour your heart out to Him. Know that the deep yearning you have can only be satisfied by God. Cling to Him.

Most of all, commit to Chastity and ask God to strengthen you with His grace. Unchaste behavior will magnify any feelings you have of self-hatred and will result in shame. Then, the enemy will taunt you and you will really believe something is wrong with you. Worst of all, it will separate you from our Holy God and lead you to despair.

The ‘one’ that God has for you will love you despite your faults. There is nothing wrong with you that will keep him from marrying you. Trust and wait. I know it is hard.

You are in my prayers. God love and bless you.

**\*\* Next week:** Book Review: ***Would You Date You?*** by Anthony Buono President of avemariasingles.com



# Would You Believe? [at La Dolce Vita ... the sweet life with three sons]

A few months ago I was assigned to write an article which involved interviewing Fr. John Osom, a Nigerian priest from the Missionary Society of St. Paul. It was a lengthy interview, part of which (believe it or not!) was conducted in Italian. Unfortunately, a week after I submitted the article he was reassigned out of our area and, as a result, they decided not to run the article (I was still paid).

But his story is too inspirational not to share ...

## Father John Osom

*Pro Christo Legatione Ergo Fungimur*

*(Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ)*

When Fr. John Osom talks about his journey to the priesthood, he often uses the expression *would you believe?*

before revealing an important event in his life. It's a question which delivers a dramatic pause to emphasize something wonderful and unbelievable. And in Father's story, there are many such moments.

As a little boy growing up in Akwa-Ibom (one of Nigeria's 36 states), Father John knew at a very early age exactly what he wanted to be when he grew up.

"I remember that the priest would invite the children to come and sit closer. I saw him raise something up – was it a white cookie? – and then say something which I didn't understand. I was only five or six years old, but I knew I wanted to be him," explains Father. "Would you believe that I would even play Mass? I would gather my friends, they would kneel, and I would hold up a piece of bread and make up some words. When I was finished everyone would say Amen!"

The idea of the priesthood stayed with him even as he began his primary education. In Nigeria, religion in the schools is heavily taught, along with discipline and moral instruction, so Father was in an environment which continued to foster the idea of the priesthood. In fact, at the age of 13 when he was faced with the decision of attending secondary school or enrolling in a junior seminary, he chose the junior seminary.

And Father did well. He studied, worked hard, and was even awarded a scholarship during his second year which would enable him to continue his studies at the university level. But when he passed his final examinations with honors and graduated at the top of his class, the scholarship complicated things because while the seminary was one pathway – one which he always intended to take – the university was also calling to his heart.

“The scholarship divided my attention,” he explains. “But then I heard about the Missionary Society of St. Paul, and would you believe that is what sealed my intention to enter the seminary?”

Unbelievably, this was a pathway Father hadn’t foreseen since he always thought he would attend the traditional seminary and, once ordained, return to serve in his diocese. But the Missionary Society of St. Paul (MSP), which was being established that very year in Nigeria, was different in that ordained priests would be following in the footsteps of St. Paul and be sent to all parts of the world to serve as “ambassadors for Christ” (2Cor 5:20).

The next eight years were difficult ones. The formation program was challenging, and to gain pastoral experience Father was sent all over Nigeria to work with different ethnic groups and with people who spoke different languages. Of the nine seminarians in Father’s class, over the years the numbers dwindled until, in the end, Father was the only one left. On June 22, 1985, Fr. John became the first member of the Society trained in the seminary and the first to be ordained.

Immediately following his ordination Fr. John returned to his diocese and began traveling from village to village to celebrate a Thanksgiving Mass. Not only is this an important tradition in Nigeria, but it is such a huge celebration that the Mass is held in the village square so everyone can attend. During this time Father assumed that he would now spend two years working in his diocese, but when he was in the middle of his 18-village tour something extraordinary happened.

“Would you believe that I was told that I was being sent to Rome to continue my studies?” he explains. “Everything happened so fast. I had to start celebrating two Thanksgiving Masses a day so I could finish them all, and I had almost no time to say goodbye to my family.”

Within the month, Father obtained a passport, boarded a plane, and for the first time in his life left his country.

When he landed in Rome he was hit with the harsh reality that all his classes would be taught in Italian (instead of English), and so he was given a train ticket to Puglia where he would take Italian language classes to help prepare him for school. Sitting in the train station, alone and away from home, Father felt overwhelmed; he didn’t know where to go and he didn’t know the language to be able to ask for help.

“Would you believe at that moment a man – a stranger – approached me and asked if I needed help?” he explains. “When I showed him my ticket he walked me to my train, bought me some snacks, and arranged for two young men on the train to help me at the next stop. At the next stop these two found a woman to help me during the next stage, and she arranged for a taxi once we got

to our destination. All these strangers helped me in my journey.”

In six weeks Father mastered conversational Italian, in six more weeks he could understand the lectures at school, and at the end of the school year he challenged himself to take his final oral examinations in Italian instead of English. When he eventually left Rome he had a doctorate in Moral Theology.

The jump from Nigeria to Rome was the beginning of Father’s life as an ambassador of Christ, a life of going where you are sent. It has meant living in different countries, learning new languages, and being “all things to all people” (1 Cor 9:22). Today, as a missionary priest Father has worked in Nigeria, Rome, England, the United States, and Grenada. While he is first and foremost a missionary priest, he has also served as a chaplain, a pastor, a lecturer, and a teacher. And in all the places Father has been sent, and in all the places he could go, would you believe that now, for a short while, he is here with us? What a wonderful blessing for our parish.

“Anywhere I go I am comfortable,” explains Father. “I am where I am supposed to be. A missionary has to be as happy as any person, and I find happiness being with the people.”

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This contribution is available at <http://www.ladolcevitathesweetlifewiththre reasons.blogspot.com/2013/01/would-you-believe.html>  
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# Diverging Paths and the Heart of Catholicism [at The Trenchcoat Introspective]



(via Like A Day Off)

On any journey, there comes a time when the road diverges, and we are given a choice as to which direction we will pursue. Sometimes this choice is simple. One of the paths is treacherous, or is clearly marked with “Do Not Enter” signs. Or one path is so vastly superior, filled with light and wildflowers and birdsong, that we should be foolish not to go that way.

But sometimes it is not so simple. Sometimes the path you want to take and the path you need to take are not the same. Sometimes it is difficult to even tell where either path will lead. Both are dangerous, or both are safe and beautiful, or both are mysterious and so obscured by the mists of limited human understanding that there is no clear direction.

On the Destined Path, that is, this road to the Ideal version of the Self — the version we were intended by God to be — this choice can be even more difficult. We can pray for guidance, but sometimes guidance will not come immediately. And in the end, we are the only ones who can decide which road to take, and the consequences of that choice are borne by not only ourselves but all the travelers we have touched along the way.

Sometimes I think my life would be easier if I were not Catholic, if I did not have a definite sense that my destiny lies down the road to deeper communion with the divine. I look at my peers who are not religious, and sometimes I get a little jealous. They get to do what they want, without a church system telling them that they are misbehaving.

And it’s hard to be Catholic. The government doesn’t like us. We stand against so much of what society claims is good and right that being a Catholic in the secular world is like being a cow at a barbecue. It smells good, but it’s built on a terrible truth we can never fully accept.

So why, in spite of the difficulties, am I a Catholic? And, indeed, why do I believe that I can never be anything else?

If you've read my blog, you know I take great pleasure in the mystical aspects of the Church. I believe in miracles. I talk to angels and saints the same way I talk to Joe-Bob on the street. I can't help but feel that God is very active in my life and in all of history, because something in me knows that all this must be true for my world to make sense. It's not just a beautiful idea. It is, and must be, reality.

There is a hole in each and every one of us that cries out for the Divine, and we all seek it in the way we best know how. We can't not. Even those who do not believe in the Divine are desperately finding a way to fill that hole with lesser things. Truth, which is God, is what our souls crave... for He created them and they desperately wish to return to Him.

It is in Catholicism that I have found that Truth. And so, no matter what else I want from my life, Catholicism comes first. Because God comes first. He must. He is the greatest lover in the universe, because He is Himself Love. I cannot forsake Him, for it is in his Church that my soul can be satisfied in the burning, heart-wrenching ecstasy of that perfect Love.

To be parted from the Church would be to lose my very self, for I can be nothing outside the Truth I have found there. It is not merely an important part of who I am. It is the very essence of my existence, the very fundamental spark of my intellect, and the primordial fire of my heart.

So how do I find my way on the Destined Path, when where I want to go is on one side and where I must go is on the other? I kneel at the fork in the road. I pray for courage, high-five my angel, and tighten the straps of my backpack before plunging headlong into the unknown mists of where I must travel. And I move on. And I move on. And I move on.

And every step — knowing I am walking in God's Grace — gets gradually easier, as I leave my wants behind on the road.

-E. G. Norton

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This contribution is available at <http://trenchcoatintrospective.wordpress.com/2013/01/29/diverging-paths-and-the-heart-of-catholicism/>  
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# Extraordinary Jaunts {Sundays in Seattle} [at Glimpse of Peace]



*Ryan, Joseph, Peter and Peter enjoy baked goodies.*

## In this [Year of Faith](#),

our family set a goal of participating in and growing more familiar with the 'Extraordinary Form' (Latin) Mass. This form of the Mass is not offered in our city, or county, or neighboring counties, but it is offered at North American Martyrs in Seattle, about a 90 mile drive from home.

## [FSSP](#)

priests pastor this technically 'homeless' parish, which worships at St. Alphonsus Church and at Holyrood Cemetery Chapel in Shoreline. This ancient ~extraordinary~ form of our Holy Mass almost disappeared in my lifetime after rapid changes implemented following the Second Vatican Council in the 1960's. I don't remember the 'old' Mass, nor was I taught about it in my Catholic upbringing; but I always fostered a special attraction to the enlarged, framed black and white photograph of my parents' Nuptial Mass, said in the 'old' form at Holy Rosary in West Seattle.

## The 'Ordinary Form' (Novus Ordo) Mass

which we know, love and attend daily at Sacred Heart follows basically the same 'order of events' but with significant differences, not the least of which is the language in which the Mass is said and the

## manner in which we receive our Lord in Holy Communion

. Following along in the little red booklets offered at the entrance, or fumbling along with the 1962 (heirloom) Missals we have inherited, we can mostly keep up with the Mass and prayerfully worship. The solemnity with which the Latin Mass is celebrated, the profound reverence and the decorum of the congregation are awe inspiring to say the least. The preaching is certainly not for the faint of heart!

### **Our special Sunday journeys to Seattle**

punctuate our ordinary calendar and offer us

*extraordinary*

ways to keep holy the Lord's Day.



*Peter holds his God-brother Samuel*

### **Meeting in the middle**

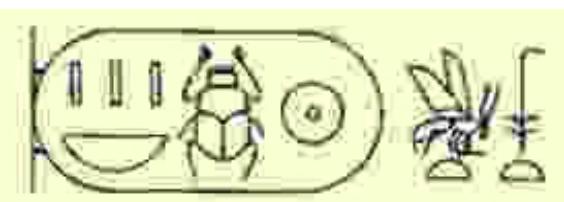
, each family driving about an hour, we celebrated a recent Sunday in Seattle with our dear friends from Tacoma. Aileen's family honored her wish to attend Latin Mass and we combined the main event with a tasty side-trip to a bakery a few blocks from the hospital in Ballard where Joseph was born almost 15 years ago. 'Ballard Blue,' the first house Tim and I owned happens to be just a few blocks from the Church, so we are familiar with the surrounds, though the area has certainly been further developed and more densely populated since we moved to Bellingham in 1998.

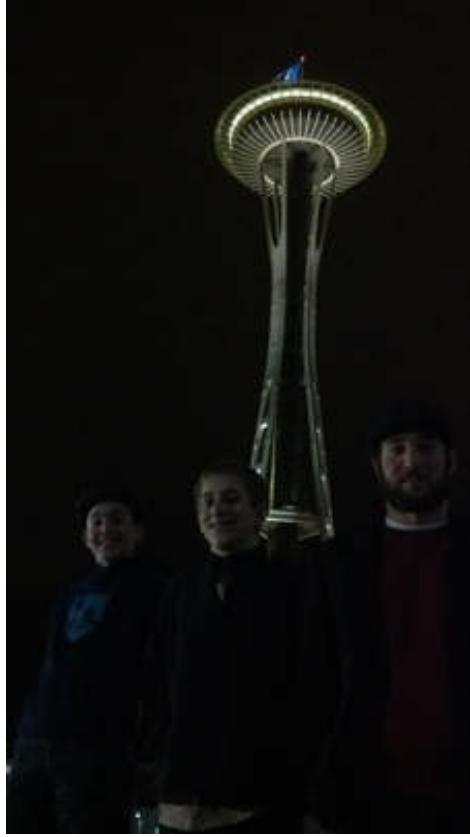


*Bridget, Samuel and Aileen, together on Sunday morn*

### **King Tut's exhibit at the Pacific Science Center**

, another Sunday side-trip during Zachary's Christmas break, offered a glimpse of history for about the price of a sarcophagus. Being linguistically inclined, Zachary especially enjoyed the inscriptions on the various artifacts. King Tut's name (or one of his names) included a sign meaning 'manifestation', which when being viewed by those of us celebrating the Epiphany (which means Manifestation) held special significance. King Tut, you may have been a king, but you were not God.





*Brothers in Seattle*

**Spending time at Great Grandma's house on a Sunday afternoon**

included being catered to and well loved. Grandma and I feigned interest in the Seahawks game, while the guys intently cheered for the home team, which on that day reigned victorious. The views from her windows overlooking the Puget Sound and the Olympic Mountains beyond are phenomenal, but sitting in the company of my 95 year old Grandma would be a pleasure in any environment.



*Guests of Great Grandma for the Seahawks playoff game; watching her double-decker TV*



*Peter cheering for the Seahawks in his Sunday best*

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This contribution is available at <http://glimpseofpeace.blogspot.com/2013/01/extraordinary-jaunts-sundays-in-seattle.html>  
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# God Only Knows How to Love [at A Spiritual Journey]

You can love God or fear God. We should fear him because he is our ultimate judge, but I choose to concentrate on loving him as St. Therese of Lisieux did. Both logic and common sense tell me that if I do this, then I really don't need to be concerned about anything else, including being judged by him. It also simplifies things, perfectly suiting someone simpleminded like me. If you truly love God, you don't care what he's going to do with you ~ what else can Love do besides loving you? The Lord wipes out all my worries ~ how can you not love him?

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This contribution is available at <http://journeyofimperfectsaint.blogspot.com/2013/01/god-only-knows-how-to-love.html>  
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# Pride [at Convert Journal]



Pride is one of the 7 deadly (capital/cardinal) sins and the sturdy platform upon which the others (wrath, greed, sloth, lust, envy, gluttony) are built. It is therefore considered the most dangerous sin. It is the opposite of the virtue of humility.

So, what is pride? It is self-love that places one above others. It is being really impressed... with yourself. St. Augustine said “it was pride that changed angels into devils; it is humility that makes men as angels.” St. John Climacus said “humility is the only thing that no devil can imitate.” (More Saint quotes: [here](#).)

Pride is the most basic tool of the father of lies ([Satan](#)), expertly used to feed and build vanity. When we see ourselves through prideful eyes, we can not fully know our true self, others or God. We compete with God, not loving Him above all else and we can not love our neighbors as ourselves. In other words, pride directly opposes the two greatest commandments.

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them [a scholar of the law] tested him by asking, “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.”

I have been thinking a lot about pride lately. The more I look at it, the more it looks like an iceberg with just the tip visible. Superficially it seems much more benign than it truly is. It is very insidious in that way.

So, I want to understand it better... a sort of “know your enemy” thing. Part of my approach is to mentally review my thoughts and interactions to analyze what happened and how to improve. A

play-by-play approach. This is a bit like a football team watching films of their last game. Why did I think that? What was my honest purpose in saying such and such? Did I realize that small accomplishment was a grace from God? Was I trying to elevate myself over another – or worse, trying to lower them? This has been helpful and I feel that it can lead to enduring improvement away from this sin (although avoiding it completely seems almost impossible to me).

Another part of my strategy is prayer. I ask the Holy Spirit for help in understanding something then I listen. The response does not come immediately nor all at once, but it comes. For me, the best place is before the Blessed Sacrament in [adoration](#). Three things that I have learned about pride so far are:

1. *Pride is taking credit for that which is accomplished by God's grace.* Our achievements are through God's gifts to us. He is the source, not us. We take a dim view of people who steal credit for someone else's work. How much worse then is it when we steal from God?
2. *Pride is a black cloud which smothers the light of God in other people.* We are all God's greatest creation. Pride focuses our attention inward making us act as though God's greatest creation is ourselves. In essence, we sever ourselves from the Body of Christ and thus can not love our neighbor (seen lesser) as ourselves (seen greater).
3. *Pride is putting yourself on a pedestal, from which you will surely fall.* It is inevitable – and even positive. In the past I viewed such falls as embarrassments which is defined as “the shame you feel when your inadequacy or guilt is made public.” I have come to view these humbling moments as welcome and instructive blessings. It is interesting to me how this perspective replaces embarrassment.

He then addressed this parable to those who were convinced of their own righteousness and despised everyone else. “Two people went up to the temple area to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself, ‘O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity – greedy, dishonest, adulterous – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.’ But the tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, ‘O God, be merciful to me a sinner.’ I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

## The March For Life [at Our Ordinary Life]

I wrote this two years ago (I can't believe this blog is already that old!). On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the tragic Roe vs. Wade decision which legalized abortion in this country, I am re-posting it today. I added a few minor updates.

Recently, I've come across some powerful posts/articles about abortion. Like

[this](#)

and

[this](#)

. [these articles are now two years old, but the links still work, and they are still worth reading]

With these things in mind, it spurred me to start a conversation with a friend about abortion. This person is a devout Catholic, and I remarked that he did not seem to get that "fired up" about about the issue, which surprised me. He responded with: "Yeah, of course abortion is wrong and terrible, but - I hate to say it - what can you do about it? People are still going to get abortions. You have to face it that the culture is heading down a path of corruption. It's going to keep getting worse, and there's nothing you can do. It would be like trying to stop a freight train. I think at this point, we basically are just waiting for the Second Coming."

Whoa, now. My response was this: "It may be true. Maybe things ARE just getting worse and worse. But I have to believe that the

very thing

Satan hopes for us to do is say, 'well, there's nothing I can do to change things. So I'm just going to do nothing.'"

It takes a certain kind of person to be able to change culture in a big or sweeping way - to influence many, and help change hearts. And I think very few are

called

by God to do that. But that doesn't mean that the rest of us don't have a responsibility as well. I continued my response by saying, "If what we're doing is waiting for the Second Coming, then we need to be as prepared as possible, and help others to be prepared. No, I'm probably not going to be able to effect much change to the culture, but I can do my

very best

to raise my children to know and love God. And I can share Truth with other people in my life, in hopes that it will maybe help them in some small way to get closer to God."

He went on to say that abortion wasn't as black and white as people make it seem. That most people who get abortions truly don't believe that it's a person, so for them, it might not represent as grave an offense.

My thoughts on that comment....Well, first of all, it

is

a person, and whether or not someone accepts that fact, abortion still constitutes a serious EVIL, and it needs to be stopped. Even if someone could receive an abortion free from all culpability (They were mentally unstable, and unaware of their actions, let's say) - even though they may not be actually committing a sin themselves (and let's say their method of abortion was self-induced - by taking some sort of drug - so as to remove the abortionist from this equation), it is still WRONG. Always.

Also, I really

don't believe

that most people truly think an unborn child is not a person. This is so maddenly obvious when you just hear the language that people use when referring to that child, dependent

solely

on whether or not it is WANTED. Those who have an unplanned, unexpected, and unwanted pregnancy refer to the baby as a "clump of cells," "pregnancy tissue," "embryo" or "fetus." They talk about not being ready to be a parent and how it would be

unfair

to carry "it" to term (this one

really

gets to me. What would be unfair is not giving your child a chance at life in the first place). They talk only about the woman's life and how it will be forever changed - in a negative way - if she has a baby.

But as soon as someone finds themselves pregnant intentionally [and this is usually how it works these days. It's all very carefully planned out. After years of using birth control, partying and

"having fun," getting to know yourself, getting to know your spouse (which really, you should have done before you married him or her), accumulating the little luxuries and the money you

think

you need, taking expensive vacations.... Then it's thought, "Now it's time for me to have a kid. I DESERVE to have a child. This is my RIGHT, and I will use whatever means possible to GET one."], the language used is different. Now they are pregnant with a

baby

, and expect congratulations for getting that way. They are "expecting." They start thinking of themselves as a mom, a dad. It would, of course, be weird and impersonal, to call it now a fetus. They change to a language of personhood, because - as soon as a child is

wanted

- most people DO truly think of it as a person. It kills me that our legal system can sentence criminals for double homicides when they kill a pregnant woman (okay, so the baby WAS a person. "homo" = man, "cide" = to kill), and then allow abortions simultaneously (so wait....Killing people is okay...if it's the mom who chooses to do it? or...baby's aren't actually people, like you just said? Huh?).



We can't give up the fight. Even when it seems hopeless.

When the world around us is going to crap.

We need to remember that we already know Who will win in the end.

DEFEND TRUTH.

*And the Lord said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground.” (Gn 4:10)*

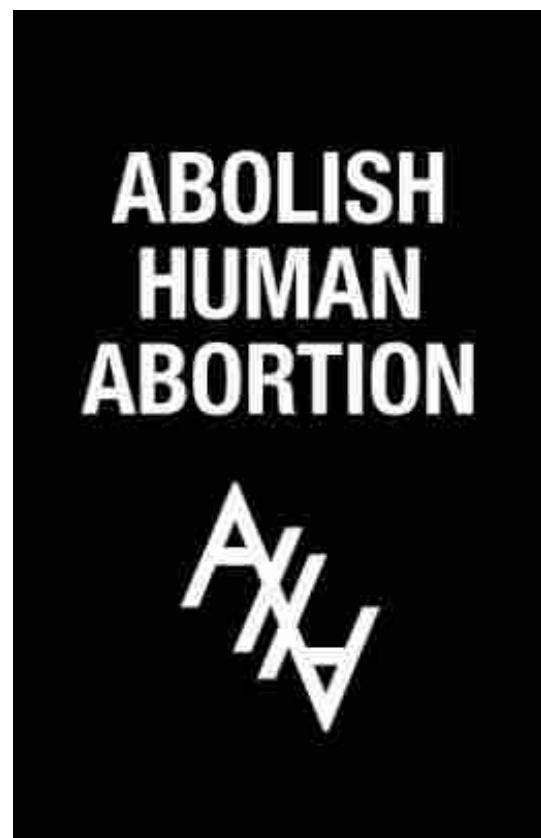
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# What I Appreciate About People Who Say the Catholic Church is Satanic (With an Invitation for Toby Harmon) [at Young, Evangelical, and Catholic]



"[Y]ou are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot!" - [Revelation 3.15](#)

With the 40th March for Life just about a week away, a very imprudently timed fight has [apparently](#) broken out among pro-lifers over some Facebook comments of Toby Harmon, one of the founding members of [Abolish Human Abortion](#). The offending comment that started it all:

“...[W]e do not consider Catholics brothers in Christ or Christian at all. We will not seek unity with a Satanic religious system. The only unity that can come is for Catholics to repent of false religion and idolatry and put their faith in Jesus Christ alone (not rituals, not Mary, not the Church of Rome or any mere man). AHA does not believe Catholicism is a Christian religion, but will fight alongside Catholic pro-lifers in various tactics against abortion. However since AHA is gospel centered, believing that that the gospel is the only hope to end abortion, and since RCC does not preach the gospel, then Catholics cannot be abolitionists any more than a Mormon can be. I have said numerous times, even on the AHA page that We are anti-Catholic doctrine/theology/faith/religion, but that does not mean we hate Catholic people, we love them. Everyone at AHA loves them. We also believe that in LARGE part Western Protestantism is dead, very dead as well.”

This is just one element of the small amount of this conversation I've really read, so please do correct me if I'm misinterpreting the situation. Regarding this comment though, I'm certainly surprised to hear that I worship people other than Jesus, or that I put my faith in the Pope. Toby is certainly mistaken, not only in his ultimate assessment of the Catholic Church, but obviously about what the Catholic Church actually teaches and practices. No, we don't worship Mary or the Pope or think that the Church died for our sins. That's just old-time Protestant propaganda that got old a long time ago. The first rule of healthy religious debate is having an accurate understanding of your opponents beliefs.

But Toby is right about one thing: the Catholic Church does have an essentially different view of what true Christian doctrine and practice is than Protestants (whatever variety Toby might be). While I hope Toby would be pleasantly surprised to know that Catholics believe as infallible dogma in the unique mediation of Christ, the necessity of the grace of Christ for salvation, and the necessity of faith, there are indeed many very significant points of difference. We Catholics do indeed believe that Jesus instituted the seven Sacraments as signs and instruments of his grace, that Jesus founded a Church and left the Apostles in charge, that the Apostles ordained successors who have passed on their authority to the present day in the bishops, that Mary and the saints are rightly honored as individuals made holy by Christ, and, probably most importantly for Toby, we do indeed unflinchingly reject sola fide and sola scriptura as heresy which, like all heresy, if knowingly, obstinately, and unrepentantly believed post-baptism, makes a person a heretic and damns them to hell. If Catholics are shocked by Toby saying that the Catholic Church doesn't have the Gospel, I recommend they read [the Sixth Session of the Council of Trent on justification](#), paying careful attention to the last sentence of chapter XVI and the canons.

Yes, there are real, essential differences between Protestants and Catholics. The Reformation wasn't just a big misunderstanding. I joined the Catholic Church after being raised as an evangelical Christian because I was convinced that only the Catholic Church had the fullness of the Gospel and the means of grace and that I was obligated to do so in order to follow Christ. While the Catholic Church differs with Toby by recognizing that all those who have faith in Christ and are baptized do rightfully claim the title of 'Christian', it is nonetheless the case that, as much as Toby hopes Catholics will leave the Catholic Church, I also hope Toby and other Protestants will join the Catholic Church.

And this doesn't mean that Toby or orthodox Catholics are "anti-" anyone, hate anyone, are bigots, or are intolerant. It means we both take religious truth claims seriously. Yes, it is very possible to think that another person's religious beliefs are wrong - even Satanic - and still love the person deeply. There is absolutely no contradiction in that. In fact, it is that very love that will spur the person on to try help the other see the supposed error of his ways.

Religious beliefs are not just opinions or expressions of the person such that they cannot be disagreed with. Toby rightfully takes his beliefs seriously. He knows, based on logic, that if he believes  $x$ , and Catholics believe  $y$ , but  $x$  and  $y$  are mutually exclusive, then either  $x$  or  $y$  (or both)

must be wrong. Since he of course believes x to be the case, he logically concludes that the Catholic belief y (or at least what he believes is a Catholic belief) is false. This is just simple logic.

**Toby also correctly understands** that, not only is there such a thing as religious truth, but religious truth *matters* - and can matter a great deal. A correct understanding of the Gospel is not a matter of indifference; it is not just a matter for ivory tower theologians who are splitting hairs: it is the very essence of the faith. The only thing that will matter in eternity is whether one avoided hell and gained heaven. How one understands the Gospel is precisely how one believes that is accomplished. Toby and the Catholic Church both agree that God's grace is necessary, that Jesus alone died for all of our sins, and that one must put their faith in Christ alone to be saved. While I don't know for sure Toby's beliefs, I'm assuming that we part ways from that point on, regarding such things as the necessity (or lack thereof) of the Sacraments as means of applying the grace of Christ to our lives and our cooperation with God's grace in living the Christian life to go to heaven.

If Toby believes that the Catholic Church is fundamentally wrong on this point, he very rationally keeps his distance. Though I generally withhold certain judgment about the particular activities of the Evil One, indeed, it would not be unreasonable for Toby to think that, given the size and historical longevity of the Catholic Church, if the Catholic Church is not of God, she is of Satan.

**Which brings me to another point** on which I'd like to commend Toby: he believes in Satan. It would seem that anyone who would call the Catholic Church a "Satanic religious system" would have to be someone who takes Satan seriously, which I applaud! While most of the world unfortunately scoffs at the very existence of their spiritual enemy, Toby may find that he'll be increasingly left in the company of orthodox Catholics on this matter.

Far from being offended by Toby's comment, I find it refreshing in a way. Gosh, he actually believes in objective religious truth! And he seems to take what he believes the Catholic Church teaches seriously. Though we sharply disagree on matters of the utmost importance, I nonetheless have a certain respect for him, recognizing, in his desire to take the Christian faith seriously, a fellow brother. I feel much closer to someone who consciously rejects the Catholic Church for honest theological reasons than someone who thinks Catholics are "just fine" due to religious indifferentism.

And so, if for some reason Toby has read this long piece on a Catholic blog, I'd like to offer him an invitation. I'm assuming he'll be in Washington DC for the March for Life. I'll be flying in from Minnesota to be there, too. I'd be more than happy either to grab a beer or coffee (depending on the time of day as well as Toby's preferences) and have a real, friendly discussion about the religious truths we both take seriously. The drinks will be on me. **I'm serious: I can be contacted on Facebook, Twitter, or by email.**

**Toby, I'll hear you out, I'll let you explain to me why I should return to the protestant evangelicalism I left in 2010 - and I'll hit you back with the arguments that convinced me to join the Catholic Church, no holds barred. We can even laugh at a few jokes, or strategize about how to best accomplish the only thing that will stop the March for Life from happening year after year: succeeding in abolishing human abortion.**

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# Getting Good at Being Bad [at From the Pulpit of My Life]

## *Making Resolutions for 2013*

This morning at daily Mass our homilist wandered here and there around the topic of the Holy Name of Jesus. While I cannot reconstruct what he said, there is one thought that has stayed with me. He stated that "

***a person can get really good at being bad.***

" The way to do that, he explained, is to repeatedly do bad things, especially the same bad things, over and over. He gave the example of stealing a car. If someone actually steals a car successfully, the chances are he or she will repeat that and become very good at it.

As our pastor spoke these things, I thought to myself, the opposite is also true; that is,

***a person can get really good at being good***

. This can happen in much the same way as getting good at being bad. Simply do good things repeatedly. For example, one can pray daily in the morning and in the evening. Making the effort daily will result in one becoming a good and faithful pray-er.

One becomes

***virtuous***

by doing good things repeatedly. One becomes

***vicious***

by doing bad things repeatedly. This is how moral character is built.

It is good to keep in mind that a person's traits can change along the virtuous-vicious spectrum. However, that takes effort.

I mentioned in a previous post that I am working on New Year resolutions this month. What I heard at Mass this morning motivated me to consider resolutions that will help me get better at being good and/or worse at being bad.

Yesterday I viewed a video about making spiritual resolutions. The three he highlights are prayer, forgiving an enemy, and comforting the afflicted. When it comes to prayer, which I mentioned above, Fr. Barron repeatedly says, "Make the time." That, I think, is the first step.

If you would like some New Year resolution suggestions, Fr. Barron's video may help you.

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# Mary, The Holy Mother of God - The Sign of Our Unity [at Fra Angelico Institute for the Sacred Arts]

We celebrate on this the first day of the New Year the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God.

Mary, by this very title, is the Holy Mother of the human nature of Jesus Christ. We receive insights on how the Church came to this title within the Holy Scriptures; for through a prayerful reading of them we come to an understanding of who this remarkable young woman was and what she means for us today. Three evangelists, Matthew, Luke, and John help us with this in their presentation of Mary as a woman who was clear minded, humble, intelligent, devout, loving, immensely strong, and quietly, yet fiercely, devoted to her Son.

Our beautiful Scriptural readings for this Solemnity (*Numbers* 6: 22-27, *Galatians* 4: 4-7, and *Luke* 2: 16-21) help us approach today's celebration through the perception of Mary herself. Today's Scriptures remind us that Mary and Joseph were devout Jews who understood the importance of faith, family devotion, tradition, and the fulfillment of the Jewish Law itself. It was with Holy Scripture – Hebrew and Christian – in mind, and the sacred tradition provided by the Apostolic fathers, that the debate over Mary's title rested upon.

The designation of Mary, as the Holy Mother of God was debated and decided upon at the third Ecumenical Council of the Church. It was held in the year 431 at the city of Ephesus in Asia Minor. This Church Council was known as the First Council of Ephesus and was attended by over 250 bishops from the four (soon to be five) patriarchates of the Catholic Church: Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, and eventually, in 451, Jerusalem (Jerusalem, at the time of the First Council of Ephesus was part of the Patriarchate of Antioch, Syria). Now that the formal persecutions by the Roman Empire had ended, the fifth century saw much activity within the Church to formally secure theological positions on both Christ and the role of His mother in salvation history. The catechesis of the people was paramount. Using their gifts of reason and the Holy Spirit, combined with the Holy Scriptures, and the sacred Tradition of the early Church the assembled bishops determined to safeguard the Truth of the Church while simultaneously further establishing the foundations for the catechesis of its clergy and laity.

But at the heart of the matter, for all Christians, Jesus is the human incarnation of God Almighty. He presents to us in His Person, the true, physical Presence, of God; and with His Divine Nature intact, He in turn with a true human nature, could then call us His brothers and sisters. We are, through Him, and Mary's maternity, adopted sons and daughters of our Father in Heaven. Mary is the Mother of Jesus' human nature, and, she is the Mother of the Church.

How do we know this?

We know it because Jesus said it was so: "Whatever you did for the least of My brothers and sisters, you did for Me" Matthew 25:40; and let us not forget John 19: 26-27: "Jesus saw His own mother, and the disciple [John] standing near whom He loved; He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son." Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother." And from that hour, he took his mother into his family."

Such is the love of God for His creation.



While doing some other research a few weeks ago, I was struck by some quotes from the three main leaders of the 16th century Protestant revolt. While certainly these men steered their new churches along a different path from the Tradition of the Western and Eastern Rites, the quotes provided below show them to have an understanding and love for Mary as the Holy Mother of God and the significance of her perpetual virginity.

*Martin Luther:* "It is an article of faith that Mary is Mother of the Lord and still a virgin... Christ, we believe, came forth from a womb left perfectly intact." (*Works of Luther*, Vol. 11, pages 319-320; Vol. 6, page 510.)

*John Calvin:* "There have been certain folk who have wished to suggest from this passage [Matthew 1:25] that the Virgin Mary had other children than the Son of God, and that Joseph had then dwelt with her later; but what folly this is! For the gospel writer did not wish to record what happened afterwards; he simply wished to make clear Joseph's obedience and to show that Joseph had been well and truly assured that it was God who had sent His angel to Mary. He had therefore never dwelt with her nor had he shared her company... And beside this Our Lord Jesus Christ is called the first-born. This is not because there was a second or a third, but because the gospel writer is paying regard to the precedence. Scripture speaks thus of naming the first-born whether or no there was any question of the second." (*Sermon on Matthew 1:22-25*. Published in 1562.)

*Ulrich Zwingli:* “I firmly believe that Mary, according to the words of the gospel, as a pure Virgin brought forth for us the Son of God and in childbirth and after childbirth forever remained a pure, intact Virgin.” (*Zwingli Opera*, Vol. 1, page 424.)

Perhaps, in God’s Divine Plan, the beautiful and holy virgin Mary – the Holy Mother of God – will be the cause for the reunification of all the Christian Churches: Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant.

As a fellow Christian, please consider making the following prayer that I wrote a few hours ago part of your own prayer arsenal for the New Year: ”Holy Mary, Mother of God, keep us within your most precious and immaculate heart. Through your maternal love, intercede with your Son to remove the painful scars of division and hurt that lie within our own hardened hearts. We implore you to ask your Son to strengthen us with His Truth, Goodness, and Beauty so that we may always fulfill His Divine Will. Amen.”

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**Notes:** Source of the sacred icon of the Holy Theotokos with the Christ: <http://en.lpj.org/2011/12/30/solemnite-de-marie-mere-de-dieu/>

Protestant leader quotations taken from <http://blackieschurchmilitant-apocalypse.blogspot.com/2008/01/perpetual-virginity-of-blessed-virgin.html>

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## ...the cluttered house that hides the Holy One. [at Journey to Wisdom]

While channel surfing early on a Saturday morning, I came across an infomercial for "MyPillow." As the camera panned the enraptured audience, I wondered how much these people are paid to sit through, and act interested in the presentation. Do they get cash? A free pillow? Then I thought about how much I was being paid to watch this, and over my lifetime, thousands of additional hours of worthless programming. Time lost to me forever. This brought to mind my favorite saying of rabbi Abraham Heschel: "Living is not a private affair of the individual. Living is what man does with God's time..."

These thoughts resonated with me when I read this Sunday's letter from Paul to the Corinthian's. He writes:

"

Brothers and sisters: There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom; to another, the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another, faith by the same Spirit; to another, gifts of healing by the one Spirit; to another, mighty deeds; to another prophecy; to another, discernment of spirits; to another, variety of tongues; to another, interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes." (1Corinthians 12:4-11)

In author J.K. Rowling's magical world of Harry Potter, "muggles" were those people unaware of the power and the gifts within them. Like the Corinthian's, and, too often, myself, muggles are preoccupied with the mundane and profane, the hustle and bustle, buying and selling, work and play of their everyday lives.

Dave Pruitt, in his book, "Reason and Wonder", tells of an awkward teenage girl named Jeanne, who used to walk with her dog around Central Park in New York. On two occasions, she nearly knocked over an elderly gentleman. The old man offered to walk with her. So, for more than a year, Jeanne and the old gentleman met several times a week in the park. Jeanne called him "Mr. Tayer" because she could not get the first part of his long French name.

Jeanne felt Mr Tayer's unpretentiousness and childlike wonder transformed the most ordinary experience-like stumbling upon a caterpillar-into a moment of enchantment, as she recounts:

"Jeanne, can you feel yourself to be a caterpillar?"

"Oh yes," I replied with the baleful knowing of a gangly pimply faced teenager.

"Then think of your own metamorphosis," he suggested. "What will you be when you become

a butterfly, une papillon, eh? What's the butterfly of Jeanne"?...

Perhaps the most extraordinary thing about Mr. Tayer was the way he would suddenly look at you. He looked at you with wonder and astonishment regarding you as the cluttered house that hides the holy one. I would tell my mother, "Mother, I was with my old man again, and when I am with him, I leave my littleness behind."

Years later, Jeanne was given a copy of the book, "The Phenomenon of Man." And she discovered that "Mr. Tayer" was Jesuit priest, paleontologist, author and mystic, Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. The Jeanne of this story is Dr. Jean Houston, world renowned protege of Margaret Meade, and a founder of the human potential movement. Houston's chance encounter and subsequent meetings with "old Mr. Tayer" changed her life as no other event ever did. "I leave my littleness behind," she remarked, "because he saw God in me and I had to rise."

I need to remind myself that the Divine Presence within Dr. Houston, and the first century Corinthians Paul is addressing, is also within me and all of us. In the story of Martha and Mary (Luke10: 38-42), Jesus tells us the way to Himself. Martha, who is burdened by doing all the housework while her sister Mary sits at Jesus's feet, complains to our Lord:

"Do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me." The Lord said to her in reply, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her."

The "one thing" was simply this: Mary was, in love and humility, present to Him. She was open, receptive ,in the moment, in a state of complete silent surrender to Our Lord. When Paul writes that "the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit" I think he means not only for the good of the community, but for the development and manifestation of my very being, my very soul. I am created in God's image and likeness, a Temple of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, I am responsible for seeking the Divine, hidden in plain sight within me. And I must use "God's time" wisely, awaken my caterpillar self, and be a living, breathing icon, witnessing to God's immeasurable love and kindness.

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## A certain point of view [at Outside the Asylum]



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Ben gives Luke his first lesson in Jedi subjectivism.

*“Luke, as you grow older, you’re going to find that many of the truths we cling to depend on a certain point of view.”*

How many of you, when you first heard Obi-Wan Kenobi offer this remonstrance to Luke Skywalker in *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*, found yourselves putting a mental question mark next to it? And how many of you were simply too caught up in the moment, in Luke’s feelings of betrayal and loss, to allow it to register?

“After all, it’s only a movie,” he observed drily.

Movies are stories, and stories can be dangerous weapons: torn by the pity and terror of tragedy, drawn along in spite of yourself by the drama, weeping and laughing according to its merits and

intents, you may find yourself accepting as true propositions and values that, were they presented as arguments, you would question or doubt or even reject. Consider the watershed influence of *Brokeback Mountain*, or the quietly malign effect *Atlas Shrugged* (the book) has had on our view of the poor, and tell me I'm wrong.

It's not that Ben Kenobi's statement as worded is false or an endorsement of subjectivism. Many of the things we hold to be true are only "obviously true" by consensus; shatter that consensus, introduce a substantial party dedicated to denying or contradicting it, and its obviousness is lost. Identities of people, institutions and nations are built on and vested in "self-evident truths" that other people, institutions and nations find dubious propositions at best; mental breakdowns, corporate dissolutions and social chaos follow when those truths collapse under pressure.

And yet — Kenobi's words nag at us, for he speaks these words to justify misleading Luke. That Darth Vader "killed" Anakin Skywalker is an abstract metaphor; that Darth Vader *was/is* Anakin Skywalker is concrete fact, and can't be waffled away by arguing perspective. The literal is prior to the metaphorical; if Ben's account of Anakin's "death" is true "from a certain point of view", it's a perspective that doesn't face the facts in their ugly fullness. Considering Kenobi's motives, for all that they're good, his "truth" is darned convenient.

But even by his own lights Kenobi is wrong. Vader needs his suit to survive, but it's also a mask, a box within which he can hide Anakin Skywalker from everyone, including himself. He tries to "kill" Anakin by suppressing him in mechanics and artificiality, but Anakin still comes out in Vader's desire to have Luke by his side when he achieves supreme power — the father's natural desire to have a legacy to bequeath to his offspring. He tries to convince himself that he can kill his son if need be, but allows Luke too many opportunities to escape the death blow; when Palpatine threatens to succeed where Vader fails, Anakin finally escapes the "Vader box" to save his son and kill the Emperor, probably knowing that he will hasten his own death in doing so.

The saga of Anakin Skywalker's fall and redemption is fully grounded in the first principle that there is such a thing as objective truth, that it is knowable, that it is discoverable, and that we owe it a primary loyalty. Much of the tragedy and drama of the cycle stems from the individual characters' inability to face and accept truths that are dangerous or unappealing. For instance, Han and Leia banter and squabble until halfway through *The Empire Strikes Back* because they fear the unknown territory of love and what it will demand of them: far easier to engage in sexual suggestion and caustic insult than to admit they love one another. The Jedi, for all their goodness and heroism, are too amenable to compromising the truth in favor of the easier, more politic

resolution; it's this consequentialist bias that is Obi-Wan Kenobi's fatal flaw, which Luke must resist and reject to save his father.

The centrality of truth to a just society can't be overstated. Without respect for and faithfulness to the Way Things Really Are, justice — the rendering to each person of that which he deserves — has no meaning. Where deception is not only possible but expected, even *de rigueur*, commerce breaks down and extensive government regulation becomes a poor substitute for "good faith" bargaining. Without truth, we can't properly "know" anything: there would be no real facts for science to discover or education to transmit. Without objective truth — "ground truth", truth that's often inconvenient or dangerous, truth that stubbornly exists in defiance of psychological needs or social theory — promises are meaningless, trust impossible, *fidelity* an empty antiquity, *love* a shapeless heap of indefinite, self-referential emotions.

"Men could not live with one another if there were not mutual confidence that they were being truthful to one another" (

Summa Theologica II-II:109:3 ad

1).

The virtue of truth gives another his just due. Truthfulness keeps to the just mean between what ought to be expressed and what ought to be kept secret: it entails honesty and discretion.

In justice, "as a matter of honor, one man owes it to another to manifest the truth"

(

ST II-II:109:3

A).

[1]

Like St. John the Baptist, we're called not only to live in the light but to bear witness to it, "the true light that enlightens every man" (Jn 1:9). Because it's the truth that makes us free (Jn 8:32), we aren't free to make the truth what we will: there is only one God, who is the source of all truth, and therefore only one Truth that liberates. "I am the Way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (Jn 14:6).

We must not only discern and speak the truth, we must bear allegiance to it: we must plant our flags by it, and if necessary set our backs against the mountain and suffer or die defending it. This means we must accept the truth about ourselves, no matter how ugly and uncomfortable it may be; this means we must speak the truth to and about others, if not regardless of consequence then at least without using those consequences to justify deception.

But it also means living our lives in such a manner that the truth about us when spoken by others testifies to the truth of the Gospel. Very often, we'll find it's also becoming to us. Only by building our own lives on the truth can we hope to build a just, merciful and loving society.

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# What Parenting a Sick Baby Taught Me About the Heart of God [at Messy Wife, Blessed Life]

**This past week, Lucia's was sick.** She's had a cold a few times before, but this is her first real illness (double ear infections!). She was so miserable. It broke my heart.



sick, miserable baby

**When you or I are sick, we know that the pain and discomfort are only temporary.** Knowing that we'll soon be better makes the sickness more bearable. But my sweet baby, she's too young to understand that there is an end in sight. I can't imagine how distressing it is to her to feel so awful and not understand why she feels that way or when the pain will cease.

**Last Wednesday, Lucia was at her worst.** David was able to take the day off to stay with her and when I called on the way home, he told me that she had been laying in his arms moaning all day. She was in too much pain to be able to completely fall asleep. When I got home, I took over, holding my sweet pea in my arms the rest of the day and all night. I tried to comfort her, I tried to explain that this would all be over soon. Try as I might, I think my efforts just didn't make it through to her.

**I realized that this is maybe a bit like God's relationship with his children.** We all go through periods of suffering in our lives. We cry out to Him from our misery. He tries to comfort us,

knowing that whatever our struggles, they will pass soon enough. But in the midst of it all, we are often incapable of accepting His comfort because we can't see the end of our suffering. Just like my little Lulu can't comprehend that her illness is temporary, we can't conceive of our sufferings ending. We begin to give in to the pain, to stop fighting back and preparing for life after our current battles.

**Right now, we are struggling with David's unemployment/underemployment.** It seems as if there is no way out. He applies for every job he's even remotely qualified for, yet has only gotten a few interviews and nothing has come of them. We can't foresee this changing anytime soon. We're starting to get depressed without an end in sight. When he was in school, it was difficult, but we had an end date to look forward to: graduation. Right now, there is no guarantee that he will ever find a job. And that's scary. Overwhelming. And yet I imagine our Heavenly Father looking down at me thinking, "Don't you know that this will soon be over?"

**When I lean down and whisper in my sweet baby's ear,** "It will all be fine, I promise. Mommy is watching over you. Trust me that this will soon be over," I hear this same echo in my ear: "It will all be fine, I promise. Your Father is watching over you. Trust Me that this will soon be over."

**Right now, I'm choosing to trust.** I don't know when David will find a job, but I know that the Lord knows. That he's laying plans. That there is a purpose for this time. As difficult as it is for her, as difficult as it is for me to watch, Lucia needs to get sick as a child to build her immune system. I don't know the exact reason for our sufferings right now, but I am consciously choosing to trust that the difficulties we face today have meaning. Perhaps I will someday know what that meaning is, but it's just as likely that I never will. And today, I'm ok with that.



**P.S. Between now and February 28, all proceeds from ad space on Messy Wife, Blessed Life will go toward [Kaia's adoption fund](#). See ad space options [here](#).**

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This contribution is available at <http://www.messywifecom/2013/01/what-parenting-sick-baby-taught-me.html>  
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# Abortifacient Shmortifacient [at NFP and Me]

I wrote this post a few weeks ago and have been reflecting on how to make it better, more informative and inclusive. Well since I'm the one writing it we're already suffering on all those fronts anyways. So after lots of edits (mostly to the spelling of 'shmortifacient') I decided to just write a new post about the scientific proof that this actually occurs. If it takes anywhere near as long as this post you'll see it next year. ;-)

So here is Part 1 with a little added background about my history of teaching safe sex:



I have learned a lot about hormonal contraceptives in my 24 years. It all started back in high school when my first job was as a peer educator. I (ignorantly) taught my fellow high schoolers about the ins and outs of contraception and unplanned pregnancy. We also educated about other things, eating disorders, domestic violence, harms of tobacco and alcohol, how to say no, etc. In my 3 years at that job, I put a lot of rubbers on a lot of bananas. I showed a lot of teens what a diaphragm, female condom, sponge, IUD, and pack of birth control pills looked like. I'm not proud of this past and my only sorrowful excuse is that I was then ignorant, of both the harmful effects of what I was promoting and of the Church's teaching.

Since then I've become painstakingly aware of how damning these devices are. I've had to learn mechanisms of action for most every kind of birth control out there in order to pass my pharmacology tests, my first board licensing exam, and my family medicine shelf. I feel I'm fairly well versed in how these things work.

They work in three ways:

- 1) Inhibiting ovulation
- 2) Cervical mucus alteration
- 3) Endometrial alteration

Despite my years of education (devoted to medicine, mind you) I have come across many people who say some variation of this:

"I have heard that. It didn't hurt my second child as I was on birth control before and for weeks

until I found out I was pregnant. So I'm not so sure I believe that."\*

That's fine, I generally doubt people that spew "scientific facts" on the internet backing them up with the catch all phrase to end all catch all phrases: "studies show [insert claim here.]" What's not fine is that hoards of pro-life women are taking a medicine that could potentially be aborting their children without their doctors informing them. Fortunately though pharmaceutical companies are obligated to put how their drugs work on a little piece of paper that comes with the medicine. We are then able to read this insert and know exactly what this drug is capable of doing to our bodies, albeit it takes some searching. When it comes to the abortifacient properties of birth control let me settle the argument with this (emphasis mine):

### Monophasic pills

: "alterations include changes in the cervical mucus (which increase the difficulty of sperm entry into the uterus) and the endometrium (which

#### **reduce the likelihood of implantation**

)."

### Biphasic pills

: "alterations include changes in the cervical mucus (which increase the difficulty of sperm entry into the uterus) and the endometrium (which

#### **reduce the likelihood of implantation**

)."

### Triphasic pills

: alterations include changes in the cervical mucus (which increase the difficulty of sperm entry into the uterus) and the endometrium (which

#### **reduce the likelihood of implantation**

)."

### Transdermal Patch

: "alterations include changes in the cervical mucus (which increase the difficulty of sperm entry into the uterus) and the endometrium (which

#### **reduce the likelihood of implantation)**

."

## Depo Provera shot

: "inhibits the secretion of gonadotropins which, in turn, prevents follicular maturation and ovulation and results in

### **endometrial thinning**

"

## Hormonal IUD

: "How does Mirena work? It is not known exactly how Mirena works. Mirena may work in several ways. It may thicken your cervical mucus,

### **thin the lining of your uterus**

, inhibit sperm movement and reduce sperm survival. Mirena may stop release of your egg from your ovary, but this is not the way it works in most cases."

## Copper IUD:

"The contraceptive effectiveness of ParaGard® is enhanced by copper continuously released into the uterine cavity. Possible mechanism(s) by which copper enhances contraceptive efficacy include interference with sperm transport or fertilization, and

### **prevention of implantation.**

"

## Subdermal Insert (Implanon)

: "The contraceptive effect of IMPLANON™ is achieved by several mechanisms that include suppression of ovulation, increased viscosity of the cervical mucus, and

### **alterations in the endometrium.**

"

## Emergency Contraception (Plan B):

"it is possible that Plan B® may also work by preventing fertilization of an egg (the uniting of sperm with the egg) or by

## **preventing attachment (implantation) to the uterus (womb)**

"

So what does this mean? It means that if you believe life begins at conception (and it does) then by using one of the aforementioned methods of contraception you are potentially aborting your newly conceived child. Scores of women who have been informed of this have been appalled their physician had chosen not to inform them of this little fact. So here it is, spread this information far and wide so no more women continue to unknowingly lose their child to a flawed womb they themselves medically induced or betray their conscience under the guise of "My physician never told me." Help put an end to internet ignorance and blatant disregard of facts. The manufacturers say it themselves, begrudgingly so, and we should all be made aware. We deserve to know what we're doing to our bodies, not just what Planned Parenthood or Big Pharma wants us to know.

\*Comments taken directly from a post Abby Johnson put on Facebook about NFP.

P.S.

If anybody know hows to properly spell Shmortifacient, let me know.

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This contribution is available at <http://nfpandme.blogspot.com/2013/01/abortifacient-shmortifacient.html?m=1>  
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## Prison and Purgatory [at Written By the Finger of God]

My first panic attack spasmed when I was in jail. Nine months pregnant with my first baby. The *fwoosh*

of an airtight sliding electronic door, the automatic click of the lock and a cramped baby kicking on my ribcage brought on unexpected claustrophobia. Sweat prickled out of every pore of my skin, shallow breaths came in nanosecond intervals, and with all bodily functions going haywire, my confused brain thought I was an inmate. The urge to plow my fist through the walls like a Power Puff girl, and scream “Get me out of here or I’ll go into labor!” almost sabotaged my respectable attorney doppelgänger, but thankfully, another

*fwoosh*

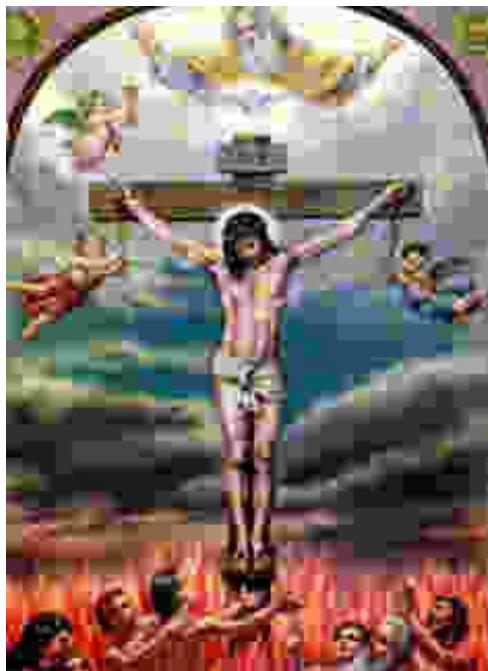
indicated an opened door and a guard stood outside waiting to escort me to my client. It was by God’s grace and a Hail Mary that I didn’t give the correctional facility surveillance cameras a good entry for

*America’s funniest videos*

that day.



But don’t let my anecdote fool you: there is nothing funny about being in jail. In fact, jail visits always made me more aware of my shortcomings at loving God and my sins in disobeying His Commandments... and empathetic to the souls in purgatory.



source: [www.saintjoan.org](http://www.saintjoan.org)

As a cradle Catholic, ‘the souls in purgatory’ was just a perfunctory line that my mother uttered every night we said prayers.

But as I began reading books explaining purgatory, one day it clicked:

it's just like jail where God's justice is satisfied and God's mercy is manifest at the same time.

Catechism teaches us that: purgatory is a place where those who have died

(members of the Church triumphant) expiate their sins and undergo purification to achieve holiness necessary to join the perfect inhabitants of heaven

(members of the Church triumphant).

We, who are earning our salvation on earth, (the Church militant) are inexplicably tied to this Communion of saints.

Mystics like St. Pio, St. Gemma and St. Faustina, encountered souls from purgatory asking for prayers and sacrifice, (particularly the Mass) so that they could be released from purgatory. This demonstrates to us that our good acts and prayers are deposited to the Church's treasury so that the whole of mankind, can be set free of sin and attain communion with our Perfect Father in heaven.

For the souls in purgatory, the Church militant "offerings" are sort of like a "Get out of Jail Free" card, at someone else's very generous expense.

It isn't hard to guess which grateful newly released saint of the Church triumphant will be interceding fervently on the generous donor's behalf. The new saint thus petitions the Heavenly Father, applying the merits he earned during his life for the benefit of the donor, who struggles with her salvation and sanctification.

This communion of saints is a loving system of cooperation between God's creatures that results in a win-win situation for all.

Only a Wise Creator and Father could come up with a brilliant scheme.

Not too long after I grasped this mind-blowing mystery, my children and I began saying [St. Gertrude the Great's prayer](#) where Jesus promised to release 1,000 souls in purgatory, whenever we drove by a cemetery. This prompted my daughter to ask me in the midst of all the grey tombstones, crosses and silk flowers, "Oh. Is *that* purgatory, mom?"



By the time I felt labor pains with my third baby and I was tempted to get an epidural, my husband/doula wisely gave me this advice: "It's up to you honey, but if you offered up your labor pains you could clear out a huge chunk of purgatory tonight."

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This contribution is available at <http://anabellehazard.blogspot.com/2012/06/prison-and-purgatory.html>  
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# Things I like about our local Melkite parish V [at 50 Days After]

41.

## Ineffable

. I never knew this word before I started out at the local Melkite parish. Sometimes the unknown should be left unknown.

42.

## "O Lord save your people and bless Your inheritance."

This line from Psalm 28 is sung by the priest and/or deacon at every liturgy.

43.

## Bowing and repenting like the publican

. Every Divine Liturgy the people bow and repent saying "Lord, have mercy on me a sinner."

44.

## Simple plastic playsets in the back

. As this is about the local Melkite parish, I can't help but mention that I like the little four foot playsets in the back that my daughter insists on playing on when I am ready to go home.

45.

## Theophany

. I have nothing against Epiphany, as a matter of fact it wasn't until I went to my first Theophany liturgy that I realized that Epiphany is celebrated to affirm Christ's divinity. However, I love celebrating the revelation of the Triune God as the Father speaks, the Spirit descends as a dove and Christ is baptized.

46.

## Nicene Creed

. I do not reject the

## Filioque

. The reason I like that is that the surprise of it the first time and the confusion the next several times forced me to make that prayer more than just words I memorized years ago. I had to go back through and think about the words (the translation also uses slightly different wording) and ask the priest about it and do more reading and learning.

47.

## **Icon of Saints Peter and Andrew**

. St Peter was of course the first Pope and St Andrew was the first bishop of Constantinople and the predecessor of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Its a great picture to symbolize the reconciliation of the Melkites and other Eastern Orthodox Churches with the Catholic Church.

48.

## **Icons are intentionally unrealistic**

. The point of the icons after all is to reflect Heavenly and not Earthly realities so they remain stylized in a way that Western art moved away from in the Renaissance.

49.

## **Named for St Ignatius of Antioch**

. The patron saint was named specifically to show the ancientness of the faith and our connection to the faith of the Apostles.

50.

## **Homilies**

. We've been blessed with great priests and deacons. Most homilies fade into the background because you've heard the same message before, its uninspiring, etc. I can remember only a handful of homilies from the 27 years before when I went to Latin Rite parishes. There are about ten homilies just from these last three years that stand out and I remember well. I'm not saying that this shows superiority of one over the other, but rather that this parish has been blessed with great priests and deacons.

May God bless all who read my ramblings,

This contribution is available at <http://50daysafter.blogspot.com/2013/01/things-i-like-about-our-local-melkite.html>

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# Dont Wait for the Wedding [at The Spiritual Workout]

It happened one Friday night.

The

**anticipation**

had been building for awhile, at least for me. I couldn't ignore the

**hunger**

any more. It felt like I had been

**waiting**

an eternity, and I just couldn't hold off any longer.

*Screw waiting for the wedding!!!*

I thought.

So I gave in to the

**urge**

.

**Wait, wait, wait...**

you all know what I'm talking about, right?

Be honest - how many of you are thinking that this post is about - are the kids out of the room? no?  
ok, I'll spell it instead -

s-e-x?

I know my most read post is about

[porn](#)

, but c'mon y'all!

**Get your mind out of the gutter!**



My precious.

I know. It's beautiful. It's alright if you tear up. I totally did.

Let me backtrack a bit...

I'm sure many of you know that

[I love to bake](#)

. Partly because I love sugar and partly because it's one of those ways that I show people that I care.

**Like really care.**

Some of you also might know that this KitchenAid stand mixer is a baker's dream. Like heaven. On your countertop.

**You can make an entire batch of cookies at once!!!!**

So, it probably comes at no surprise that

**I've always wanted a KitchenAid stand mixer for my very own.**

I have great memories making batches of oatmeal chocolate chip cookies with my family growing up, and ever since I became an adult, my wrist has always longed for the relief of not having to

mix cookie batter with a hand mixer.

But something has always been holding me back, and that something is the idea of **waiting for the wedding.**

KitchenAid stand mixers do not come cheap. This one runs for a retail price of \$299.99, and that's the cheapest one! So, while I've always wanted one, I've never taken the leap to buying one.

*It's soooo expensive!*

I think.

*Can I really justify spending that kind of money on something for just me?*

I wonder.



Because only married people  
use kitchen appliances.

*This is the kind of thing you put on your wedding registry,*

is the thought that always cinched the "Not gonna give in and buy it" mindset.

You see, for years, I've been living with the idea that there are things that I would want - things that I would

*use*

- but I haven't bought them for myself because they are the kinds of things that you **register for when you get engaged.**

The kinds of things that your girlfriends all chip in to buy you for your bridal shower.

Or that really expensive item that your dad's co-worker has shipped to your parents' house before the wedding all gift-wrapped in special Macy's ribbons and bows.

Or the gift that your great Aunt Ruth

([who had a beard... and it felt weird...](#))

splurges on for you because you are her favoritest great niece in the whole wide world.

It's one of those expensive gifts like nice crystal or china that you wait to buy so you can put *something*

on your wedding registry... and if you buy it before the man comes along, then what are you supposed to register for?!

Waiting for the wedding was holding me back. It was keeping me from living my dreams... my baker's dream, that is.

And then it happened. Everything just lined up too perfectly. It's like it was God's will! All KitchenAid appliances went on sale at Kohl's. Then they had a special Ebates deal on top of that. Then there was the extra 30% off. Then there was the Kohl's cash. Then there was the mail-in rebate. You get the idea. When it all came down to it, the final price was going to be down from \$299.99 to under \$100. I even had some muscle who carried it to my apartment and set it up for me! How could I say no?

Obviously, I have a hard time saying "No!" to any great deal, but it was more than that. It was finally

[time](#)

for me. It was a change in my mindset.

*I'm done waiting for the wedding. I have a life that's worth living now, not just someday when I get married.*

So, it did happen that one Friday night, where I didn't wait for the wedding. I had some chivalrous muscle come over to carry it up from the lobby for me, pull it out of the box, and place it ever so

gently on the countertop.

It was a beautiful moment.

**It was everything I had hoped it would be.**

And it was mine. A gift for myself.

And then we made mashed potatoes.

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This contribution is available at <http://spiritualworkoutblog.blogspot.com/2013/01/dont-wait-for-wedding.html>  
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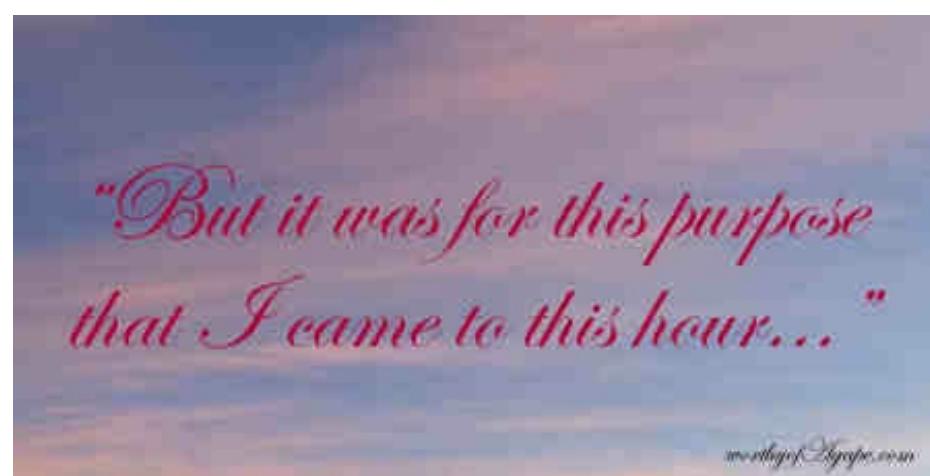
## for this Purpose.

*“I am troubled now. Yet what should I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name.”* - John 12:27-28

A few weeks ago I read over these verses in the Catechism. I've always loved these verses because they showcase Jesus' humanity in a way that is completely relatable. In a way I can almost hear the sarcasm dripping from His words when He asks, “Yet what should I say? Father, save me from this hour?” Of course that isn't the right response. Just because we are troubled doesn't always mean that we need to be saved from that troubling hour. Perhaps what we need is to open our eyes and our hearts to why God is calling us to the troubling hour.

The truth is that I've turned to these verses a lot over the course of my life, but upon reading them a few weeks ago I understood them in a new light. I get troubled about the single life. My friends get troubled about the single life. When will our knight in shining armor appear? So often we get stuck praying, “Father, save me from this hour! This single life is lonely and sad and I am tired of watching all of my friends get married and have babies. When will it be my turn?”

That isn't to say that the single life turns a person's prayer life to whiny mush, but being single isn't always easy. Sure, there are days that I'm incredibly grateful that I can sleep in and no one really cares that on my day off I watched an entire season of How I Met Your Mother whilst in my pajamas. There are days I'm grateful that I can pack a bag and take off to go visit another cathedral just because I feel like it. But there are also days that I want to share those experiences with that special someone. It is in those moments of feeling troubled about the single life that I can relate to Jesus' prayer, “Father, save me from this hour!” But it is also in that troubled hour that I completely forget about the rest of Jesus' prayer, **“But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour.”**



“What purpose is that?”, you might ask. I'd be asking right there with you. I don't know what the purpose of this single life is, but I know what purpose it serves: **God's**. God is constantly preparing my heart to love, and hopefully to enter into marriage someday. He is healing my heart

and restoring it to the glory He created it for. He is romancing me and leading me to fall more deeply in love with Him so that I may learn to love as He does. I don't always know the purpose for the single life, but I *do* know that He has a purpose for it. He's preparing me. He's loving on me. He's preparing my future spouse. He's loving on my future spouse. Do I want to get in the way of that? Heck no. All that remains is to join my prayer to Jesus', "***Father, glorify your name.***"

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This contribution is available at <http://worthyofagape.com/2013/01/30/for-this-purpose/>  
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# Unnatural Family Planning [at This Cross I Embrace]

A few friends recently wrote posts about Natural Family Planning (NFP), which got me thinking. Uh oh. TCIE thinking... that's never a good idea :) But, I thought it was high time to write about how I

***really***

feel about NFP... and what you read next might shock you. Hold onto your seats.

Natural Family Planning. Let's break that phrase down a bit, shall we? First - that word "Natural." It's all the rave these days, as more and more people are trying to avoid synthetics, artificials, and toxins in an effort to achieve a more holistic, organic, healthy lifestyle. The problem is, as any food snob can tell you, that word "natural" is not synonymous with holistic, organic, OR healthy/healthful. In fact, when used in food labeling, the term "Natural" is largely up to the interpretation of the food producer. Unsuspecting consumers often unwittingly opt for the "Natural" foods based upon what natural means to them, when in fact they have no idea what it means to the producer.

The term "natural" in and of itself, however, does have a standardized definition. (Many, actually.)



From Merriam-Webster:

## **Definition of NATURAL<sup>1</sup>**

*: based on an inherent sense of right and wrong*

2

*a : being in accordance with or determined by nature*

*b : having or constituting a classification based on features existing in nature*

3

*a (1) : begotten as distinguished from adopted; also : legitimate*

*(2) : being a relation by actual consanguinity as distinguished from adoption*

*b : illegitimate*

4

: having an essential relation with someone or something : following from the nature of the one in question

5

: implanted or being as if implanted by nature : seemingly inborn

6

: of or relating to nature as an object of study and research

7

: having a specified character by nature

8

a : occurring in conformity with the ordinary course of nature : not marvelous or supernatural

b : formulated by human reason alone rather than revelation

c : having a normal or usual character

9

: possessing or exhibiting the higher qualities (as kindness and affection) of human nature

10

a : growing without human care; also : not cultivated

b : existing in or produced by nature : not artificial

c : relating to or being natural food

11

a : being in a state of nature without spiritual enlightenment : unregenerate

b : living in or as if in a state of nature untouched by the influences of civilization and society

12

a : having a physical or real existence as contrasted with one that is spiritual, intellectual, or fictitious

b : of, relating to, or operating in the physical as opposed to the spiritual world

13

a : closely resembling an original : true to nature

b : marked by easy simplicity and freedom from artificiality, affectation, or constraint

c : having a form or appearance found in nature

14

a : having neither flats nor sharps

*b : being neither sharp nor flat*

*c : having the pitch modified by the natural sign*

15

*: of an off-white or beige color*

*— natural·ness noun*

When we use the word "Natural" within the larger term "Natural Family Planning," I believe we mean to invoke several of these definitions above, namely #2, #10b, and #13b. We mean to invoke a feeling that this way of living, within the context of marriage, is in accordance with and determined by (and cooperating with) nature. We mean to imply that there is nothing artificial about it, but rather that it exists in and is produced by nature. And we mean to say that there is a marked simplicity about it, as a result.

What strikes me is that the definition we do

*not*

generally intend is the very first one:

***based on an inherent sense of right and wrong.***

And yet, shouldn't that be the most important aspect of the word? Well... perhaps it is. We'll revisit this in a moment.



Let's move on to the second part of the phrase: Family Planning.

Pretty straightforward, right? I think we can all agree on the intended definition of Family Planning as a means of planning a family in the traditional sense of when a pregnancy is to be avoided or spaced, and when the time for another child is deemed appropriate by the parents.

Interestingly, this commonly held interpretation of the word "family" within the context of "family planning" is loosely encompassed in the #5 definition of the word by Merriam-Webster:

5

*a : the basic unit in society traditionally consisting of two parents rearing their children; also : any of various social units differing from but regarded as equivalent to the traditional family*

*b : spouse and children*

(Take note, none of the definitions defined a family as a married couple with no children. No shocker there.)

And finally, the word

## **planning**

is given in the following context:

*: the act or process of making or carrying out plans; specifically : the establishment of goals, policies, and procedures for a social or economic unit*

Therein, my friends, lies the bread and butter of this post.

Planning. Oy. Where do I begin.



For starters, on nearly every large-scale article or smaller-scale blog post even remotely touching the topic of Natural Family Planning, I have found comments from our delightful little Infertile Peanut Gallery (I say that lovingly, as a Member of her Board), gently or not-so-gently reminding everyone that NFP is not JUST about avoiding or spacing pregnancies, that the luxury of planning a family is not taken for granted by those of us who suffer from infertility, and that many of us require the use of a system to help us identify underlying health issues. I also hear arguments from couples using the system to space children, defending their natural right to do so, as well as arguments from people not using NFP who question the motives and intentions of couples who do.

But this post? It is about none of those things.



Understandably, I am in quite a unique position, with an even more unique vantage point. I am infertile. I did use NFP for years (to try to achieve pregnancy). I have been teaching the Creighton Model Fertility

### *Care*

System for over 5 years, to couples and singles from all different walks of life.

But, the fact is this. (Are you ready?)

I loathe NFP.

There. I said it. And I mean it. But probably not for the reasons you think.



See, I find an absolute beauty and truth in the very thing I teach on a daily basis, the very thing that first planted seeds in my life in 2006, and continues to bear more and more seasons of fruit to present day. I trust that the knowledge we have been given of our cycles and times of fertility and infertility is divine. Most importantly, I believe a couple has been given these "Natural" signs as a means of using them, "Naturally," to choose intimacy or abstinence on any given day, and according to their "Natural" intentions for their "Family." Whoooooaaaaaa. That was a whole lot of quotations. But my interpretation is simple: God gave us these easily visible, easily interpreted signs and symptoms for a reason - to USE them. And it is a

**NATURAL**

thing to have these signs, and a

## **NATURAL**

thing to want to have your

## **PLANS**

in

## **FAMILY**

building be layed out before you.

What is

## **UN**

-Natural, on the other hand, is that we think any of this actually

*works*

. You read that right. No, no, I'm not talking about the statistics of use, which are overwhelmingly high for both avoiding pregnancy and for achieving. And I'm not talking about the statistics of how strong marriages are of couples using NFP versus those who don't. I'm not even talking about the logistics of charting itself. I am speaking about the underlying mentality that what we do to PLAN our FAMILY, or to PLAN ANYTHING, for that matter, matters at all in the grand scheme of things.



It's easy to forget, especially if NFP "works" for you (by measure of your own perception), that the 3rd party involved is not an equal party member, but The Big Kahuna Himself. It's easy to assume that by following the rules of NFP according to your desired intention (to space, avoid, or achieve pregnancy), you actually hold the ability to make

## **OR**

carry out that plan. It's easy to see the desired outcome make itself known and to then become all too comfortable in future "Planning" endeavors.

Let me just say this: My biggest problem with Natural Family Planning is that it is a misnomer, and as such, gives too many users and non-users alike the wrong impression of its application.

I've heard many an infertile woman lament that they could not "plan" their family. They did not "plan" for their Drs to see their lady business more frequently than their husbands, nor did they plan to do 14 treatment cycles and spend a gazillion dollars, nor did they plan to be 45 years old when they finally achieved pregnancy. And furthermore, I've heard many single women mourn the fact that they have not even the chance to "plan" in the sense of the word family planning, and that if it had been up to them, their family would have started with a spouse years and years ago.

But again, this is not exactly what I'm talking about.

Rather, I think that Family Planning in and of itself is UN-Natural. I think

*any*

planning which leads us to believe we are in control of the course of our life is dangerous, at best. Way too often, we see the culmination of the plans we set out for ourselves, in the way we desired, and then expect that same result in every arena, for every plan, and for every goal set in our lives. Likewise too often, we

*change*

our plans when they don't work out our way. For example, in infertility, often a couple will choose the path of adoption, and in doing so, are really just

*changing*

their Family Planning by setting the goal to adoption rather than pregnancy. Once an adoption occurs, we often hear it said that this was God's Plan all along... but was it? Don't get me wrong. I adore adoption, and wish with all of my heart I could plan my family in the same way. But the process to adopt is another brand of Family Planning which asks of the couple the same criteria as Natural Family Planning: a) to agree in their intention of use, b) to understand that the timing may not be exactly the same from couple to couple, and c) to be open to life.

It is in how we interpret these words Family and Planning, and their combination Family Planning which leads me to find them anything BUT Natural.

Right about now you're probably wondering... wait, didn't she say something about beauty and truth, and fruit and knowledge?? Was this the same post???



Yes. It was.

You may have heard the phrase: To err is human, to forgive, divine.

I say: To PLAN is human, to accept, divine.

We are going to plan. It's what we do. As unnatural as it might be, because in the end, it is not our plan for our lives that matters. But, we can't escape the planning mentality. Our years are broken into 12 months, and those into 7-day weeks, and those into 24-hour days. I imagine the human void of ANY type of planning whatsoever may either be a raging lunatic by the end of his lifetime, or a saint. Could go either way, really.

And so, we go with it. We plan. We succeed. We plan again. We succeed, maybe in a slightly different way than originally intended, but nonetheless, we succeed. We plan again. We...

FAIL?????!!!



Now, it is fully up to your understanding of God, and His presence in your life, and His plan that will make, or break you in this moment.

We cannot *only* accept God as the true planner in moments of success, NOR can we only accept His love and comfort in times of failure. We must recognize Him in both. We must understand that we can plan and plan and plan all the livelong day, and it makes not an iota of difference in our spiritual makeup or our final destination. Coming back to Natural Family Planning - we must also

understand that ***THERE IS NO SUCH THING.***

What I do every day at work, with couples learning this highly effective form of NFP, is listen, observe, and maybe impart some knowledge from time to time. Not unlike what my client couples do as they track the signs and symptoms of their fertility cycles: they listen to their bodies, observe the signs, and maybe impart some knowledge to each other about what is happening hormonally in those moments. But all of this, myself included, serves merely as tools to a deeper understanding for the couple who uses NFP. An understanding that they must approach it from that very first definition of the word "Natural"- *based on an inherent sense of right and wrong*. The understanding that it's not about Natural, it's not about Family, it's not about Planning. It's about LIFE. It's about GOD. It's about the things you cannot, could not, would *never* plan. It's about **ACCEPTANCE**.

Holy. Life. Acceptance. Now there's a "plan" I could get on board with :)

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This contribution is available at <http://www.thiscrossiembrace.blogspot.com/2013/01/unnatural-family-planning.html>  
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# The Rules for Loving Children [at Sue Elvis Writes]



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- Tell your children you love them. Tell them every day, every hour, every time you see them.
- Hug your children. Hug them every day. Hug them every hour. Hug them as often as possible. Hug your babies. Hug your toddlers. Hug your older children. Hug your young adults. No one ever gets too old for hugs.
- Let your children sit on your lap for great big hugs, even your older children.
- Never refuse an invitation to hug. Never say, “I’ll give you a hug later.” Put down whatever you are doing and hug straight-away. What is more important than showing a child you love them?
- Tell your children you love them again.
- Tell your children they are beautiful.
- Love everything about your children. Love their rainbow coloured hair. Love their choice of clothes. Love their ideas. Love who they are. They don’t have to be like you.

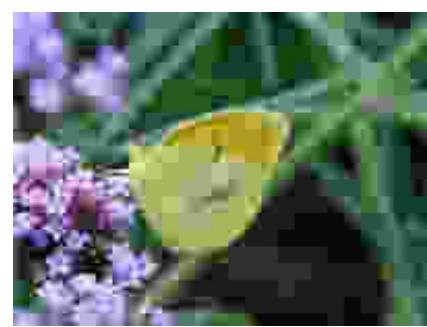
- Tell your children you love them yet again.
- Never use love as a carrot, as an incentive to strive onwards and upwards. The carrot will keep moving forward, just out of reach, and a child will eventually give up believing she is worthy of love. She will conclude she will never be good enough. Love shouldn't have to be earned.
- Ask your children who made them so beautiful, and teach them the answer: "God!"
- Show your children you love them by giving them your time, listening to them, accepting them just the way they are, and trusting them.
- Ask your children who loves them, and teach them the answer: "You and God!"
- Think about how much God loves us. There is no such thing as too much love. Love won't spoil a child.
- Love everyone. There is enough love to go around. The more we love, the more it grows.
- Think about how you want to be loved, and love in the same way.

Tell your children you love them. Make sure they know they are loved unconditionally. Then one day they will realise just how much God loves them. And they will strive onward and upward, wanting to be the people God intended them to be, not because they are following the elusive carrot of love, but because they **know** they are loved and want to love too.

Love is good. Love is the best gift we can give to our children.

Don't you feel the need for some love? I do. I'm now off to find someone to hug. Why don't you do the same?

But before you go, why don't you stop and share your own rules for loving children? I am sure my own list isn't complete.



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# Natural Family Planning... It's a beautiful thing [at This Captivating Love]

I realize that I have not really posted anything about this and I think it's time I should. For anyone that doesn't know Natural Family Planning is a method that helps women understand the way that their body works so that they can recognize signs of fertility and therefore make decisions accurately for family planning. This is not the rhythm method... oh, no it is not! It is scientifically based and it recognizes that all women are different and so are their cycles. It's kind of a beautiful thing.

When I first heard about NFP I just did not understand because I at the time did not know my body. All around me I saw girls using all different kinds of contraceptives with really no regard to what is happening inside of them. You see women are not fertile 24/7. In fact they really only have a window of hours to days when they can have sex and actually conceive a child. It amazes me that at one point I didn't know this and it continues to amaze me how many men and women still don't know this.

People have told me that birth control pills are just easier. You just take a pill and you are "good to go." Well, it probably would be easier to just pop a pill everyday and assume that the magical pill will take care of everything. But there is so much more to all of it. I'm not just talking about the actual act of conceiving a baby. I'm talking about morality.



My handsome husband and myself.

I have very concrete, straight forward, no-exceptions-to-the-rule beliefs that may not be... popular. I believe in love. I believe that giving yourself to someone in a sexual way binds you to them emotionally forever. I don't think that is something that can be undone. I believe that sex belongs in marriage and in marriage alone because it is the complete gift of yourself. Now, if you are completely giving yourself to your spouse then you don't need to "protect" yourself from anything. Your spouse is not taking anything from you, he/she is completely giving himself to you, too. All

giving, no taking. I'm not trying to be preachy, but this is what I ardently believe. And to be clear, I don't believe that people that contracept are damned to hell. I just don't believe that is how it is meant to be.

So as you can see BC and other forms of contraceptives were never an option for me and my sweet husband. However, we really did not know what our first year or so of marriage would look like financially with him still being a student, and it was not ideal for us to get pregnant right away. Plus, we had trouble figuring out where to put the dog kennel in our tiny one bedroom apartment. I think trying to fit a crib in would cause us to burst at the seams! ha ha! So we learned how to use NFP. We really want to have kids some day but up until now we have used NFP to avoid pregnancy successfully. And people said it couldn't be done!

The great news is that because we both know how my body works with regards to fertility when we are ready to start having children it will not take too long to achieve a pregnancy with NFP. Hopefully!

I realize I am far from eloquent and not the best with getting my point across so if anyone has any interest in learning about NFP you can always check out

[iusenfp.com](http://iusenfp.com)

. It was co-started by a close friend of mine and has some excellent information. It's pretty phenom! I am also a fan of

[1flesh](http://1flesh.com)

. It has some pretty awesome stories about NFP but its main focus is the negative side of contraceptives. And PS these are both secular sites. If you want something more religiously based Read Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body. It's so freaking awesome I could hardly wrap my mind around it! Or you can visit

[this](#)

site. Or you can talk to me! Just remember... not eloquent over here! ha

Spread the love, ya'll!

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This contribution is available at <http://thiscaptivatinglove.blogspot.com/2013/01/natural-family-planning-its-beautiful.html>  
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# Serving Up On the Altar [at Prints of Grace]



Those gathered for daily Mass this past Saturday morning, January 12, 2013, witnessed a beautiful sign of love and dedication to the Church in the chapel at

## [Little Sisters of the Poor](#)

. The priest who usually celebrates Mass there wasn't well enough to do it, so the 93 year-old priest who typically concelebrates with him and gives out Communion while sitting in a chair on the altar was asked if he would be up to doing it with help. Fr. Paul agreed, and our best friend and dearest brother in Christ John, was summoned to come up to assist him.

It was deeply moving to see a very elderly, devout priest sitting next to a young only just finished his first semester seminarian. John helped him find the right prayers, consecration, and blessings for the Mass. The lady sitting in front of Kevin and me said it was one of the most beautiful Masses she'd ever been to. Kevin and I definitely agreed.

At the conclusion, we clapped for Fr. Paul and thanked him for being willing to celebrate Mass for us when it took a good deal of effort for him to do so, even sitting down the whole time. As he slowly made his way back down the aisle with his walker (which of course has the standard two yellow tennis balls), he said that we should be thanking John.



Many people did come up to John after Mass to talk with him. The woman sitting in front of us asked Kevin if John's our brother, because she could tell we were proud of him. My husband ultimately said yes, with a little bit of explanation.

When he was home for Christmas break, John served at quite a few Masses, so we'd gotten used to seeing him up on the altar. It hit home that's where his ministry is going, and ours will

continue to be, at least in part, to love and support him on the journey—a blessing we are grateful to have.

It has always moved me deeply to see Fr. Paul up on the altar concelebrating Mass at the age of 93, bless his heart. There was hardly a dry eye in the place seeing him sitting up there with John seated at his side, helping him each step of the way.

Lord, thank You for the many ways that You speak to us through different circumstances as well as the sacraments of daily living. Amen.

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# Our Lady of Nicaragua (Our Lady of Cuapa) [at APPROVED APPARITIONS]



Bernardo Martinez was a very simple, middle-aged rancher with great humility. In the valley of Cuapa, Nicaragua, he took care of the small sacristy. From the time he was a young boy, he had done the cleaning in the chapel, opened doors for services, prepared for all celebrations, rang the bells and led the Rosary hours all without pay. Bernardo's grandmother had been very devout, and she taught him to have a great love for Our Holy Mother Mary, and the Rosary. Bernardo was very poor, owning a single calf and bathing in a nearby stream.

On two different nights in April of 1980, Bernardo had gone to the sacristy, where he found the lights turned on. Bernardo was sure some of the local women had left the lights on, and he had lightly scolded them.

Then, on the night of April 15, 1980, Bernardo saw the glow of the lights from the sacristy, and entered to turn them off. What he found instead, was not the sacristy lights on, but the statue of the Virgin Mary illuminated all by itself. Because of Bernardo's humility and simplicity, he thought that the statue lit up because Mary was mad at him for blaming some of the women for leaving the lights on.

Bernardo later said:

*"I thought The Holy Virgin, the Holy Mother, is angry with me because I have been quarreling with the people. I decided to ask their forgiveness because I was so moved at seeing Her so illuminated."*

*"After the public apology, I told all the people (who were there praying the Rosary) what I had seen (the illuminated statue). But I asked them to keep it secret. It was not so. The secret spread throughout all of Cuapa and I suffered due to this because some of them ridiculed me."*

The people continued to ridicule Bernardo, even his priest. People would ask if Mary was talking to him; the priest would ask him for news as if he was making fun; and then told him to pray to Mary and ask Her if there was anything she wanted from the people.

Bernardo *did* pray, but his prayer was:

*"Blessed Mother, please do not request anything of me. I have many problems in the church. Make your request known to some other person because I want to avoid any more problems. I have a great many now. I don't want any more."*

The man Mary had chosen to receive Her message exemplifies what the Gospels say we all should be: simple, childlike, humble, prayerful, and obedient. Bernardo Martinez was himself such a man.

On May 8, 1980, Bernardo had gone fishing. He was returning around 3 o'clock to go feed the animals, and then go to the chapel to pray the Rosary with the people at 5 o'clock. As he was going

on his way, he saw 2 lightening flashes. On the second flash, the Virgin Mary appeared to him. Here are his own words:

*"It looked like the statue of the Virgin of Fatima. I was immobile. I had no inclination to run, to yell, I felt no fear, I was surprised. I had thought and said: What am I seeing? Could it be the same statue of the Virgin that they brought and placed here for me? The statue from the chapel? Is it in order to play a joke on me because I said I saw it illuminated? Is it a trick? But no! I would have seen them carrying it. I then passed my hand over my face because I thought that what I saw was a dream. And I said, Could it be that I am asleep, but I have not tripped over anything."*

*"And when I removed my hands from my face, I saw that she had human skin and that her eyes moved and She blinked. I then said, in my thoughts, because I could not move my tongue I said: She is alive. She is not a statue. She is alive! My mind was the only thing that I could move. I felt like numb, my lower jaw stiff and my tongue as if asleep, everything immobilized, as I said, only the ideas moved in my head. I was in those thoughts when She extended Her arms --- like the Miraculous Medal which I never had seen, but which later was shown to me. She extended Her arms and from Her hands emanated rays of light stronger than the sun. She was... She rested up high and the rays that came from Her hands touched my breast. When she gave out Her light is when I became encouraged to speak, although somewhat stammering. I said to her: What is your name?"*

*"She answered me with the sweetest voice I have ever heard in any woman, not even in persons who speak softly. She answered me and said that Her name was Mary. I saw the way She moved Her lips. I then said: She is alive! She spoke! She has answered my question! I could see that we could enter into a conversation, that I could speak with Her. I asked her, then, where She came from. She told me with the same sweetness:*

***"I come from Heaven. I am the Mother of Jesus.*** At hearing this I immediately asked Her --- remembering what the priest had told me --- I asked Her: What is it you want? ***"I want the Rosary to be prayed everyday."***

*"I then interrupted and said to Her: Yes, we are praying it. --- The priest brought us the intentions of the San Francisco parish so that we would unite ourselves with them.*

**"She told me: I don't want it prayed only in the month of May. I want it to be prayed permanently, within the family, including the children old enough to understand; to be prayed at a set hour when there are no problems with the work in the home."**

**"She told me that the Lord does not like prayers we make in a rush or mechanically. Because of that She recommended praying of the Rosary with the reading of bible citations and that we put into practice the Word of God."**

**"When I heard this I thought and said, How is this? because I did not know the Rosary was biblical. That is why I asked Her and said, Where are the biblical citations?"**

**"She told me to look for them in the Bible and continued saying: "Love each other. Fulfill your obligations. Make peace. Don't ask our Lord for peace because if you do not make it there will be no peace. Renew the Five First Saturdays. You received many graces when all of you did this."**

**"Before the war we used to do this. --- We went to Confession and Communion every First Saturday of the month. --- But since the Lord already had freed us from the shedding of blood in Cuapa, we no longer continued this practice. Then She said:**

**"Nicaragua has suffered much since the earthquake. She is threatened with even more suffering. She will continue to suffer if you don't change. --- Pray! Pray, my son, the Rosary for all the world. Tell believers and non-believers that the world is threatened by grave dangers. I ask the Lord to appease His Justice, but if you don't change, you will hasten the arrival of a Third World War."**

**"After She had said these words, I understood that I had to say this to the people and I told her: "Lady, I don't want problems. I have many in the Church. Tell this to another person." She then told me:**

**"No, because Our Lord has selected you to give the message."**

After this first vision of Our Lady, there would be five more visions of Her, and one vision of an angel.

Not wanting any more problems or ridicule from the people, Bernardo kept the vision to himself, and began to avoid the area where the vision had occurred. He felt guilty for remaining silent, and felt as though he had a great weight upon him. On May 16, 1980, Bernardo was walking through a pasture on his way to take his calf to the river to water it. Once again he saw 2 lightning flashes, and Mary appeared before him:

*"I thought she had come to complain about all that she had told me to say. I felt guilty for not having spoken as she had asked and at the same time, in my mind, I said: "I don't go to the place where she appeared because she appears there, and now, she appears to me here. I will be in a fine state, she will be following me wherever I am." It was with this in mind, when she told me with a tone -- with her voice soft -- but with a tone as if in reprimand: "**Why have you not told what I sent you to tell?**" I then answered her: "Lady, it is that I am afraid. I am afraid of being the ridicule of the people, afraid that they will laugh at me, that they will not believe me. Those who will not believe this, will laugh at me. They will say that I am crazy." She then said to me: "**Do not be afraid. I am going to help you, and tell the priest.**" Saying this, there was another flash of lightning and she disappeared.*

Bernardo then told all the people who came to his house about his vision, and then he told the priest. The priest told him that what he had already seen he could tell the people, but if he had any more visions he was to tell no one but the priest.

On June 8, 1980 Bernardo had a night time appearance from Our Lady. She showed him 4 visions that Bernardo described as being like a movie in the sky. First, he saw a large group of people dressed in white, their bodies radiating light, singing and marching towards heaven. These were the first Christians. Second, he saw another large group of people (Dominicans), dressed in white with large luminous Rosaries in their hands. One of them carried a very large book. He read, then everyone silently meditated on the words, and then they all prayed the Our Father and ten Hail Marys

Mary told Bernardo:

***"They are the first ones to whom I gave the Rosary. That is the way that I want all of you to pray the Rosary."***

Bernardo then saw a third group all dressed in brown robes, apparently they were the Franciscans.

***"These received the Rosary from the hands of the first ones."***

The fourth group Bernardo saw was a very large group dressed in normal street clothes and all carrying Rosaries. Light radiated from all of their bodies, and their bodies were all beautiful. Bernardo told Mary he wanted to go with this last group because they were all dressed like he was.

Mary's reply to him was:

***"No! You are still lacking. You have to tell the people what you have seen and heard. I have shown you the glory of Our Lord and you people will acquire this if you are obedient to Our Lord, to the Lord's Word; if you persevere in praying the Holy Rosary and put into practice the Lord's Word."***

Bernardo wanted to tell everyone about this vision, but he obeyed his priest and told only him. This is always a true test of any apparition, and that is the obedience of the seer to the priests and bishops.

On July 8, 1980 an Angel appeared to Bernardo and foretold several events which shortly took place. One of those events was the murder of Bernardo's cousin which could have been prevented if he had listened to Bernardo's warnings.

On September 8, 1980, Mary appeared to Bernardo as a child of six or seven years old. Her message to him was the same as the first time and Bernardo asked Her if She wanted a church built in her honor, as one man had already given him 80 Cordobas for that purpose.

Mary told Bernardo:

**"No! The Lord does not want material churches, He wants living temples which are yourselves. Restore the sacred temple of the Lord. In you is the gratification for the Lord. Love each other. Love one another. Forgive each other. Make peace. Don't just ask for it, make peace. From this day on do not accept even one cent for anything. Always continue firmly in the catechism. Little by little you will comprehend all that the catechism signifies. As a community group meditate on the beatitudes, away from all the noise. I am not going to return on the 8th of October, but on the 13th."** (Note: October 13 is the Feast of Fatima.)

On October 13, 1980, Mary appeared to Bernardo at Cuapa for the final time. Bernardo and fifty people went to the site of the apparitions. They prayed the Rosary and sang "Holy Queen of Heaven" when suddenly Bernardo and the witnesses saw:

*...a big luminous circle formed over the ground. Everyone without a single exception saw it. It was like a single ray that fell and marked this luminous circle on the ground. The light came from above. The light that came was like a spotlight that on touching the ground was scattered. Seeing how this light fell over the heads of everyone who was there, I again looked upward and saw that a circle gave off lights in different colors, without coming from the sun. It was not at that spot as the sun was already setting.*

*A little girl, being held by the hand of her mother, tried to release her hand, telling her mother that the Lady was calling her. The mother held her even more firmly and did not let her move. The child's mother told me this herself after the apparition was over.*

*It was 3:00 in the afternoon. One could feel a small breeze that moved softly. Pleasant, like a fresh shower, but which did not wet us. While we observed this, we were silent and continued*

*seeing that circle of light which gave off colored lights from the exact center, where the sun is at twelve noon.*

*"All of a sudden a lightning flash, the same as the other times; then, a second one. I lowered my eyes and I saw the Lady."*

When Mary's form appeared Bernardo pleaded with Her to allow herself to be seen by the others for they didn't believe. Her face turned pale, and Her garments gray, and She began to cry. Bernardo began to cry too when he saw how this hurt her, and he began to apologize profusely. Mary told him:

***"It saddens me to see the hardness of those persons hearts. But you will have to pray for them so that they will change. Pray the Rosary. Meditate on the mysteries. Listen to the Word of God spoken in them. Love one another. Love each other. Forgive each other. Make peace. Don't ask for peace without making peace, because if you don't make it, it does no good to ask for it.***

***"Fulfill your obligations. Put into practice the world of God. Seek ways to please God. Serve your neighbor as that way you will please Him.***

***"They ask of me things that are unimportant. Ask for Faith in order to have the strength so that each can carry his own cross.***

***"The suffering of this world cannot be removed. That is the way life is. There are problems with the husband, with the wife, with the children, with the brothers. Talk, converse, so that problems will be resolved in peace. Do not turn to violence. Never turn to violence. Pray for faith in order that you will have patience.***

***"You will no longer see me in this place."***

Bernardo began to shout, begging "Don't leave us my Mother!"

Mary said:

**"Do not be grieved. I am with all of you even though you do not see me. I am the Mother of All you sinners."**

**"Love one another. Forgive each other. Make peace, because if you don't make it, there will be no peace. Do not turn to violence. Never turn to violence."**

**"Nicaragua has suffered a great deal since the earthquake, and will continue to suffer if all of you don't change. If you don't change you will hasten the coming of the Third World War."**

**"Pray, pray, my son, for all the world. Grave dangers threaten the world. The Mother never forgets Her children, and I have not forgotten what you suffer. I am the Mother of all of you sinners. Invoke me with these words."**

**"Holy Virgin, You are my Mother, the Mother to all of us sinners."**

With those words, Our Lady of Nicaragua left, and never again appeared in that place. Her message was complete...pray the Rosary, meditate on Christ's life, meditate on the Beatitudes, pray as a family, never rush or mechanically say prayers, make your own peace, and put the Word of God into practice daily.

Bernardo Martinez, that simple humble man who received these visions, continued to be the sacristan at his parish for awhile.

When the Bishop of Juigalpa, Bishop Pablo Antonio Vega, authorized him to reveal the miracle, and crowds of pilgrims began coming to Cuapa, the Sandinistas began to persecute Bernardo. They tried to bribe Bernardo with the offer of free farm land if he would say that the Virgin was Sandinista. He refused. They then launched a television and newspaper campaign calling Bernardo insane, hysterical, and hallucinatory. A woman began to follow him, and tried to seduce him, but he would not be swayed. The faithful who protected Bernardo discovered lurking photographers, and one morning defended him from Sandinista police who had invaded his house and tried to kidnap him.

To protect Bernardo, the Church brought him to a seminary where he devoted himself to gardening and took great joy in telling the seminarians about his visions.

In 1995. at the age of 64 years, Bernardo was himself ordained a priest in the Cathedral of León, Nicaragua. He would later celebrate the Mass of the Resurrection in this same cathedral.

Bernardo Martinez died as a holy priest in 2000.



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You may [click here](#) to read Bernardo Martinez's officiasl statement on the apparitions at Cuapa given to Bishop Mons. Pablo Antonia Vega, Prelate Bishop of Juigalpa.

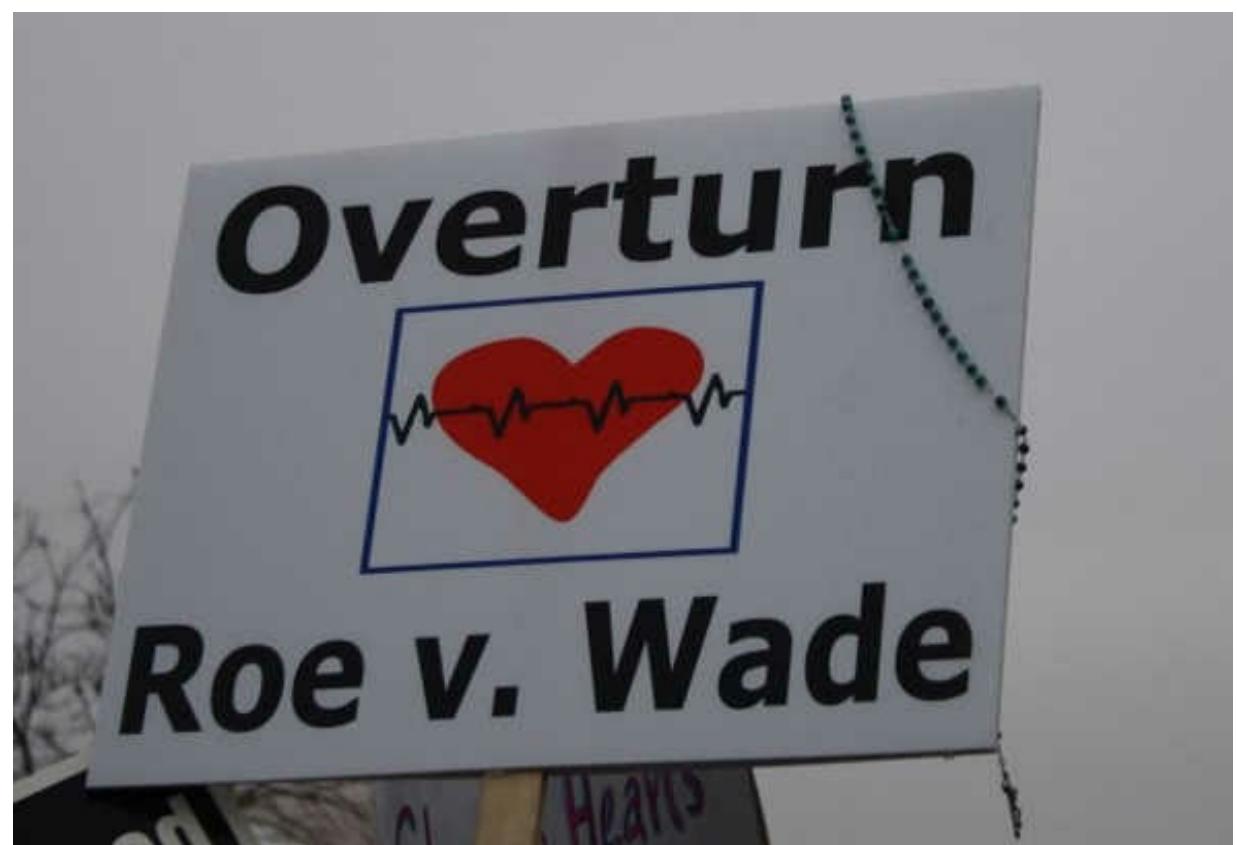
In 1982, both Bishop Bosco M. Vivas Robelo, Auxiliary Bishop and Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Managua and Bishop Pablo Antonio Vega M., Prelate Bishop of Juigalpa (the diocese where the apparitions took place) released statements positively affirming the apparitions.

You may read those by [\*\*clicking here\*\*](#).

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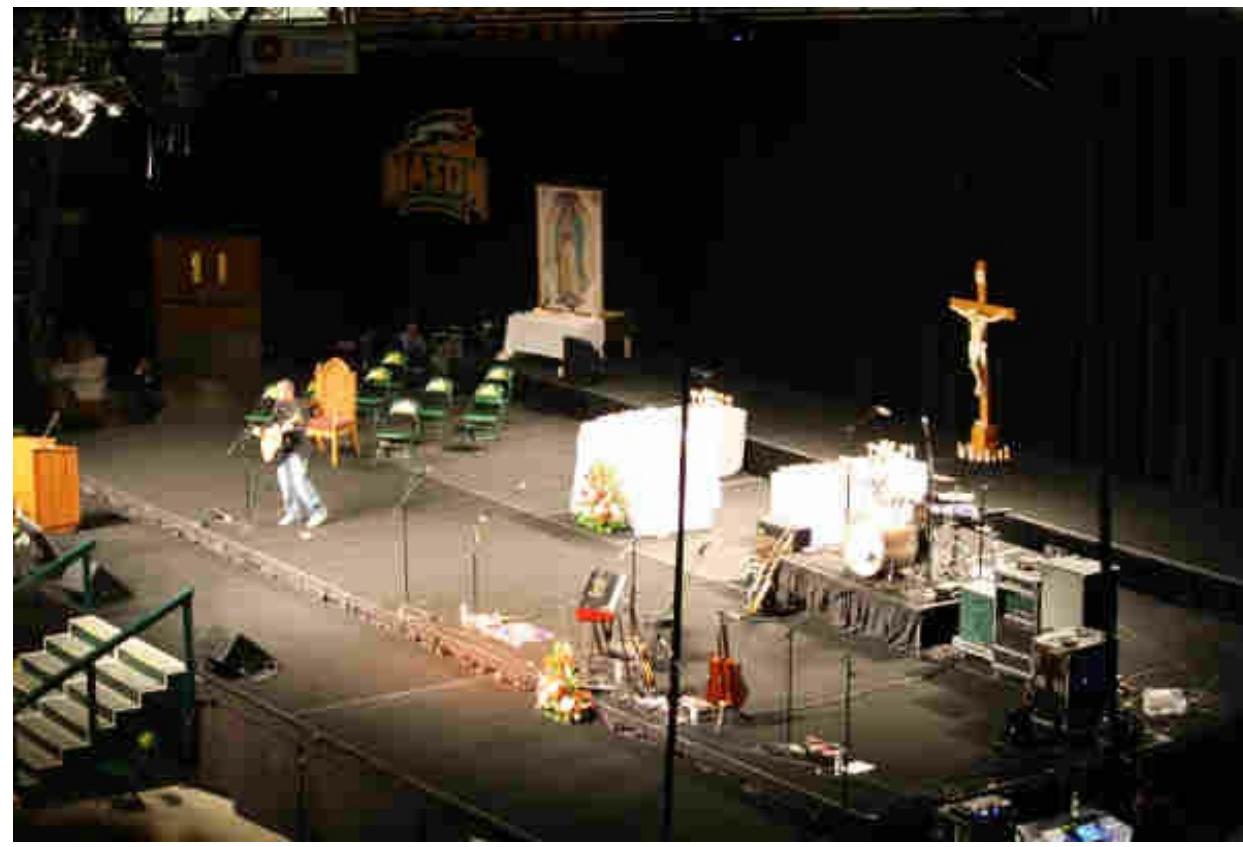


[The last time I went to the March for Life](#), I forgot my camera. I'm happy to say that this year, I brought it.

On Friday morning, Curly and I rose early, bundled up in long underwear and double the socks and layer upon layer of clothing, and headed to our church to board the bus with the youth group for the hour-long trip.

Our first stop was the Patriot Center on the campus of George Mason University in Fairfax, where the Arlington Diocese hosted a youth rally and Mass.

Let me pause and be honest here for just a moment. I was slightly bummed that we weren't going to THE Youth Rally, the one at the Verizon Center—where there would be priests and bishops and youth from ALL OVER the country. [Father Leo Patalinghug](#)—aka “The Cooking Priest”—was there in 2011. For two years I've had this fantasy of meeting him at this year's youth rally, maybe having him hear my confession, and striking up a conversation with him about food. Heck, even Cardinal Timothy Dolan was supposed to be there this year, darn it!!



Of course, THAT rally didn't have Steve Angrisano to emcee' the event, Matt Maher to provide wonderful music, or Elizabeth McClung to give an awesome motivational talk. (I saw snippets of the Verizon Center rally over the weekend on EWTN, and guess what? OUR rally had much better music. Ha.)

The best part of the Life Is Very Good youth rally: The Mass.







During his homily, Bishop Loverde showed everyone a model of what a baby looks like at about 32 weeks (I'm not sure of the exact number), which was right around the age he was when he was born prematurely. He told the story about how his parents tried to conceive for years, and doctors had told them they would never have children. When his mother became pregnant, her doctor didn't believe her at first. She had a difficult pregnancy and was put on bed rest, and she went into labor two months early. When he was born the doctors thought he wouldn't survive, but miraculously, he did.

He also wanted to show the kids that while we work so hard to nurture children born prematurely like he was, and are joyful when these babies survive and thrive, babies like this are being killed every day by abortion.

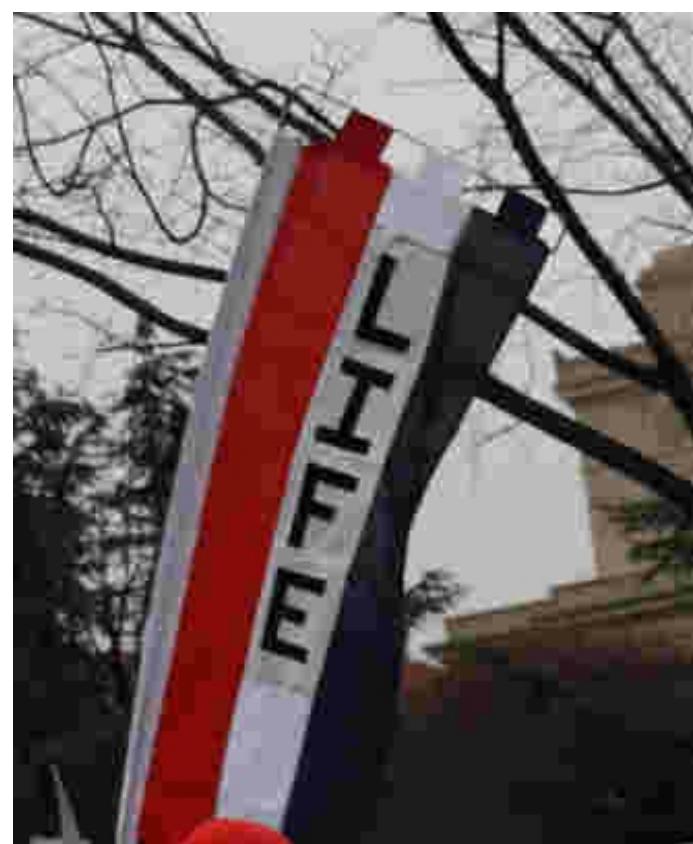
Next we headed to the Mall in Washington, just as they were finishing up the rally there. Soon it was time to march!



(During our brief time on the Mall, we ran into our old friend [Father Stefan!](#))







LIFE

CONGRESS SHALL MAKE NO LAW  
RESPECTING AN ESTABLISHMENT  
OF RELIGION - OR PROHIBITING  
THE FREE EXERCISE THEREOF  
OR ABRIDGING THE FREEDOM  
OF SPEECH, OR OF THE PRESS,  
OR THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE  
PEACEABLY TO ASSEMBLE, AND  
TO PETITION THE GOVERNMENT  
FOR A REDRESS OF GRIEVANCES



It was crowded. It was cold. It snowed. But just like the two other Marches for Life we have participated in, there was a spirit of prayer, unity, and even joy. We come from all over the country, from different faiths and traditions, and we all have different ways of expressing our support for Life. ([Read Simcha Fisher's article](#) about how the March for Life is a mishmash of faiths and personalities and prolife groups, not particularly organized; and even though we sometimes disagree on how to stop abortion, we are all marching for one purpose: To stand up for the most vulnerable in our society, the unborn.)

January 22, 1973 was a dark day in America, but every time I go to a March I have hope that one day we will march to celebrate the day abortion was abolished.



## About momn3boys

Don't let the title fool you. If you come to my house for a home-cooked meal, you will likely find one or all three of our boys shoveling their food down like, as my grandmother used to say, they were going to a fire. There is never a dull moment in my house, and my dear, sweet boys have driven me to the confessional more times than I can count. As for me, I'm a convert to the Catholic faith, teaching assistant, book lover, and racing fan. We love the outdoors, movies, food, Indy Car racing, and each other. I have an old, deaf, senile, infuriating, and loveable yellow Lab; and very unruly hair. You're always welcome in our home, but enter at your own risk. Especially the laundry room.

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This contribution is available at <http://eatingslowly.wordpress.com/2013/01/30/life-is-very-good-march-for-life-2013/>

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# The Woman of Revelation 12 [at Washed, Sanctified and Justified...]

Lutero said:

2 Roman Catholic scholars comment on Revelation 12 as being about Mary. As you will see the facts of Scriptures don't fit for it being about Mary. Raymond Brown and J.A. Fitzmyer, editors of the Jerome Biblical Commentary (2:482): "a woman: Most of the ancient commentators identified her with the Church; in the Middle Ages it was widely held that she represented Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Modern exegetes have generally adopted the older interpretation, with certain modifications. In recent years several Catholics have championed the Marian interpretation. Numerous contextual details, however, are ill-suited to such an explanation. For example, we are scarcely to think that Mary endured the worst of the pains of childbirth (v. 2), that she was pursued into the desert after the birth of her child (6, 13ff.), or, finally, that she was persecuted through her other children (v. 17). The emphasis on the persecution of the woman is really appropriate only if she represents the Church, which is presented throughout the book as oppressed by the forces of evil, yet protected by God. Furthermore, the image of a woman is common in ancient Oriental secular literature as well as in the Bible (e.g., [Is 50:1](#); [Jer 50:12](#)) as a symbol for a people, a nation, or a city. It is fitting, then, to see in this woman the People of God, the true Israel of the OT and NT."

One of the problems you have with your analysis is that none of the apostles teach what you claim. No apostle claims that Mary had a crown of 12 stars. The other problem is the to have pain in childbirth was part of the curse that God gave because of sin. Now if Mary was sinless then she would not have felt the pain of childbirth as verse 2 says.

My Response:

Lutero:

2 Roman Catholic scholars comment on Revelation 12 as being about Mary. As you will see the facts of Scriptures don't fit for it being about Mary. Raymond Brown and J.A. Fitzmyer, editors of the Jerome Biblical Commentary (2:482): "a woman: Most of the ancient commentators identified her with the Church;

Lutero, the key word here is "most". Most does not mean "all".

**in the Middle Ages it was widely held that she represented Mary, the Mother of Jesus.**

This statement is representative of the Protestant mindset of "either/or". The Catholic Church has never maintained that this is about either the Church or Mary. The Catholic Church has always known it is about Mary and about the Church and about Israel.

But the person whom it fits more closely and perfectly is Mary. Because Mary is a Woman and Mary is the Mother of Jesus Christ. And the Woman of Rev 12 fits that description perfectly.

**Modern exegetes have generally adopted the older interpretation, with certain modifications.**

**In recent years several Catholics have championed the Marian interpretation. Numerous contextual details, however, are ill-suited to such an explanation. For example, we are scarcely to think that Mary endured the worst of the pains of childbirth (v. 2),**

Anyone reading Rev 12 can see that the ideas represented there are symbolic. To what do the symbols of birth pains refer in the context of Mary? To the prophecy of Simeon:

Luke 2:35

(Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

to the fact that she would have to suffer the flight to Egypt to save her Son.

to the fact that she would have to suffer the sight of her Son being persecuted and killed by the Jews.

**that she was pursued into the desert after the birth of her child (6, 13ff.),**

She was. She had to flee to Egypt, Egypt is in a desert.

**or, finally, that she was persecuted through her other children (v. 17).**

Through her other Spiritual Children who would be martyred for the name of Christ:

Revelation 12:17

King James Version (KJV)

17 And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ

**The emphasis on the persecution of the woman is really appropriate only if she represents the Church, which is presented throughout the book as oppressed by the forces of evil, yet protected by God.**

Except for one thing. The Church did not give birth to Christ. The Church is the mother of Christians. But not of Christ. The most direct correlation to that aspect of the prophecy remains MARY OF NAZARETH, the Mother of God.

**Furthermore, the image of a woman is common in ancient Oriental secular literature as well as in the Bible (e.g., Is 50:1; Jer 50:12) as a symbol for a people, a nation, or a city. It is fitting, then, to see in this woman the People of God, the true Israel of the OT and NT.”**

And that is part of the interpretation of the Catholic Church. But the most explicit interpretation is that the Woman is Mary.

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This contribution is available at <http://washedsanctifiedandjustified.blogspot.com/2013/01/the-woman-of-revelation-12.html>

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## Youth Sports and Trophy Kids [at Sole Searching]

The very instant each one of our children is born, Steve rushes over to them, and through teary eyes counts fingers and toes, his instincts as protector and provider kicking in hard. Then, we lock eyes and laugh, as I wait for him to tease me about passing on my distinctly bent toes to our sons. Yep, some of them do have bent toes, and crooked ears, but I'm not sure which ancestor to thank for those precious ears!

And, that's the story for so many of us. From conception and throughout life we want what is best for our children - for them to be healthy, happy and whole. To be shielded from suffering, difficulty, short-comings and failures, bent toes and crooked ears.

Sometimes we even want more for them than to just be *their best self*. We want them to be *the best*. Period.

Internally we're measuring ours against "theirs", we may not say it, but we are. We are a comparative society, it's etched in our beings. First, we ask ourselves if our babies are rolling over, crawling and walking according to schedule. Then pretty soon, it's can they sing the alphabet? Because the neighbor kids can. And, finally, are they top of the class, top of the team and on top of the world? Because, it sure seems like all the other kids are.

And if our kids are.....then we are too.

True?



My oldest son, Benedict, would never admit to this (because he's getting to be a "big guy"), but he knows I'm absolutely crazy about him. I know he's not totally annoyed by me since he still hugs me, and thanks me for making supper every night and opens the car door for me when we go places. Every day, I get to savor his goodness, feel the warmth of his innocent smile, listen to his humble insights on life and watch him grow into his true self with each passing day. God has given him countless undeniable gifts.



At the ripe old age of 10, he wants to be a hoop star. Master and commander of the court. But, he's not. And, he knows it. Steve and I decided early on to take an encouraging, yet laid-back approach to sports (our number one rule is to **JUST HAVE FUN**). Since, both of us love sports, it's a lot of fun to watch our boys' own enthusiasm for athletics grow. Yet, sometimes it's difficult to watch the kids put pressure on themselves because they want to be as good or better than everyone else.



It doesn't matter if he's good at about a thousand other things, it's basketball that he wants to be ~~good~~ great at. I try to take his enthusiasm seriously but my ancient wisdom knows he has so much time, room and potential to grow. All I can remember about my first years of basketball was dribbling the ball off of my big bent toe and shooting at the wrong basket - and he's already better than that, so what's there to sweat about??



Children's abilities change as they grow. And, although after experiencing a season of personal disappointments, we tried to reassure Ben that he has a lot of time to grow in the sport, and that he shouldn't give up. But, we could tell he was questioning our advice. So, we broke out the reinforcements - Dairy Queen and story time. Steve shared with him the story of when Michael Jordan tried out for his high school basketball team and didn't make it. Yet, in spite of that singular disappointment, he went on to become an NBA Legend.

Then, I chimed in with the a little factoid of my own - Mariah Carey was voted off of the Gong Show, but still became a singing legend. I gained ZERO respect with that little reflection, and my son stared at me with a look that expressed utter confusion, and "Are you serious, Mom?," and "Just let dad tell the stories" all contorted into one. Thank goodness I had a large oreo mint blizzard there to ease the rejection. But, I shook it off and made a secret plan to brush up on my college and NBA athlete stats and facts between now and next season. I might even watch a game or two. *Might.*

Have you known the experience of practicing something over and over and over with your child - musical instruments or spelling words or sports and then, when it's time for your little star to shine, they bonk? Totally bonk? And, in that moment, when the child runs left when he's supposed to go right, sings a solo during the rests and scores below average on those "all important" state assessment tests, the heat of pride rises to the cheeks, beads of sweat break out and all you can do is try to keep it together - for your child's sake and for your own. I mean heaven forbid that our

children should miss the mark, or worse yet, make us look like **we** missed the mark in teaching them how to sink a 3 at the buzzer or sing the National Anthem like Celine Dion, or memorize their states and capitals in alphabetical order, inside out and backwards.



It's NOT easy to separate our kids' success from our own desire to feel successful as teachers and parents. I know this, because **I FEEL IT TOO!** Their performance, good behavior and personal achievements reflect back on us, and when they're good, we feel good. But when their behavior is bad, or their scores are low we feel embarrassed? Disappointed? Frustrated? Determined to fix it all up into something neat and shiny - like a trophy - a trophy child???

This is where the deep down gutsy love of parenting comes in. A love that desires what is best for the other. A love that desires for our kids to shine, but is not self-seeking or self-absorbed, or self-fulfilling. This kind of love is NOT the sunshine, rainbows and unicorns kind of fluff. (I'm thinking of those moms who sob all over their daughters when they get voted off of American Idol, reassuring them that they are the best singer in the universe. Then they turn around and yell explicatives at the judges. Puke.). Nor, is it the "tough-love" that is so tough all it can do is focus on making the kid work harder and practice longer, thinking that one day they will "thank you for it."



Real love wants what is best for another. Real love for Benedict and his current journey in athletics does not involve my own personal passion for success, it involves my passion for the soul of the child. A soul that needs to be nurtured with encouragement, not pressured with unrealistic expectations, delighted in, not disappointed with, free to be himself, not forced to be a superstar.

It is a lonely feeling for our children, for any of us for that matter, to go through life believing the lie that our only value and worth is in what we do, and how well we do it, and not in *who we are as dignified persons made in the image and likeness of Christ*.

As parents WE **ARE NOT GIFTED WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY OF RAISING OUR BEAUTIFUL CHILDREN SO AS TO MEND OUR OWN PERSONAL FAILURES AND SHORTCOMINGS THROUGH THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS AND SUCCESS.**

Sadly, I can't help but observe this tragedy all around me, as parents berate their little children at athletic events and academic competitions as if the five-year old carries the weight of the world and all the happiness of its inhabitants on their shoulders.

# **IT'S NOTHING LESS THAN SHEER INSANITY!!!**

How can we teach our children to enjoy the freedom that comes from experiencing a hobby, interest or sport without that enjoyment hinging upon being the best, better than the rest?? Where's the life or liberty in that?



My hope for Benedict is that he will continue pursuing his passion for basketball. And, one day as an adult, look back and decide ~~two~~ three things:

- 1.** He still loves the game, whether playing it or watching it.
- 2.** The experience of practicing and playing the game was worth every sacrifice, because he's a man of character, hard working, dedicated and free - free to play the game because it's fun, not because he's the best or the worst.
- 3.** Bent toes are cool.



# Do Christians idolize virginity? [at Arleen Spenceley]

In a post today on Rachel Held Evans's fabulous blog (1), she posed the following questions:

I feel compelled to respond.

**Whether the Christian culture idolizes virginity depends entirely on your definition of "the Christian culture."**

I am reminded of the book

*The Purity Myth*

by Jessica Valenti (2), which I read in 2012. In it, Valenti decries what she interchangeably refers to as "the purity myth" and "the virginity movement," for maintaining the myths that men are uncontrollably interested in sex and women aren't interested at all, for shaming women who have sex outside of wedlock, and for fostering hierarchical relationships (in which men have authority and women submit to them).

Like Valenti, I neither believe that men can't control themselves nor that women don't have sex drives.

I am opposed to shaming people who have nonmarital sex.

I am

so

opposed to hierarchical relationships that I had to stop reading blogs by the people who are for 'em, for the sake of my health (I'm lookin' at you, Tim Challies.).

But I'm also a 27-year-old virgin.

Who sometimes speaks to youth groups about saving sex.

Who won't date guys who can't handle no sex until marriage.

I don't save sex because I will be "impure" if I don't. I save sex because I believe saving sex aligns with love like Jesus defines it.

And because "in not knowing what I'm doing [on my wedding night], I can express confidence in my spouse's commitment to me. In not knowing what to expect, I can infuse my vows with authenticity."

And because the pursuit of premarital sexual compatibility is at the expense of something more valuable. Because "maybe it's to a relationship's disadvantage to pick a partner with whom you're effortlessly sexually compatible over a partner who is willing to work through conflict. Maybe we do each other a disservice when we search for consistently gratifying sex but avoid opportunities to become people who can communicate when it isn't. Maybe how willing we are to practice and communicate, and to be uncomfortable and vulnerable in sex [i.e., on the wedding night, if you haven't slept yet with the guy or the girl you just married] predicts how willing we'll be to do those things in other parts of a relationship."

Valenti reserves the right to define "the purity myth" and the "virginity movement" however she wants. But in the book, she did it with disregard for shades of gray. The truth is this isn't always either/or. It can be both/and. I both am a proponent of chastity (and therefore of abstinence until marriage)

*and*

agree that most of what Valenti decries in the book

*should*

be decried (I decry it myself!).

All of that is to say this:

If you define "the Christian culture" the way Valenti defines "the purity myth," then the Christian culture puts virgins on a pedestal. It says "Girls have to cover up so boys don't objectify them," which implies it's the woman's fault if she stumbles,

*and*

it's the woman's fault if

*he*

stumbles. It perpetuates the maintenance of gender roles at the expense of authenticity. It always says you're "good" until you've had sex, and never says you are still good afterward.

But is that Christian culture the same one that walks the narrow road?

**I have a hunch it isn't.**

Which brings us to RHE's second question: How should our narratives change (presumably in order that they won't perpetuate Valenti's purity myth), particularly as they concern women?

**We must include men.**

The "Christian culture" - as implicitly defined by the bloggers RHE quoted in today's post - takes the onus for upholding purity and puts it on women. Women have to cover up so men don't sin. Women have to be virgins for their fathers first, and then for their husbands. The result is stuff like the kind but frustrating emails I get in which fans of my work write they wish more women lived like I do, that if all women were chaste the world would be a better place.

As if men have no influence on the state of the world.

### **We must talk more about sex.**

People who host purity balls, or call sexually experienced single people "damaged goods," routinely say "don't have sex until you're married" but provide few reasons other than "God says so." They say "don't have sex until you're married" and never talk about sex. But is sex what sex is in our culture because kids got too much accurate information about it?

### **And we must be explicit.**

The world doesn't get to define chastity. I get to define chastity. (Technically, the Catholic Church gets to define it, and I get to borrow its definition. But you catch my drift.) And I have to define it explicitly. The chastity Valenti describes is not the chastity I practice. If I keep my mouth shut about the difference, then I say "I practice chastity" and a lot of people hear "I promote rigid gender roles." The result, when we aren't explicit, is a world (plus a segment of the church) that thinks "Christian culture" is a culture that damages women.

If that is "Christian culture," I frankly want no part.

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1. Click

[here](#)

to read the post on RHE's blog.

2. Click

[here](#)

to read what I wrote last year about

*The Purity Myth*

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# The Umbrella of the LORD [at Smaller Manhattans]



*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.*

Living in the modern, woodsy, and temperate South Carolina Upstate, the kids in Wednesday Night Sunday School don't grasp the Biblical concept of overshadowing right away. To them, overshadowing sounds dark and threatening, like a thundercloud. In prior years, I'd explain that people living in a hot, arid land would regard being overshadowed as a

*good*

thing, as in "made in the shade." I might use this example from my Yucatan honeymoon: at Chichen Itza, the sun was so brutal that I hid under a tree at every opportunity. I moved from shade-to-shade as much as possible.

But this year I got a volunteer to come stand in front of me. He acted out my description of being uncovered in the desert, and the sun burning him to a crisp: "Your lips are blistered and cracked, your head feels like it's on fire, you can barely open your eyes, you're cooking to death...what do you need?"

*Water!*

No, you have water. Class, will water keep him alive 'til sundown?

*No!*

What does he need?

*Shade!*

Yes! He needs...(I reach into my canvas bag)...

*an umbrella!*

Yes!" I open it over the wilting child. "How's that?

*Good!*

Well don't just stand there, show us...there ya go, so cool, so nice...think you'll live now?

*Yes!*

Y'all tell me what people want at the beach.

*A beach umbrella!*

Yes. When it's hot and sunny, being

*overshadowed*

is

*gooood*

- got it?

*Yes!*

OK. Now volunteer, would you like to shade yourself with my umbrella?

*Yes!*

Well, you can't have it, it's mine. I can decide to overshadow you or not; and you can decide if you're going to stay in my shade or not. So if I start to move...

*I move too!*

Yes. But I don't force you, because you have

*...free will!*

Yes- we both

*agree*

that you'll be protected by my umbrella."

This year I thought of the umbrella only in time for the Annunciation. Next year I'll use it as soon as we cover Exodus, and discuss the Shekhinah overshadowing the Meeting Tent.

Speaking of Exodus, the Hebrew Old Testament does not have a directly-equivalent word for *episkiazo*, ἐπισκιάζω

the Greek verb we translate as

*overshadow*

. Hebrew instead has a few basic verbs such as

*sakak*

and

*kasah*,

which fundamentally mean "to cover."

Context often suggests specific meanings such as block, screen, protect, defend, enclose, and overshadow.

Centuries after Exodus was written down, the Hellenic Jewish scholars of Alexandria translated the Hebrew scriptures into Greek: the Septuagint. When they translated verbs such as

*sakak* סָקַךְ

and

*kasah* נִסַּחַ

into the word-rich Greek language, they didn't say "to cover" every time. So to understand the Biblical idea of overshadowing involves looking at how the

*concept*

of covering is used in a

*spiritual*

sense in the Old Testament, regardless of the particular verb used in each case. What follows is a representative, but hardly exhaustive list of examples.

Ex 24:15: Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of

the LORD settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days; and on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud.

Num 16:42 And when the congregation had assembled against Moses and against Aaron, they turned toward the tent of meeting; and behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared.

Ex 40:3 And you shall put in it the ark of the testimony, and you shall screen the ark with the veil.

Ex 25:20 The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be.

That is, the LORD's cloud covers the Meeting Tent; the Meeting Tent covers the Sanctuary; the veil screens off the Holy of Holies; the cherubim overshadow the Mercy Seat. Four degrees of covering which define increasingly-exclusive access. Ultimately only one person, the High Priest, is allowed access to the Mercy Seat.

Some charming and affectionate expressions of being protected by the LORD's overshadowing wings:

Ps 17:8 Keep me as the apple of the eye; hide me in the shadow of thy wings

Ps 36:7 The children of men take refuge in the shadow of thy wings.

Ps 91:4 ...he will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge.



*The tree overshadows the mother; the mother overshadows her children*

A few more coverings:

1Kings 19:19 So [Elijah] departed from there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing, with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and

*cast his mantle*

upon him. (Elijah selects Elisha to be his protege and successor.)

Nahum 2:5 The officers are summoned, they stumble as they go, they hasten to the wall, the

*mantlet*

(cover) is set up. (A

*mantlet,*

literally a small mantle or cloak, is a military term for a protective screen or shield. For example, a tank typically has an armored mantlet,

which covers the opening through which its gun protrudes.)

Ruth 3:9 I am Ruth, your maidservant;

*spread your wing*

(i.e., cloak) over your maidservant, for you are next of kin. (Ruth wants Boaz to marry her.)

Those should be enough examples to give you a spiritual sense of covering: selection, separation, protection, dedication. The umbrella does a good job of physically showing kids these characteristics, especially separation. That is, let's say that as a husband I will put one woman, my wife, under my umbrella. She does not get rained on; and I shelter no-one else. My overshadowing is not

*in*

clusive, it's

*ex*

clusive. And if I collapse the umbrella, she'll get wet. There's no spiritual dimension to it- but

suppose there were?

Let's focus a bit on the matrimonial aspects of covering. We'll start with Elijah cloaking Elisha. True, they aren't getting married, but this is going to be a covenantal relationship regardless. Elijah physically and symbolically shows that he has selected Elisha; he will protect Elisha; Elisha is separated from his family; Elisha is dedicated to a new purpose. Why is this so? Because by covering Elisha with his mantle, and Elisha 'accepting the mantle,' Elijah echoes aspects of the Jewish marriage rite.

Y'all are probably familiar with the Jewish prayer shawl, the

*tallit:*



You can see how this man covers himself

,

using his tallit to create his own private, separate, exclusive Meeting Tent. Suppose he were to admit someone else under his tent, could that matter? Indeed it could.

Here's a Jewish man admitting someone else into his tent, spreading his wings over her:



Of course they are getting married.

The husband shows that his wife is, that's right, selected, separated, protected, and dedicated by covering her with his tallit. And she shows her acceptance by freely choosing to abide under his wing. By the way, the tallit may also be used to cover the wedding couple, as a tent once covered Abraham and Sarah. The tent covers the couple, the husband covers the wife; once again, a hierarchy of access:



*Yes, those are hockey sticks supporting the chuppah, the canopy.*

Boaz understood that Ruth wanted him to marry her; and while spreading his wing over Ruth on a threshing floor would not make a marriage, it would most definitely indicate a commitment to wed. Did Boaz spread his wing over Ruth? Go find out on your own.

And likewise anyone who saw Elijah cover Elisha understood it was no ephemeral gesture.

Here's one more covering verse for you:

Acts 5:15 [T]hey brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.

We understand from context that Peter's shadow would heal those upon whom it fell. But after Peter had passed, and the afflicted were no longer overshadowed, would they become blind, lame, leprosy-ravaged again? Of course not: the consequences of Peter's overshadowing were permanent.

Suppose the Meeting Tent veils were pulled back; or the Shekhinah, the Glory Cloud, had shifted overhead; or the Tent wasn't pitched yet; or the cherubim weren't poised over the Ark; would any of that have allowed access to the Mercy Seat by anyone less than the High Priest? Of course not: access to the Ark was permanently exclusive, and the Ark itself was permanently reserved for God's Stuff, as we say in Catechism class.

And when Elijah put his mantle back on his own shoulders- was Elisha free to go back to his family and farm, get married, have kids? Again, of course not. The consequence of being covered by Elijah's mantle was permanent.

How about at a wedding? The husband must eventually put away his tallit, remove it from his wife's shoulders. Is his wife still selected, protected, separated, dedicated? Yes. Her status is permanent.

And the

*chuppah*,

the canopy- does God cease to cover the marriage when the tent comes down? Of course not.

Now back to the opening verse

from Luke 1: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God." That is, Mary was selected, protected, separated, and dedicated by God Himself, and Mary agreed to it. After the child was born, was Mary's overshadowed status canceled? Was Mary free to enjoy a life of marital intimacy with Joseph, having more children? The New Ark, once containing not merely God's Stuff, but God Himself, now suitable for holding...regular stuff?

Of course not: as a consequence of being overshadowed by God, Mary's virginal status was permanent. More permanent than even a marriage vow, or the healings worked through Peter's passing shadow:

*ever-virgin*

My umbrella eventually has to close; God's doesn't.

*Credit to the San Miguel News for the chuppah; and Henry Owassa Tanner for his Annunciation.*

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This contribution is available at <http://platytera.blogspot.com/2013/01/the-umbrella-of-lord.html>  
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# Why We Dont Use Contraception: Natural Family Planning (NFP) [at Savor His Goodness]

Yes, you read that title right! My husband and I do not use contraception. I have been debating writing about such a personal topic on my blog for months, but God has finally opened my heart to writing about this.

Many people know that the Catholic Church teaches against the use of contraception in marriage.

Sadly, few Catholics follow this teaching. The church advocates Natural Family Planning (NFP) as the only acceptable method of family planning, but there are a lot of misconceptions about what it actually is. It is not the rhythm method, as many people think, but a scientific, evidence-based method of observing signs from a woman's body and recording them on a chart to determine when she is fertile or infertile, and using those times to either achieve or postpone pregnancy.

I want to share our experience of switching from contraception to NFP both because it has brought abundant joy to our marriage and because it was through hearing and reading about other couples' stories that we prayerfully decided to make the switch. I'll be honest and say that I feel really vulnerable writing about this on the internet for anyone to read, but if this encourages even one woman to decide to use NFP, it will be so worth it.

**Surprisingly, Thomas and I never learned about NFP at our Catholic high school.** The first time we learned about it was at our marriage preparation retreat. They didn't teach us how to use the method, but we heard a couple speak about their experience and how beneficial it was for their marriage. Their love for each other was so evident we could just feel it in the room, and their excitement about NFP was contagious. I have to say, we were both interested and intrigued.

But. They were young. And they already had five children. They said all their children were planned through using NFP and that they wanted a large family, but I felt like they were just saying that to convince everyone to use it. I brushed it off as ineffective and outdated.

I didn't know anyone using NFP who could offer me guidance, and I made so many excuses to not use NFP in our marriage. I figured everyone I knew was using contraception, so it wasn't that big of a deal if I used it too. I was scared, and I was especially worried about having a baby in grad school. I talked to my family physician, who brushed off my inquiry about NFP, gave me a trial pack of birth control three months before our wedding, told me to come back when I needed more, and sent me off on my merry way. I finally settled on the fact that I would have to use the pill until I got done with graduate school, and then I would use NFP after graduating. I felt guilty about it, but I also (selfishly) felt like I had to do what I needed to do for myself to get me through school.



God did not give up on us, and he kept tugging on my heart. I can't say there was one big moment that made us decide to use NFP, but rather an increasing awareness of its effectiveness and the benefits for women and marriage. I also felt increasingly uncomfortable taking medication with so many side effects and health risks when I was perfectly healthy. I started reading Catholic blogs and found out about many women who use NFP. Women like [Katie](#), who is married and in medical school, and who I greatly admire for the way she promotes NFP. Women like our NFP instructor, who we met through our Bible Study at church, another young, married woman who also had no children. I started to think that maybe NFP is a healthy and effective method if you need to wait to have children.

We met with the instructor at our church just to learn about it and get some introductory information. Thomas and I were both absolutely blown away. We learned more information about our bodies, reproduction, and a woman's cycle than we ever did from sexual health lessons in school. Just from that one class. After that, I started reading every single bit of information I could find on NFP and on the church's teaching about birth control and sexuality.

Thanks be to God we stopped using contraception almost a year ago, and have been using NFP since then. Making that decision has been the single best thing that has happened in our relationship. Because we have found this to be so positive, I want to share with you some information and benefits. I am going to do my best to give health, secular, and environmental

reasons, as well as religious and moral reasons for why we stopped using contraception.

**1. Natural Family Planning IS effective if you are trying to postpone pregnancy.** It is not the rhythm method. Like I said above, it is a scientific method that uses the signs of a woman's body to determine when she is fertile. We use the [Creighton Model](#), which has a [use effectiveness](#) (not method effectiveness) of [96.8%](#) in your first year of use, and it only continues to become more effective as you become more confident and aware of the signs from your body. Compare that to other types which have a use effectiveness between [91-99%](#). Condoms? Only [82%](#) effective.

**2. There are NO side effects to NFP!** Hallelujah! Have you looked at the list of side effects and possible health complications on the information sheet from the pill box? Many women have experienced a lot of those side effects from taking the pill. Thankfully, NFP is completely natural, so I don't have to worry about any of those awful side effects.

**3. There are no health risks involved with NFP!** Did you know that birth control pills are rated by the CDC as a [type 1 carcinogen](#) (along with tobacco, asbestos, and arsenic)? Women have an [increased risk of breast cancer](#) until up to ten years after discontinuing the use of birth control pills. Also, after using the pill for ten years, a woman's [risk of cervical cancer is doubled](#). And we were just learning in one of my classes about how oral contraceptives [increase a woman's risk of stroke](#). You've also all heard the commercials that list death as a possible side effect. That is all scary. Very scary.

Furthermore, unlike men, who are fertile 24/7, women are only able to get pregnant about five days out of their cycle. Why should we women be subjected to medicine that comes with a slew of side effects and health risks, to the point of potentially dying, when our fertility is limited?

Being free from all that? An extremely good feeling!



- 4. NFP is completely natural, and it takes advantage of a woman's normal body functions,** whereas birth control pills, IUDs, the patch, etc. act to stop the normal functioning of the body. With NFP there are no hormones, no devices inserted into your body, and no tricking your body into thinking it's pregnant. Again, why should we use something that messes with our bodies when they are healthy and functioning normally?
- 5. I feel empowered through using NFP** because it is a comprehensive way of monitoring my reproductive health every day. I know SO much more about my body from using NFP. Just from charting my cycles, I know that I potentially have issues with my levels of progesterone which could increase my risk of having a miscarriage when I become pregnant. Having that knowledge is so powerful, and will impact my ability to seek help before or when that happens.
- 6. NFP gives solutions to women's reproductive health issues.** Unfortunately, many women are prescribed birth control pills to regulate their cycles or deal with other reproductive health issues. While it might eliminate their symptoms, all it is doing is masking the problem, not fixing the underlying cause of the problem. There is a health science called [NaPro Technology](#) that looks at a woman's cycles from her NFP charts, and doctors can give solutions to the problems she is facing, rather than just give her medicine that covers up the symptoms. Along with that, if a woman develops an issue, say for example ovarian cysts, while she is on birth control, her issues will be covered up and she may not find out about the cysts until there is a significant amount of damage.
- 7. NFP is environmentally friendly,** unlike the [pill](#), which has been causing a lot of issues with

the water supply and fish.

**8. NFP is either FREE or inexpensive depending on what method you choose to use.** With our method, we had an upfront cost, and it was \$30 per session with our NFP instructor. We've had about five meetings with her so far, but now that we know the method there is really no need to meet with her, but we are always able to email her with questions. However, if you can't afford to pay for it, your instructor will work it out with you.

**9. NFP can be used to achieve pregnancy, as well as postpone pregnancy.** If you decide one month you want to try to get pregnant, you can tell from your chart when you are ovulating and aim for that time to try to conceive. If you decide one month you want to postpone pregnancy and your circumstances change the next month and you want to try to have a baby, you can easily start trying without having to wait for hormonal effects to wear off!

**10. Contraception has the ability to abort an unborn child.** The pill typically works by tricking your body into thinking it is pregnant. However, if you happen to conceive while on the pill, the pill can act as an abortifacient through [thinning the lining of the uterus](#) so that the fertilized egg can't implant. IUD devices also act as abortifacients because they make the lining of the uterus inhospitable to implantation, so that when the egg and sperm join, they cannot implant. Don't believe me? Read the information sheet from [Paraguard](#) ("Possible mechanisms...include interference with sperm transport or fertilization, and prevention of implantation.") or the information from [Mirena](#) ("There is no single explanation for how Mirena works. Mirena may...make the lining of your uterus thin"). Essentially **every single type of birth control** has the [ability to abort your conceived child](#). If you believe that life begins at conception, you may have a huge issue with this because the life of the conceived child is ended when the fertilized egg cannot implant in the uterus. For me personally, it is so deeply upsetting to think that we could have killed an innocent child through using the pill.

**11. I absolutely believe in the church's teaching that unification and procreation should not be separated in the marital act.** The church does not say that every act of intercourse should be aimed at trying to get pregnant, but every act should be ordered to procreation (as in barrier free) and open to life.

Furthermore, the church really wants all married couples to have the most fulfilling relationship possible, one that mirrors God's immense love for us. Husbands are called to love their wives as Christ loves the church (Ephesians 5:25). We can see the qualities of Christ's love in this excerpt from Christopher West's Book "Theology of the Body for Beginners:"

*"But if "bodily love" is meant to express "the language of 'agape'" (TOB 92:7), we must properly understand this language. Christ's love seems distinguishable by four particular*

*qualities. First, Christ gives his body **freely** ("No one takes my life from me, I lay it down of my own accord," John 10:18). Second, he gives his body **totally** - without reservation, condition, or selfish calculation ("He loved them to the last," John 13:1). Third, he gives his body **faithfully** ("I am with you always," Matthew 28:20). And fourth, he gives his body **fruitfully** ("I came that they may have life," John 10:10). If men and women are to avoid the pitfalls of counterfeit love, and live their vocation to its full, their union must express the same free, total, faithful, fruitful love that Christ's body expresses" (page 89).*



**The two of us have become so much more open to life** because we talk about our intentions for a family, pray about God's will for us, and try to discern if our reasons are severe enough to wait to have a child (the Catholic Church teaches you should only postpone pregnancy if you have severe reasons, whether financial, physical, psychological, etc.). Using NFP has opened the door to constant communication about God's will for us and our family because we are both involved in using NFP – I observe during the day, Thomas writes the information in our chart at night, and we both interpret the results together, so we literally talk about it every single day. Our instructor asks us to rate how we would respond if we were pregnant every time we meet with her, and it's been funny to see how our answers have gradually changed from not very accepting to very accepting. We have come to see children as a precious gift from God that will only *change* our life circumstances, rather than a burden that will *ruin* our life circumstances.

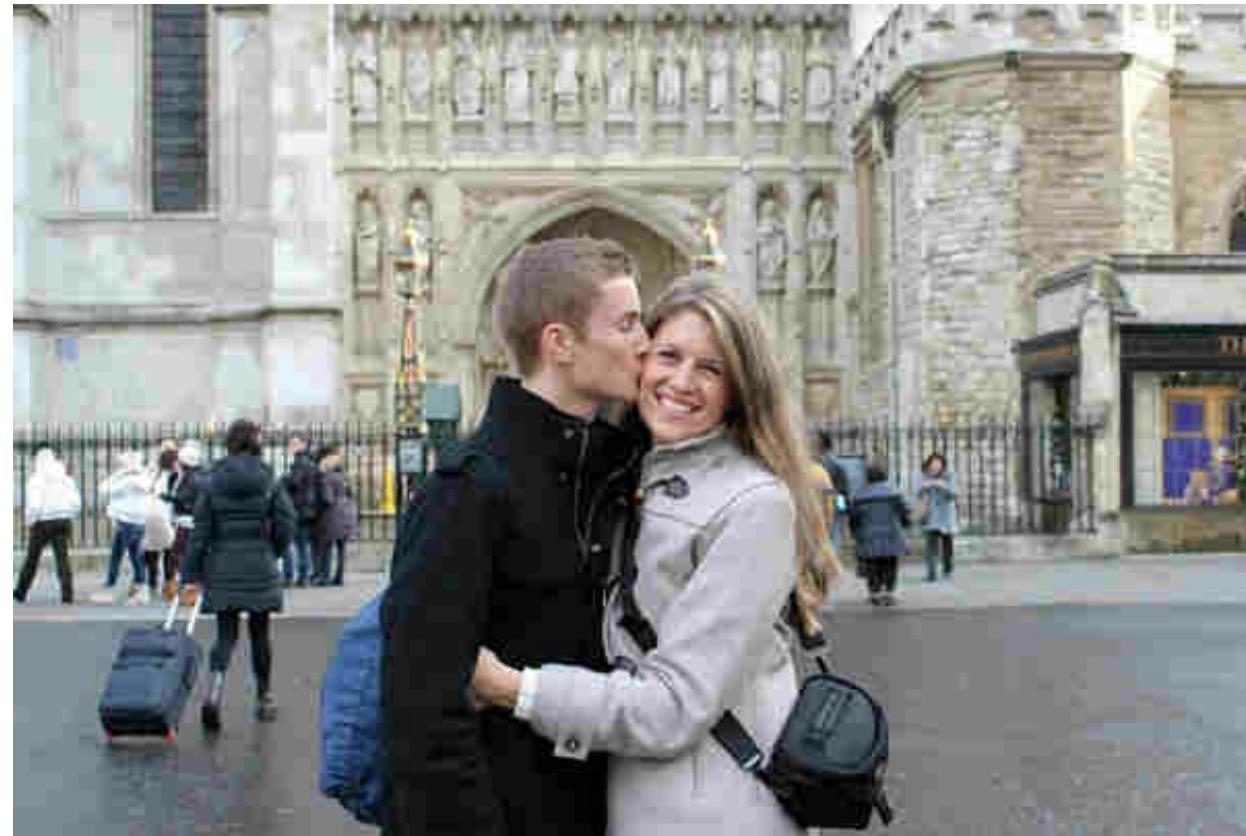
The Humane Vitae says, "to experience the gift of married love while respecting the laws of conception is to acknowledge that one is not the master of the sources of life but rather the **minister of the design established by the Creator.**" Using birth control causes us to think that the start of life is completely up to us, but in reality, God is the one who is to determine when a life should begin. He designed our bodies the way they are for a reason, and only He is the author of life.

**12. I thought we had a wonderful marriage before we started using NFP, but Thomas and I both agree that our relationship has been a million times better after making the switch.** I completely agree with this statement from the Humane Vitae: "*Another effect that gives cause for alarm is that a man who grows accustomed to the use of contraceptive methods may forget the reverence due to a woman, and, disregarding her physical and emotional equilibrium, reduce her to being a mere instrument for the satisfaction of his own desires, no longer considering her as his partner whom he should surround with care and affection.*" Yes, yes, and YES. I really believe that contraception leads to the objectification of your partner (both ways). The more I study the church's teaching on sexuality, and the longer we use NFP, the more I find truth in that statement. I now understand why Pope John Paul II said that the opposite of love is not hate, but use.

We both feel like we are in a more authentic, true, self-giving, loving relationship than we ever have been in the past. I feel so loved, respected, and cherished wholly as a woman by my husband. We have learned how to respect each other more deeply, and the sacrifice of abstinence involved in NFP has caused us to improve many other aspects of our relationship. We make a constant effort to show our love in more ways than physical. We strive to put the other person first in all that we do because we understand more fully that love is sacrifice.

Through living out the lifestyle of Natural Family Planning, I am able to fully see the beauty in the Catholic Church's teachings on sexuality (although I'm sure it will solidify even more once we have children). I have heard many women say that the church oppresses women, or that they love the church, but they disagree with the church's beliefs about women's issues. Through using NFP and studying the church's stance on contraception, I have found the complete opposite. I have found that the church deeply, deeply cares about, and wants the best for, women, their health, and their families. The church respects and appreciates the body of a woman the way it was made by God, upholding her dignity and the essence of femininity.

Also, I just want to say that I have become so much closer to God through using NFP. There was a complete surrender to God and His will for my life and our marriage that came with switching to NFP, which has caused me to place my full trust in Him. I truly feel how much He is ALWAYS there for us, surrounding us, and looking out for our best interest as a married couple. We have seen His grace pour down on us in every aspect of our marriage after switching to NFP, and I feel His love more and more every day. NFP has been such a blessing, and we are so grateful that our eyes have been opened to the truth.



Friends, I hope this information was helpful! Please, please, please let me know if you want to talk more about NFP. I'd be more than happy to meet up with you for coffee or dinner, talk on the phone, let you borrow books, etc. **Consider this post an invitation!** I'd love to share some of the more personal details with you, answer any questions, and share the challenges. I am in no way trying to condemn anyone who does use contraception. I have been there, so I promise there is no judgment from me! I just want you to know that if you're not happy with birth control, or even feel the slightest bit uneasy about taking it, there is a healthier, natural option that is effective in postponing or achieving pregnancy.

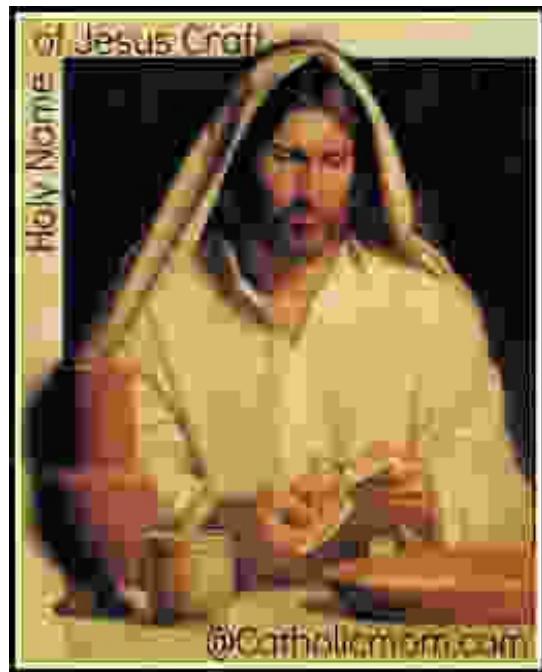
I can only tell you so much in one post, so I made [a tab at the top of my blog](#) that has a list of a TON of resources with way better information!

Love,  
Caitlin

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This contribution is available at <http://catholiccookiejar.blogspot.com/2013/01/why-we-dont-use-contraception-natural.html>  
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## Holy Name of Jesus Craft [at Through My]

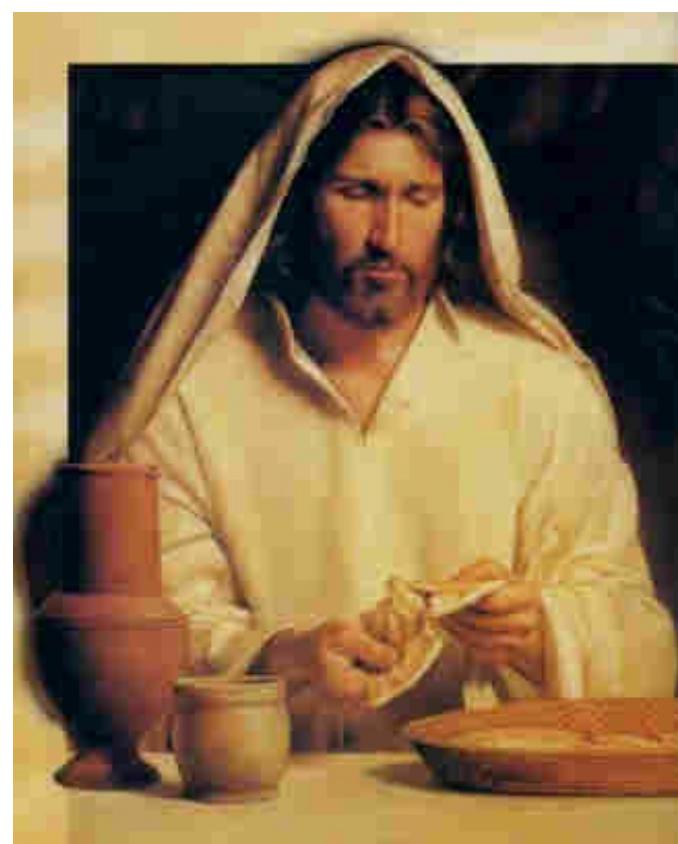


January is the month dedicated to the Holy Name of Jesus with the actual feast day falling on January 3 this year. It is celebrated in January because eight days after the birth of Jesus, he would have been circumcised and his name would have been announced. There are hundreds of names and symbols that we, as Catholic Christians use to identify Jesus and January is a month in which we can give special praise to Him for being our Savior, Redeemer, Protector, and sweet Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

This craft, celebrating the Holy Name of Jesus combines the actual name “Jesus” with a picture of Jesus serving the first Eucharist. It is a simple craft that children of all ages will enjoy.

Items Needed:

- Photograph of Jesus printed as full page:



Paper cutter or scissors and ruler

- Glue
- 2 pieces of construction paper taped together lengthwise

First, cut the photograph and the name of Jesus as closely to 8 inches wide as possible. Then stack them on top of one another and cut into 1 inch strips, keeping them together. You can number the strips at this point but I found it was easy to piece together as long as I kept the name piece with the photo piece.

**Items Needed:**

- Jesus printout
- Photo of Jesus
- glue
- paper cutter
- construction paper



Spread glue all over the construction paper and begin piecing the strips onto the construction paper, keeping the bottom of the strips even with the bottom of the construction paper. Begin with the name strip and then place the photo strip that is stacked with it. Repeat with the next set of strips until all of the strips have been placed.



Finally, cut off the excess construction paper at the end of the artwork and you are finished!





# Keeping It Clean in 4 Easy (Enough) Steps [at Garden of Holiness]



Micaela Darr, a fellow blogger over at [California to Korea](#), inspired me to write this post. I happened on her lament "I NEED HELP MANAGING THE CHAOS!!!" while perusing through the [7 Quick Takes](#) over at Jennifer Fulwiler's [Conversion Diary](#) last Friday. I started on a comment that grew longer and longer and longer. That comment found its final form here...

I know most people don't consider a clean house a necessity in their marriage. In fact, it is very likely not on anybody's radar when we mentally compile a list of issues contributing to marital stress, but people fight about cleanliness. They really do. I've learned, after years of pretending it wasn't so important, that it was vitally important in my own marriage and family life. After a few years experience, tons of prayer, and flying around with

## The Fly Lady.

I've learned how to manage housework at a level that makes everyone happy, including me.

It hasn't been easy. I prefer a clean house but don't mind clutter. I will gladly scrub the toilet, sweep the floor, and wash the dishes, but as long as the pile of books by the bed is dusted, I'm content. I tend to pile things up instead of put them away. My husband can live with the grime as long as the books are back on the shelf. You get the picture. I tried to convince my husband that mine was the best method and he tried to convince me that his was the best method, sometimes

nicely and sometimes not. Enter my son. He has Autism. He came along seven years ago and settled the question firmly and finally: our house shall be clean AND orderly, not either or



Sensory overload is a moment by moment occurrence for those with Autism

Because of the Autism, neatness is vital to my son's ability to think clearly. His senses do not provide orderly input. His eyes see everything, all at once. His ears do the same. Imagine trying to think while hearing the fly buzzing like a chainsaw on the windowsill, the whine of the transmission of the car passing by, the cat breathing like Darth Vader in the corner, then imagine all this while smelling the perfume in mommy's deodorant and the dog's spit as he licks a paw and this all mixed in with the acrid stench of the soap heating up in the dishwasher as it cycles like thunder through a wash. There is no volume control; his experience of any one of his senses is almost unbearably intense. With visual order, he has more mental energy to spare. He can concentrate on filtering out the barrage of over stimulation from his other senses. Without my diligence in keeping order in my home, my son spends his energy not in play or learning but in keeping his world from spinning out of control.

Since I have scrabbled and clawed my way to a "Clean Enough" house through trial and error, let me spare you some of the effort and frustration I had to experience by sharing what I've learned and where I learned it.

## 1. Make a List of "Daily Dos"

The only thing that worked for me was trial and error. For weeks on end I set a timer for an hour and cleaned everything up in the public rooms (the kitchen, living room, and dining room). I wrote down what I did, monitored my son's reaction during the day, and checked in with my husband at night. "How's this level of clean? What do you notice?" I went through the room with him with my list in hand. If he noticed a job was done, I put a check by it and kept it on my Daily Dos. If he didn't notice, I pointed out the job, asking, "Do you care that this was clean?" If the answer was, "No," that job came off the daily list and was added to a Weekly Dos. If the answer was, "No, but thank you!" it stayed on. From this process we created our list of the absolute essential, do-every-day-or-annoy-my-husband chores. It's posted on our bulletin board in pencil in case any adult needs to add to it or erase from it. Like the title Daily Do implies, we do those same little jobs every stinking day.

To give you an idea of where to start making your list, I will share with you my hard-won list and refer you to the

### [Fly Lady Page](#)

which was the inspiration for my family's list. She has her own system and lists ready made and I highly recommend reading her philosophy on cleanliness and using her system to get the house out of chaos and into order! We started there a few years ago but had to adapt that method to our family: we needed some jobs done more frequently due to the size and needs of our family.

### **My Daily Dos**

We start with #2 as soon as our main meal (breakfast) is done. Everybody has their list of jobs to do and everyone has 45 minutes to do it in. This list keeps our house in enough order each day that everyone is relatively happy.

1. Come to breakfast dressed and brushed (hair and teeth)
2. Dirty dishes to the counter
3. Wipe table
4. Sweep under table and wipe any spills (chairs and floor)
5. Straighten bedrooms (make beds, sweep rooms, put away toys)
6. Sweep every floor
7. Vacuum living room rug

8. Wipe down bathroom
9. Dust a room (every room gets hit eventually, including bedrooms)
10. Breakfast dishes



Just in case you think I have my act really together,  
this is the actual list, torn edges and all.

In addition to this 45 minute mad morning dash, we have two 10 minute straighten ups during the day. The kids put away all their games and toys while I fold laundry or tackle my clutter spots. Anything not picked up in that 10 minutes goes into Mommy's Basket and does not come out again until Sunday or I remember, whichever comes last.

Which brings us to

[tomorrow's post](#)

...

### **Consequences: Bad and Good.**

Stay tuned for that tomorrow. For today, focus on getting your list of Must Dos together before you start

[thinking of all the problems](#)

that get between you and the smoothly running machine you are trying to invent!

### **2. Divvy It up**

Dividing up the chores takes some doing and the divvy list is always flexing for several reasons: kids need to learn how to do all the jobs by the time they are ready to move out on their own and Mommy needs to do every job periodically to ensure that an "adult level of clean" is attained at least weekly. We found in the process that we had to make or buy some child-sized tools (we cut a broom down to a child's shoulder height until a Godmother bought us a real, usable child's sized broom as a gift). We also found that some tools were essential to invest in and some were not worth it. Our house has one carpet in the living room and hardwood or laminate flooring everywhere else, so we invested in brooms and floor dusters and skimped on the vacuum.

## **Age and Ability Guidelines**

A toddler can be given a basket and with some supervision play "Put That Away" games with the toys spread on the living room floor. (Mommy or an older child can be responsible for emptying the toddler basket and putting the toys where they live.) A three year old will be able to clear the table of silverware and unbreakable plates. A four year old can dust anything that is within reach. Five-year-olds can use a dust pan and even stand on a kitchen stool to scrape food scraps off the dishes before someone older loads the dishwasher. A six year old can manage a child sized broom to sweep a room (at least as long as Mommy gets in to sweep the corners out each week). A seven year old can be trusted with a nontoxic cleaner (like vinegar and water) to wipe down counter tops and doorknobs. An eight year old can plug in and run a vacuum. A nine year old can be trusted to feed and water household pets (with supervision) and even to clean up pet related messes indoors and out.

## **A special note on special needs**

My son with Autism has his jobs, though he requires a longer learning curve and more supervision than another child his age might. My 45 minutes of work includes working with him and his jobs. He is no different than my four other children. He will one day need to run his house, too, and every human being thrives with a healthy balance of work and leisure. Please don't forget anyone and their need to work. Work and a sense of purpose is essential to our sense of belonging and well being. Even in the Garden, Adam had his work (Genesis 2). Don't leave anyone out, no matter how much work it costs you to include them!

## **Get started!**

I work with a child who is given a new job to show them how to do it and to put some fun into it. The first time my four year old was assigned to dust my bedroom, she was filled with stories of the objects she was dusting. In particular, my husband has a picture of his deceased sister and I have a picture of my deceased brother on our respective nightstands. As we dusted, she heard about her aunt and uncle in Heaven; she asked questions and was answered. We discovered in doing this that our daughter considered the moment a rite of passage. For the first time ever, she was allowed to touch those and other treasures. The other rooms are "kid proofed" and much less

interesting for that reason, but it gives you an idea of the fruits these little labors can produce.

### **3. Set a Timer for 45 Minutes**

The kids have their lists (which are assigned weekly) and I have mine and nothing...nothing at all...happens until those things are done. No snacks, no toys, no radio, no games, no TV time. Nothing. Nada. Zip. At the end of the time our Homeschool Day starts. If a child finishes ahead of time, that child's extra time is "Free Time" to do whatever he or she wants. Most days, after about 6 weeks or so on the learning curve, my children are done before I am and are called from leisure tasks rather than a work task to begin our Homeschool Day.

Remember that the entire list of jobs should take no more than 45 minutes or so for Mommy to do, so none of the individual jobs should take a child that long unless they want it to. A toddler should have one job to do. A three year old one or two. A four and five year old two or three. Nothing in combination should take a child the entire 45 minutes to do once the job is learned and done diligently. In fact, my rule of thumb is no more work than 20 minutes worth for my oldest, who is nine. My list began with what it takes me 45 minutes to do uninterrupted on my own, so in the worst of days, and these will happen on occasion, I banish everyone to their rooms with a book and do the whole list myself. Trust me, that's a treat and a break for everyone, especially Mom!

As I mentioned before, in addition to the 45 minutes in the morning, there are the two 10 minute straighten up sessions that happen each day. Ours are done before dinner and before bedtime. Mommy sets the timer and all is cleaned up or it goes into Mommy's Basket and disappears. Whichever way it happens, the mess is cleaned!

And just in case some of you noticed, I've not mentioned my husband in the chore list. My husband is the kind of person who putters constantly. The trick to get him to function at a reasonable level, is to keep him from working himself until he is worn out. When I do my jobs right, he

**only**

does his.

### **4. Do It Daily**

This is the big part of the job, the diligence. We do this every day between breakfast and the start of our school day. The only exception is Sunday, the Lord's Day. I get these jobs done even when I am sick as a dog. Frankly, I don't want to spend my recovery trying to dig out from under the piles of undone work, so it's worth spending a little under a half hour\* in the morning exerting myself when I have the flu. I make exceptions for the kids during their illnesses, but since they have to lay in bed while we clean, it is the rare Martin child who wants to be left alone for that length of time unless they are sick enough to need the sleep.

\*It takes significantly less time to do this on my sick days because the kids are appealed to cut the shenanigans for the sake of their poor, sick Mother, and I do more and supervise less just to get it over with!

The system isn't perfect, but it works when we work. The house still has a few clutter spots, but I try to ensure those stay out of sight. My messy desk is purposefully located in a cubby with doors I can shut when I walk away. My pile of books by my bed now lives in the bed stand that has a door to shut them behind. Since all the jobs don't take all the time we assign to them, I can tackle problem spots each day until the problem is fixed. I don't try to do everything at once and I don't try to start with a clean slate. We started where we were with the hope and the promise of improvement over time. I can promise you, from experience, that that promise proved out. The cleanliness level has improved and is improving as we go. We're at five children now and the house is kept cleaner now than it was when we had no children. The work got harder and the job bigger, but I got smarter and more diligent.

Virtue is a merely a habit of being good. My virtue has become wrapped up in my habits of serving my family and husband in lieu of myself. Cleaning at a level I do not prefer has been my call and my cross, so for me, cleanliness really is next to Godliness. Sometimes it takes everything I can give and more.

God is where I go to find

*more*



This has been a

[Wifey Wednesday Post](#)

. To have an even more Wifey Wednesday visit Sheila Wray Gregoire at

[To Love Honor and Vacuum](#)

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This contribution is available at <http://www.gardenofholiness.blogspot.com/2013/01/keeping-it-clean-in-4-easy-enough-steps.html>  
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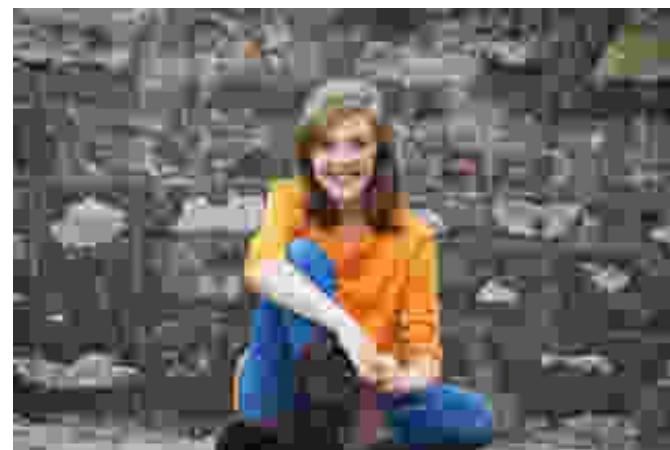
| [Contents](#) |

## **Because My Little Brother is About to be a Daddy [at Raising Angels]**

My brother and his wife just found out that their first baby will be born on Monday (prayers appreciated). Her due date is February 9th but her fluids are low and the doctor said that the baby is measuring smaller than she had hoped. The doctor assured them that even though that sweet little baby is just shy of 5 1/2 lbs., there is no reason not to think that everything will be just fine. It's just going to happen two weeks earlier than they had planned.

That being said, I've spent the last two days helping them get ready. They did not find out what they are having which I love, so into the attic I went to find that one tub of newborn gowns I had that are all gender neutral. I found the gowns along with some socks, onesies and jackets that I thought would do the trick. I oohed and ahhed over those tiny little things, remembering each of my babies in them. Such sweet, sweet memories of such a precious time.

And just like that, I blinked and those tiny creatures grew in ways I could have never imagined. And now instead of tiny fingers and toes, I stare in awe of this...



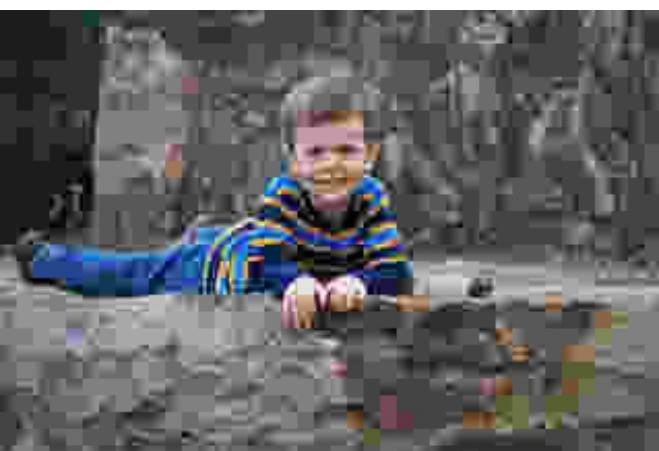
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and this...



and this.



In those wonderful delivery room moments, staring into the eyes of these beautiful creatures God had given me, basking in the miracle of how one moment they were in my womb and the next they were thrust (and yes, my poor kids were thrust) into this big world, I never, not even for one moment, imagined I would be here.



It's been such an amazing journey. Every stage has its blessings and challenges, ups and downs, but none of that takes away from the miracle of life - the fact that before they were formed in my womb, God knew each and every one of them. He saw this moment and all the ones to come. He knew some days would be better than others and that I wouldn't do any of this perfectly.

And yet, He blessed me. He chose to give me these souls in spite of myself. I am a better person because of them.

Brian and Heather, your journey is just about to begin. It will knock your socks off. It will rock your world. It will make you feel a love that you didn't know was possible. It will overwhelm you and bless you beyond measure. It will make you better. It will be an incredible adventure. Hang on and enjoy the ride! You're going to do great.

And when you don't, call me. We'll commiserate together. Some days are just like that, even in

Australia

(I'll loan you that story when the time is right).

I can't wait!

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This contribution is available at <http://raisingangels.blogspot.com/2013/01/because-my-little-brother-is-about-to.html>

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## Pro-Life in Theory [at Martin Family Moments]

You want an honest post? Here goes....

I am a die hard pro-life Catholic. I oppose abortion, the death penalty, and euthanasia. I support pregnancy centers that help mothers choose life for their babies, and pray outside abortion clinics for an end to the evil of abortion. Phil and I have never used contraception in our marriage, and we use NFP to space our children using God's design of a woman's cycles.

When I hear of a couple struggling with infertility, my heart breaks for them, I can't even imagine how hard it would be to carry that cross. When I hear news of a pregnancy, under any circumstances, I rejoice for that new little baby! Seriously, people love to tell me about their baby news because I squeal with excitement. I can't even contain my joy.

But (you knew there was a but coming, didn't you?) sometimes I fear another pregnancy like the plague. In all my pro-life proclamations, I struggle with *actually* being pro-life in my own family. Would I ever have an abortion or start using contraception? No, of course not. But does contraception seem tempting - an easy fix to solve my problems? Yes. Do I sometimes get a little angry and feel like I will be producing babies for the rest of my fertile years? Yes.

Yesterday an older co-worker of mine was talking about finances and looked at me and said "I have no idea how you are going to put all your kids through college." Then he put his face in his hands in shock of the sheer prospect. He wasn't trying to be rude, it just hit him all of a sudden. He has one child in college and struggles to afford it. He can't even imagine how we are going to do it with our Catholic school salaries. I laughed and said something like "Oh they'll do it just like we did it - financial aid and scholarships!" Then I walked away, trying to hide my tears. It's not like I never thought about college expense times five children before. But it was his genuine concern for how we were going to manage it that made it seem all the more impossible.

I also heard from a friend yesterday who had to have a hysterectomy (after having lots of children) and I thought "Must be nice". It must be nice to not have to worry about using NFP and discerning if our reasons are grave or selfish. It must be nice to be able to plan for the future knowing how

many children figure into that equation. It must be nice to be spontaneous with your husband and not plan your life around charts and fear of user error.

And then I instantly felt terrible about myself because while so many women would do anything to have a baby, a blessing from God, here I am complaining about my super-fertility. I wish I could go back in time to before I was married when I would tell everybody that I wanted 12 kids, and actually mean it. But back then I didn't realize what our future salaries would be, or that I would even have to work outside the home at all. I couldn't fathom that we would still be paying off our student loan debt when our oldest was in college. I didn't know how it felt to be pregnant four times in 5 years and how tiring and frustrating that could be.

I know all of my fears are the result of not trusting enough in the Lord's plans. I am a planner myself, and type A, and I like to know what's going to happen. I find it

*funny*

that I am struggling with this right now, and my saint for the year is St. Gianna. I need to pray that I can have the courage and grace she had as a mother. The other

*funny*

thing is that we are doing fine in so many ways. We have a house, two cars, jobs we like that pay for everything we need, 5 healthy and pretty amazing kids, so why do I worry so much?



Maggie on her Baptism Day

I have to remember that God has ALWAYS provided for our needs (easy to do, because I have proof) and He always will in the future (hard to do because I lack trust). I need to find that balance between being open to life and being prudent with what we've already been given. I'm \*hoping\* this is something that many of you can relate to. Prayers and advice welcomed.

Colleen

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This contribution is available at <http://martinfamilymoments.blogspot.com/2013/01/pro-life-in-theory.html>  
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# Quick Takes: Why Im Pro-Life [at follow and believe]

At the time that this post publishes, I will be en-route to Washington, D.C. for the annual March for Life. In honor of this event, I give you "7 Quick Takes: Why I'm Pro-Life"



## [1] "A person's a person no matter how small."

Dr. Seuss was very wise. And like he/Horton said, no matter the size of a human, they're still a human. Stage in development does not negate personhood.

## [2] Abortion is the purposeful killing of another human being.

We have laws against murder. When asked, people will tell you that the reason is because it is not right for you to willfully kill someone else. Since we've established that an unborn child is indeed human, and the ending of a human's life is immoral, then why is it deemed acceptable?

## [3] Abortion is bad for women.

Women who have abortions are

[seven times more likely to commit suicide](#)

, are

[four times more likely to have repeat abortions](#)

, and have a

[significantly increased risk of breast and cervical cancer](#)

. And women are still dying from having abortions...in fact,

one young woman died a few months ago

at an abortion clinic in Chicago. So much for a simple,

safe procedure

.

**[4] I believe in the sanctity of life.**

Similar to [1], but biologists agree that life begins at conception...that's a FACT. We all talk in terms of "beliefs" and it is true that you must

*believe*

in something in order to be passionate about it; just

*knowing*

the facts isn't enough. I

*know*

that life begins at conception and I

*believe*

that we should respect life from beginning to end.

**[5] There's no such thing as an "unwanted child".**

Just because the mother of a child might not desire to parent doesn't mean that there aren't people out there who wouldn't love to call that child their own. I don't have a statistic handy, but I believe that it is still true that there are more couples seeking adoption than there are babies to go around.

**[6] Everyone deserves the chance at life.**

No matter what predetermined conditions or disabilities a child might be born into/with, they still should have a chance at life. Let's face it, life is tough. It's really hard and it's really sucky sometimes. But it's also full of beauty and joy and pleasure. There's no doubt that it would be difficult growing up homeless or fatherless or with a disability. But I would venture to say that even people born into the aforementioned situations have still been happy at some point in their life. Every life is worth living, no matter what others might think.

**[7] Babies are beautiful!**

To quote one of my good friends and new daddy to a beautiful baby girl,

"I don't know how anyone could say that they don't want kids. I have friends who say that they hate kids. They have no idea what they're missing."

Sure, maybe not everyone is cut out to be a parent, but that doesn't give those who don't desire parenthood to kill their unborn child.

In summation (I feel like I'm back in college...), I'm pro-life and darn proud of it. Sometimes it's hard to see progress in the movement, but being that this is a movement like the civil-rights movement, I am confident that abortion will end. It may not be as soon as we hope, but someday it will be but a sad, distant memory.



I mean really, how can you resist that face?!

Have a great weekend and head on over to

[Jen's](#)

more more takes!

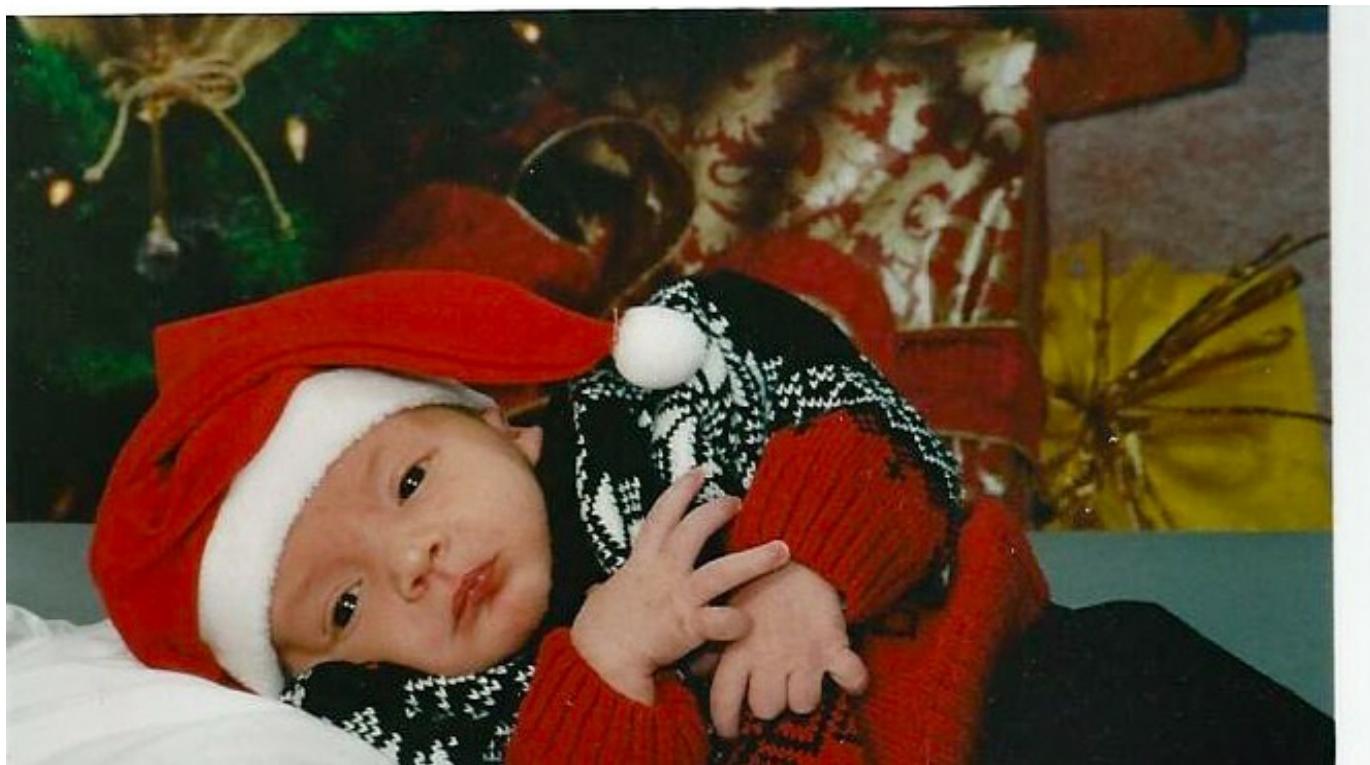
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This contribution is available at <http://follow-and-believe.blogspot.com/2013/01/7-quick-takes-why-im-pro-life.html>

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# Sorry, Catholic Parenting Is Not An Insurance Policy For Well-Adjusted, Faithful Children [at Colleen Duggan]



Patrick, 2 weeks old

When I was a new mom, and Patrick was a wee four months old, I gave up nursing him. My decision to wave the white flag of surrender wasn't because I didn't desire to breastfeed, but was because he wasn't gaining enough weight on my milk alone. I was barely producing two ounces in one nursing session, let alone enough to sustain his growth.

It wasn't for lack of trying, however.

In the months after Patrick was born, I hired lactation specialists and attended Le Leche League meetings. I read every book on nursing and how to overcome feeding issues and I implemented every suggestion just about anyone had to offer: I pumped in between feedings, I took natural supplements like fenugreek and garlic, I purchased special bras, I even used a supplemental feeding system but none of it --none, I'm telling you--worked. Patrick wasn't gaining weight and I wasn't producing enough to keep him healthy.

It was the lactation consultant, the woman who offered her assistance to me for months, who eventually encouraged me to call it quits. I had dragged Patrick to her office one morning--again--for advice when she said it:

**"You know, honey, you're not a failure if you give your baby a bottle. You've tried your best to nurse him and it's not working. I don't know what else you can do. I'm worried about**

**you. You look too thin and very tired. I don't think you taking care of yourself very well and I think you need to be realistic--you've tried to nurse and it didn't work. Formula feeding Patrick does not make you a bad mother."**

Tears rolled down my cheeks and I nodded. I sobbed the entire drive home.

I wanted to nurse Patrick and while I knew the lactation consultant was right--that I wasn't a failure as a woman and a mother--I felt like one. Still, I followed her advice, bought some formula and gave Patrick a bottle. He sucked down that milk like a little piglet on the teat of its mother and the rest was history. He ate and ate and ate some more and he grew fat and round and happy. Oh, was he happy! I didn't have to take him for weekly weigh-ins anymore and though I was sad (and even embarrassed about) the bottle, I knew the formula was the right thing--for all of us.

A few months later, when Patrick was about six months old, a few friends and I attended a Catholic Woman's Conference in Minnesota. I brought Patrick with me on the get-away and I was excited to eat good food, be spiritually nourished, and spend time with my closest friends. We shared baby strollers and diaper bags and we roared with laughter deep into the night. So I was caught off guard, when right before one of the talks, another female Conference attendee approached me and said,

**"You know, if you really wanted to breastfeed your baby, you could. There are ways to do it. You don't have give him a bottle, if you don't want to."**

"Yes, I know," I said as I choked back tears. I turned my back on her because I didn't want her to see me cry and I walked away.

I know the woman was trying to be helpful, but her polite suggestion was actually anything but--her words hurt me. I had tried all those ways she alluded to and I felt judged by someone who, without all the information, decided I wasn't doing the "right" thing. This woman--another like-minded Catholic--had inaccurately assessed my situation, assumed I hadn't tried hard enough or didn't care enough, and offered her opinion on the "right" way to feed my child. It wounded.

Deeply.

[It wouldn't be the last time someone from my team did this.](#)

This morning, I chatted with a friend of mine on the phone. She is a good, faithful woman devoted to her family. For various personal but important reasons, she and her husband recently made the decision to put their children back into public school. As we talked, she admitted she felt like a failure as a mother, but she also said she felt judged by some of the Catholic women in her homeschooling group.

I sympathized with her. I've felt the same way and after we hung up the phone here's what I realized:

**It's not the snarky women at the store or playground who criticize our decision to have large families or homeschool or whatever who are the most hurtful. We can expect this kind of attitude from secular society. But when we're judged by like-minded moms--women who love the faith and strive to live it daily just like we do--when those women deem us not as "good" because we do something outside of the "Catholic thing to do", this is when we most suffer. And here's some shocking news, friends. I don't think breastfeeding, natural child spacing, attachment parenting, family prayer, homeschooling, daily Mass and frequent reception of the Sacraments or any other practices touted by Orthodox Catholic groups are an insurance policy for raising well-adjusted Catholic citizens. Just because we do these things does not mean our kids will be practicing Catholics who never commit mortal sin, nor does it mean our kids will be normal, functioning adults able to thrive in the outside world.**

Some of the holiest priests and lay people I know were not homeschooled but, in fact, attended public school. (

*Gasp*

!)

I know families who used attachment parenting and who have strained, dysfunctional relationships with their children.

I know families whose parents attended daily Mass, prayed the family rosary, and did everything else "right" according to Catholic standards and guess what? Their children have left the Church, had babies out of wedlock, divorced, co-habitated, or had substance abuse problems (and sometimes all of the above).

On the other hand, I also know parents who didn't bring their children to Mass

*for years*

but somehow, by the grace of God, their children are faithful, practicing Catholics.

I know families who have suffered from serious substance abuse problems but who have, by the grace of God, experienced great healing and developed intimate familial relationships.

I know families who never looked like the poster people for Catholicism--families who didn't have the children in matching smocked outfits in the front pew at Mass every Sunday or who couldn't afford premiere Catholic education--but who, by the grace of God, have had several vocations to come from their lot.

**And you know why this is? Because God's grace is greater than our efforts and while we may try our very best to do the right thing by our children, our children have a free will with which they can choose the good or the bad. And sometimes, no matter how perfectly we've**

**parented, prayed and performed, our kids are gonna choose the bad--even if we've homeschooled or gone to daily Mass or used attachment parenting. None of these things are an insurance policy**

.

**Sure, these practices are good and noble and some of them (like frequent reception of the Sacraments) are even dire, but just because we do them does not mean our children are going to turn out perfectly. Nor does it mean we are failures if we can't pull it off. God calls all families to love and follow and serve Him but the way in which He calls us to do it looks different for every one.**

We all need to try our best (and assume everyone is doing the same) but we must also recognize the rest is up to God.

So let's have mercy on our fellow Catholic moms, shall we?

The women in the trenches next to us are trying their very best to form their families (and it's important to remember, I think, that some of them may not have all the tools we do in their tool box). Let's have mercy on those moms who do things differently than we do because it doesn't mean they're doing it worse (or better!), it just means they're doing it differently. And let's rally behind each other to offer love and support and encouragement, instead of offering our (most of the time unhelpful) opinions.

**Because until we've walked a mile in another's shoes, we can't ever know the reasons behind the decisions a family makes.**

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This contribution is available at <http://www.colleenduggan.net/2013/01/sorry-catholic-parenting-is-not.html>  
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# Trailing Clouds of Glory [at Catholic Exchange]

*But trailing clouds of glory do we come*

*From God, who is our home:*

*Heaven lies about us in our infancy!*

-William Wordsworth, *Ode: Intimations of Immortality From Recollections of Early Childhood*



**We were at Mass one Sunday,**

**and a couple came and sat down a few pews in front of us.** They had a teenage girl with them, and the woman was carrying a very young infant in her arms. Ken mentioned that he'd seen that same woman at daily Mass when it was his turn to take Lotus to serve, only then she didn't have "the nanny" with her.

"Nanny?" I asked, wondering what he was talking about. "The nanny they brought to Mass," he said, motioning to the teenager with them. "That's not the nanny. That's their daughter. Or the daughter of one of them, I guess. I bet it's a second marriage."

Yes. This is the conversation my husband and I were having in front of the Tabernacle while waiting for Mass. Even while I was having it I knew how horrible it was. I knew it, I felt a flicker of uneasiness about it, and- wait!- *I allowed it to get worse.*

"I saw that quite a bit when I taught. There'd be a remarriage and a new baby, and you'd end up with an age gap like that." Ken nodded, but was still going with the nanny theory, and I lapsed into

semi-moody observations about how thin the new mother looked. How is it possible to have such an obvious newborn and still fit into size 2 pants? Then I further disintegrated into full-on loathing of my body, my appearance, me, me, me. It was so ugly, and so horrible that I would usually avoid writing about it altogether, or at the very least, try to sugar coat it, but to understand what happened next, I have to show you the full extent of my awfulness.

Mass started, and while I cannot honestly say if I asked God to forgive me for the terrible things I had just thought and said about my neighbor, while sitting less than 20 yards from Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, I knew that I had done wrong.

That night, before bed, I was reading a section from St. Faustina's "Divine Mercy in My Soul" and I was struck by the following passage:

*"I do not trust my tongue, which...is inclined to talk for itself, while its duty is to help me praise God for all the blessings and gifts which He has given me. When I receive Jesus in Holy Communion, I ask Him fervently to deign to heal my tongue so that I would offend neither God nor neighbor by it. I want my tongue to praise God without cease. Great are the faults committed by the tongue. The soul will not attain sanctity if it does not keep watch over its tongue."*

It struck me so deeply, that I resolved to ask Jesus the same thing next time I received the Eucharist. The next morning, very, very early, Lotus came into my room and asked if we could go to Mass. Well, what kind of mother says no to a request like that, even if it is made in the pre-dawn darkness?

A few hours later, while I knelt in Church after receiving Our Lord, I asked Him to heal my tongue. I helpfully suggested using, like, titanium bands to sort of bolt it down; anything weaker I would surely break through. At that moment, while I was earnestly trying to convince Our Lord to make me mute, I heard a baby behind me. I knew it was the woman from Sunday. And I felt this enormous, overwhelming offer before me- "Go speak to her after Mass".

**I sort of reminded Our Lord that I was asking for a mute tongue, why would He immediately respond with an offer to go speak? And to speak to the woman I had gossiped about a few days before?**

But I said, "Ok," patiently waited until Mass was over, dawdled a little by telling a lady next to me that her shoes were fabulous (they really were, it wasn't just a time-wasting movement on my part), then went up to the woman with the tiny baby in her arms.

"She's adorable," I said. The woman smiled and thanked me. I asked her the baby's name. "Joselyn," she replied. Joselyn, meanwhile, was sleeping that sleep a friend of mine has described as "Willful Sleep. No matter what happens around me, I *will* sleep!" "How old is

she?" I asked, totally, completely in love with little Joselyn. The woman replied that she was six weeks old. "Well you look great," I said, and as I said it, I realized I had said it without a trace of envy in my heart. The sixth week is a rough week- you've used up all your birth endorphins, your body's trying to re-balance hormonally, and sleep is such a rare commodity you wonder if you've only imagined its existence. The woman looked tired, but beautiful and serene.

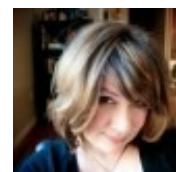
"Oh," she said, smiling at me, "I'm her foster mother." I tilted my head for a moment, not understanding.

**Then suddenly, the weight of the situation rushed into me, and I was full of sorrow for my gossip, yes, but more intensely, immediate gratitude that the birth mother had chosen life for Joselyn, gratitude for this woman in front of me who opened her home and her heart to Joselyn, and gratitude to God who so gently, but so undeniably, showed me why judging people, even idly, is so foolish.**

"Her foster mother? How long will she stay with you?" My head was still whirling, but my mother's heart immediately went to that question. The woman smiled sadly and shrugged. "Until the mother decides she's ready for her. Or until she's adopted." I was floored. I can't imagine how that woman's heart must feel, looking at sleeping Joselyn, knowing that the mothering she was called to would be so uncertain in nature. "Is she your first foster child?" Dimly I was aware that I was now entering the "your questions are becoming creepy in their intensity" realm I sometimes get with people who ask about my family, but the woman didn't seem to mind.

"No, we've fostered quite a few children." And then, it seems that Jesus didn't take my advice on bolting my tongue down with titanium, because I said to the mother, "God bless you for this. I can't imagine what it's like, but thank you for doing it." I realized that my clearly functional tongue was praising God for the grace He give to both the birth mother and the foster mother. The grace to bear this child, and the grace to provide her with a home. The grace to work together to give her love.

As I walked to the car with Lotus, I was silent, thinking about what a gentleman our God is- how He never forces His will onto us, how He always waits until we're ready for Him. I thought about the lousy god I would make, because if I had seen one of my followers sitting right in front of me and gossiping about another of my followers, my response probably would have involved thunderbolts and severed tongues and such. Instead, my lesson in humility and reserving judgement of others took place in an encounter that left me so full of love and gratitude that I felt I was trailing clouds of glory as I left Mass.



Cari Donaldson stepped through the looking glass when she married her high school sweetheart in

a Presbyterian ceremony back in 1999. Since then, she and her husband have found themselves the parents of six children, and on the corporate gypsy trail, with transfers moving them from the Midwest to the deep South to New England. The most startling developments however, have been the conversion to Catholicism in 2006, and the discovery that blogging provides an excellent creative outlet. You can find Cari on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/clan.donaldson> and Twitter at @CariDonaldson and here on Catholic Exchange.

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## Re-Post: Your Soul Shines Through [at Captive the Heart: A Sprightly Wedding Blog For the Catholic Bride]

*I am speechless today. Literally. Sometimes, you're just at a loss for new ideas. When I couldn't come up with a reflection to share with you for today, I decided to resurrect an old favorite, one of my first blog posts, about who we are as women. You are beautiful. Enjoy!*



It goes without saying that as women, we receive hundreds of messages every single day about how we're supposed to look. We need to wear this to look attractive to a guy, say that to make him want us, put on whatever makeup to cover every flaw.

Here's the thing, though. Beauty isn't something we put on in the morning, it something we *already possess*.

Can you imagine what it would be like if the fashion industry realized this? Femininity is anything but a selling point; it's nothing more or less than who we are. Like so many other girls, I've become obsessed with

lately. Recently, I've noticed lots of girls compiling fitness inspirations, which is just fine, except that instead of actual fitness tips, these boards seem to mostly contain images of women with impossibly thin or muscular bodies.

## Thinspiration

, evidently, is a widespread trend. I've felt a sadness looking at these images that sticks with me afterwards, I think because it feels like we've fallen a little for one of the biggest lies we're told: the lie that we will never be good enough or pretty enough.

For years, I was blessed not to struggle with self-image. When I got engaged and started reading tons of bridal magazines and websites, however, I'd suddenly start wishing I could be a little skinnier, have my skin be a little clearer, make my teeth a little whiter. I *knew*, really knew, that it was all unnecessary and that these messages were total lies, but even for someone who's always been pretty secure with herself, the pressure to be beautiful felt impossible to ignore sometimes. It seems like for brides-to-be, all of the normal pressures we face are ratcheted up a hundredfold. It's not wrong to want to look pretty, of course, but at a time when all eyes will soon be on you for a whole day, I found it doesn't take much to make you too hard on yourself.

I consider myself wonderfully lucky to be loved by a man who is so sincerely affirming. He constantly tells me I'm beautiful, and I know he means it (variation: a few days ago he said, "you're pretty as all get out"). Hopefully you're loved this way, too- that's one of the reasons you're marrying him, right? No matter how great our love is on this earth, it doesn't always feel like enough. That, of course, is because it's *not* enough. Luckily, the Lord unceasingly delights not only in our feminine beauty, but in our humanity, which includes the parts of ourselves we don't like. He loves everything about us, not just the "good" parts (inside and out), and what a grace that is. About a year ago, I had an opportunity to dive deeper into my basic understanding of John Paul II's Theology of the Body, which begins with the Pope's meditations on how men and women are created. I contemplated the fact that women are created to inspire love, not lust, in men, which is so contrary to what we usually hear. God's love for every human person is written right into our bodies and into His plan for marriage, which is crazy, true, good, and beautiful when you sit and think about it. These truths were a huge consolation to me during times when I struggled with the impossible ideal, the idol really, of bridal perfection. Let them console you, too! Thank Him for the gift of your femininity and ask Him for the grace to help you see your beauty when you're tempted to reject it.



I just read an amazing

[article](#)

about the beauty and virtue of women that mentions this painting by the Renaissance painter Fra Angelico. A professor wrote that "...in Angelico's Madonna, the fairness of her soul, the substantial form, shines through the fineness of her features." I know. I KNOW! Her virtuous, holy soul shines through her very features; through her body! That, ladies, is real beauty. A woman who knows her dignity in the eyes of God and man is radiant on the outside because of the radiance in her soul. That's the kind of look to aspire to.

+  
m      *Stephanie*

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This contribution is available at <http://captivetheheart.blogspot.com/2013/01/re-post-your-soul-shines-through.html>  
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## St. Paul [at Notlukewarm]



St. Paul writing in prison by Rembrandt  
I have a copy of this in my office

I uttered a sentence I never thought would come forth from my mouth today, "I'm going to Bible Study; St. Paul will make me happy." And you know what, I was happy. There are twenty-four people in the class and we are studying Romans. Last week they wanted to revolt, this week "I finally understood" at chapter six. I will say this, as a quasi feminist ( maybe but then again maybe not), St. Paul has not been a favorite of mine. But as I read and study it all makes so much sense. A few things to point out, Paul had a group of people he worked in ministry with, many of whom were women. His style of writing, diatribe, can be difficult and off-putting. It is as if he is yelling at you! However, this was a common style used at that time.

Paul certainly speaks for me when he writes "What I do, I do not understand. For I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate"

(Romans 7:15).

I am learning over and over that grace is necessary to overcome sin and to call upon God and ask for the grace to be whom he calls us to be. He wants to give it to us. Sin has been discussed frequently in chapters one to seven, along with our fallen nature and inclination to sin. This has led me to a new favorite word, concupiscence.

We are using

## The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible

series. I also use The Writings of the New Testament by Luke Timothy Johnson, The New Testament by Stephen Harris and Seven Pauline Letters by Peter F. Ellis to give more information to the class.

If you have a chance, study some of St. Paul. You will gain a new appreciation for him and a better understanding of scripture.

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# From Radical Feminist to Devout Catholic [at Little Catholic Bubble]

This is the conversion story of my friend Kim Manning, which has been on my blog forever but which has not been its own featured post until today. [We took our faith journeys together](#), though we started in very different places.

I find any story of a liberal feminist-turned-Catholic to be fascinating, but I had the joy of watching this one as it unfolded. Grab a cup of tea and dive into it now with me...

My Road from Gender Feminism to Catholicism  
By Kimberley Manning



Kim and I during the journey, mid-1990s. We would soon go from secular newspaper editorial writers (while still stay-at-home mommies) to practicing Catholics and [RCIA](#) teachers.

*Consider the following scenario:* There was a time in human history when all was well. People lived in harmony with the planet, all resources were shared equally, and there was no violence. This was the great time of matriarchal cultures when women held the positions of power in their societies and wielded that power with wisdom.

Then it all came to a halt when men rose up and began to use force, rooted in misogyny, to bring women under their control. This was not some series of isolated uprisings, but a systematic reversal of world power and a subjugation of women which has left my gender devastated. Rape was the first method used to subdue women, followed by the development of the institution of marriage; however, as time went on, more sophisticated mechanisms were employed to rob women of their power, both earthly and spiritual.

The *coup de grace* in this destruction of matriarchal utopia was the development of Christianity. This patriarchal system, purposely dominated by men, would seek to destroy the last vestiges of the great goddess-centered religions by establishing the complete authority of males over females through its use of supposed sacred writings (the Bible) and masculine symbolism to describe God. The great peace-loving goddess religions were no match for the brute force of a male-dominated Christendom and so were decimated. The greatest blow was the Inquisition, in which millions of pagan women, many high priestesses, were burned at the stake, as the Catholic Church made its massive attempt finally to eradicate female power. Then came the witch hunts in the New World, while today such constructs as gender roles continue the assaults against feminine energy on the planet.

Revisionist history at its finest? To be sure. However, much to my embarrassment, I must confess that not so long ago I subscribed to this gender feminist nonsense. Don't get me wrong, I wasn't raised with such notions. To my parents' credit, I was brought up in a strong Christian home. Baptized in a Methodist Church, I was raised in a warm and loving Episcopalian home in Lancaster Country, Pennsylvania – the heart of Amish country. The Christian values of love thy neighbor, personal morality, and strong faith were modeled constantly at home and reinforced by Anabaptist fundamentalists who set a very conservative tone for the community. Most significantly, I was raised with the old-fashioned idea that there is objective truth – that while there may be gray areas in life, there is such a thing as definitive right and wrong.

I embraced these values, knowing that somehow they were connected to the God in whom we believed, though I was unclear as to how that was so. Consequently, while seeds of truth were planted, they had not taken root, and by the time I left for college, I was very vulnerable to drifting away from Christianity.

As is not uncommon for young adults, I began to consider other options when I failed to see meaning in the religion of my youth. Gender feminism would eventually become that other option, but my "conversion" was a slow and insidious process. I use the word "conversion" purposely, because I later came to see that gender feminism is a pseudo-religion in which all of the archetypal symbols are there in a twisted manner. "Womyn" is deified, empowerment is the mantra, unborn children are the blood sacrifices in the ritual of abortion, and men are the scapegoats for our sins.

My first brush with radical feminism was a brief discussion with the Lutheran minister at my college over the issue of inclusive language in the Bible. At the time, it struck me as absurd that the reference to God as “our Father” in any way undermined my value as a woman. That was when my head was still screwed on straight and I was majoring in science. Two years into my degree, I switched majors and began to study social work. My heavy interest in the subjective philosophies of pantheism and my decision to do a volunteer internship at a domestic violence shelter had potent consequences. I began to hear a lot of talk about “woman’s experience,” how it is the ultimate source of truth. It began to seem like an all-out attack on women was taking place in society, in the form of domestic abuse (not such an absurd conclusion if the only new women you meet for 10 months are battered ones). I began to read a lot about misogyny, considered by many feminists to be a deep psychological predisposition in all men.

By the time I graduated, I was still brave enough to get married, despite my growing awareness that marriage was a legal maneuver orchestrated by men to gain control of women, both economically and physically. With a growing concern for my oppressed sisters everywhere, I took a paying job as a domestic violence counselor in a shelter.

In my personal life, I continued to explore pantheism, branching out into the New Age movement. I became fascinated with all things subjective. Psychology and spirituality were my passions and the left-brained world of critical thinking was now diagnosed as anal-retentive. I became convinced of such nebulous notions as there is no evil (or good/evil/God are all the same), pain is an illusion, God is really a woman, if you don’t get it right in this life you can always come back and try again, truth is whatever we make it for we are all creating our own realities, and all views and choices are of equal value. My highest “virtue” became tolerance, and I felt guilty if I in any way judged another’s actions.

These ideas dovetailed quite nicely with my experience at work. The staff members at the shelter were all women. We saw ourselves as a feminist organization in which all of the women were co-equals. On numerous occasions I found this “no one’s in charge” approach unbearable. Sometimes we would sit around for days in staff meetings trying to make a decision about a particular case. Those days seemed interminable, but it was all done in the name of fairness, for there should be no leaders, no hierarchy of authority – those were male constructs. So everyone would have her say as discussion and negotiation would go on and on. The name of the game was consensus, but when consensus could not be reached our director would make the final decision. This always struck me as contrary to our philosophy, but in the end everyone seemed willing to overlook the inconsistency out of sheer fatigue.

Ours was a safe environment in which the lesbian women could feel safe to “come out.” The banter of male-bashing was an endless stream of jokes and occasional outbursts of raging hatred. A woman’s “right to choose” was the pivotal issue around which woman’s freedom revolved and which had to be protected at all costs. We even had copies of videos giving instruction in “menstrual extraction” (do-it-yourself abortion) in case men ever took away our “right” to control our own bodies. Makeup was frowned upon and dieting was seen as a total surrender to the male-dominated culture in which women are merely objects for men’s pleasure.

Sexual abuse in America was rampant, I was told. The estimates were said to be as high as 70 percent of all girls. Some feminists I read even asserted that all acts of sex between a man and woman are, by definition, rape. And the statistics for domestic violence were astounding; we often quoted that half of all married women were being savagely beaten every year! Eating disorders (which we believed were caused by the male desire to keep women helpless little waifs) were killing our daughters, and all over the world the organized patriarchal religions were keeping women oppressed with such tactics as genital mutilation, whipping, stoning, death sentences, forced marriages, forbidding birth control and access to abortions, and refusal to accept same-sex marriage.

It all seemed so unjust, so horrible. The evidence mounted in my mind: Men were simply evil, and governments and organized religion – specifically Christianity in America – were their weapons. And then one day it happened. I had my “click” experience. I later read that *Ms.* Magazine had coined this phrase to describe the exact moment of coming into full consciousness of one’s oppression. I was sitting across from a co-worker in the shelter one evening and, like a light going on, it suddenly hit me that the cultural reality of my childhood did not exist. I realized in my moment of “enlightenment” that *all* men were perpetrators and *all* women were victims. “Where have I been all these years?” I asked my friend. “I feel like I’ve been living under a rock and for the first time now I can see clearly. There’s a world of male oppression against women out there and we’ve got to fight back.” My friend smiled warmly and said, “Now you’re getting it. I had the same experience. Now you see the truth.”

From that moment on, for the next four years, I essentially abandoned the notion of objective truth and embraced the worldview that all things are relative and truth is determined by the individual. This was a wholly right-brained approach to life in which one’s personal experience and feelings at any given moment determine reality. Left-brained thinking patterns, such as critical analysis and skepticism, were deemed too rigid, too limiting, too male. I felt freed by the artistic approach to life where everything is an open possibility. What 23-year-old wouldn’t love a doctrine of carte blanche? Luckily, though, the tradition, objective values of my upbringing still resonated with me, and so my “experience” led me to continue to make prudent decisions in my own life.

Meanwhile, in the name of tolerance, I found myself supporting or at least not speaking out about all manner of poor decisions that friends, co-workers, and clients were making in their own lives. They did not have the luxury of a sound foundation in the Christian ethics that I had grown up with, and consequently their lives were disasters. I was too much of a coward to judge anyone else’s actions, but I reaped the benefits of having been reared in a worldview that correctly set high standards for me. Consequently, I went along subscribing to this nonsensical system without getting myself into any real trouble.

During that time, I led my life with the comfort that I had found the “truth” – that it was whatever I willed it to be and was determined only by my own personal experience. But two situations came up that caused such a disruption in my feminist outlook that, looking back, I realized they were the start of my de-briefing process out of radical feminism.

The first was when I discovered that a seriously flawed methodology was being used to gather data on the number of women that the shelter system had to turn away each year. I saw that the numbers were being artificially inflated by a defective statistical method, and then those numbers were being presented to the public as the basis for more funding. I told people about this, but no one seemed concerned. I was told that the huge numbers we were getting statistically coincided with our “sense” of the number of battered women out there who were not able to get help, so therefore the numbers were valid. I was also told that statistics were basically meaningless anyway since mathematics is just another male construct used to oppress “woman’s reality.” This was too much for someone who had majored in science for two years. Personal determination of lifestyle and worldview I was willing to go along with, but such a cavalier attitude toward numbers and data was intolerable. When I began to see the outer reaches of subjective truth, I pulled back to regroup.

The second situation occurred shortly after this discovery. It involved what I like to call my “anti-click” experience,” which would begin my return to the world of objective truth (though complete deprogramming would take years). One day it suddenly dawned on me that if I were to base my truth solely on my own personal experience, then I could not subscribe to the gender feminist model. After all, my experience of my father, brother, and husband was that men were wonderfully kind and had the utmost respect for women. It was statistically impossible that I alone would have found the only three decent men in the entire world. So with that, gender feminism became a self-refuting proposition for me and began to crumble before my eyes. That one such basic argument in logic could devastate my entire philosophy was quite an embarrassing blow – one I would suffer again when I returned to, and attempted to defend, Protestantism.

Over the next few years, I had two daughters. On the occasion of my older child’s third birthday, I realized that I had no real dominant philosophy, much less religion, in which to bring up my children. I had originally planned to raise my girls with a knowledge of all the great religions and let them carve out some meaning to life on their own, but, as the parent of two toddlers, I was becoming acutely aware that children need structure and standards. I and another young mother [Leila], had begun writing a political and social editorial column in the *Arizona Republic* in which we often lamented the effects on our society of the “whatever-works-for-you” mentality. I had returned to the belief that there is an objective truth out there somewhere and I felt I owed it to my children to find it.

I had looked into and dismissed Native American religions, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Shamanism, even pseudo-Christian philosophies such as the popular *Course in Miracles*. The only obvious arena left was Christianity, but I was still inclined to think that while Jesus had obviously been a fine prophet, men had distorted his ideas and then used the institution of the Church and the image of a male god to alienate women from the experience of the divine. Then one day my Catholic friend and co-writer, Leila Miller, mentioned to me that the Catholic Church held the Virgin Mary in great esteem – she was and is the Mother of God Incarnate, worthy of veneration. (I had never heard of devotion to Mary in my Episcopal church. In fact, aside from Christmastime references to the Virgin Birth, she was not mentioned.) This realization of

woman's exalted status in Christianity severed the last thread which connected me to the feminist rendition of "herstory." I was finally willing to take another look at the religion of my childhood.

In January 1995, I made a public statement to a group of friends that it was my sincere prayer that Jesus would reveal Himself to me. I had never really understood this whole story of God made man, crucifixion, resurrection, and salvation. If Jesus is the real source of Truth, I wanted Him to prove it. What followed was a rapid fire conversion over the ensuing four months. The support for my conversion was a Bible church that I chose solely on the basis that I could walk to it on the days I would not have a car. The first sermon I heard there was excellent. Not only did the pastor clearly instruct that the Bible is actually relevant to my life today (something I had always doubted), but he also argued that Christianity is not some nebulous religion of blind faith. He spoke of Christianity as the source of objective truth, grounded in a real act that had occurred in a specific moment in human history. I was intrigued and, over the following four months, I never missed a service. I joined a Bible study group focusing on the New Testament, and after opening my heart to Christ, I had a classic moment of conversion: By His amazing grace, God gave me the gift of faith and I became a believing Christian.

Since I had such a "moment," I figured I was a born-again Christian and it made sense that I should become a member of the Bible church. Since this would mean renouncing my membership in the Episcopal Church, I decided that I should take the Bible church's doctrine class to understand fully what I was joining. This, along with a fair amount of reading on the side, left me enamored with the ideas of the Reformation. *Sola scriptura*, the idea that the Bible is the only source of authority for a Christian, and *sola fide*, Luther's idea that we are saved by our faith alone, became my pillars of the truth. Looking back, I realize that those doctrines were no more than an impossible "synthesis" of subjective and objective truth: The objective truth is in the Bible, but I, like Luther, still had the option of personally interpreting that truth. But at the same time, I was sold on these newfound gems and ready to join the nondenominational world of the Bible church.

In the meantime, Leila saw how much fun I was having at the Bible church and considered leaving Catholicism. Her mother very wisely advised her to know what she was leaving before she left the Catholic Church and subsequently gave her a copy of Karl Keating's [Catholicism and Fundamentalism: The Attack on "Romanism" by "Bible Christians"](#). This prompted what can only be described as a marathon replay of the Reformation. For months Leila and I debated the meanings of justification, salvation, sacrifice, transubstantiation, consubstantiation, and the Marian doctrines (just to name a few). Two of our phone conversations actually lasted seven hours each, and eventually the debate came down to one issue: authority. We discovered that the core decision for a Christian is whether or not one submits to the authority of the Catholic Church (which claims to operate under the guidance of the Holy Spirit) and thus accepts the Church's understanding of the Bible and her pronouncements on faith and morals. If one rejects the Church's authority, then one subscribes to the doctrine of *sola scriptura* and is left to find, through a personal interpretation of the Bible, the Truth that was promised by Christ. The latter seemed the proper democratic (and more comfortable) approach to me and, imbued with an underlying subconscious prejudice against Catholicism and influenced by heretical Protestant biblical

interpretations, I stuck to this position with a vengeance.

And then, in one last act toward an informed decision, I read a book called [\*Surprised by Truth: 11 Converts Give the Biblical and Historical Reasons for Becoming Catholic\*](#), edited by Patrick Madrid. In three nights, the doctrine of *sola scriptura*, and much besides, came crumbling down around me. I came to realize that if the Bible, as I held, was the sole source of truth for me as a Christian, then it would have to state as much. But I discovered that, in fact, the Bible never makes such a claim – in fact, the opposite is true. Just as in feminism, I found myself smack dab up against a self-refuting philosophy. I had been duped again, and this time I was devastated. My newfound joy in Christianity evaporated, my spirit fell, and I was left in darkness. I could hardly sleep for nights as I wrestled with the terrible possibility that there was no Truth to be found. Certainly the Catholic Church could not be the true Christianity – those people worship Mary, pray to idols, believe in salvation by works, engage in some sort of cannibalism at their Mass, and use guilt and threats of excommunication to coerce their members into serving the Church hierarchy.

Then I remembered an Anglican priest I had met while I had been a speaker at a pro-life conference (I had left the “pro-choice” camp when I left feminism). He was from a schismatic group of Episcopalians. In a panic, I met with him to find out just exactly where Episcopalians and/or Anglicans stand on the issues of *sola fide* and *sola scriptura*. By that time, I had been reading Keating’s *Catholicism and Fundamentalism* myself (along with some embarrassingly weak Protestant apologetics). In subsequent meetings with this priest I sought an official Anglican/Episcopalian response to the Roman Catholic positions on such critical points of doctrine as the Petrine succession, the Immaculate Conception, and Papal Infallibility. I thought for sure that he would present grand apologetic arguments in response to these questions. Instead, I came away from these talks recognizing what I now know to be a nearly universal ignorance of the Roman Catholic doctrine. A prime example of this was the priest’s comment that the doctrine of Infallibility gave a pope carte blanche to invent any doctrine the Church wanted to make up. “They are at risk of becoming like Mormons with that kind of doctrine,” he said. Luckily, I understood by that time that Infallibility is actually a highly limiting doctrine that preserves and protects the Deposit of Faith. It was clear to me that after 20 centuries of existence, the Catholic Church had not turned into some bizarre form of Mormonism but had, instead, preserved the living Faith instituted by our Lord and handed on by His Apostles. I chuckled to myself as I considered that Mormonism was historically a result of Protestantism!

Meanwhile, at home, my husband kept asking me when I was going to admit to myself that my thinking was Catholic. Yet I still just couldn’t imagine converting to the Church. So, in a series of last-ditch efforts, I went to four Episcopal priests in an attempt to find anyone who could talk me out of becoming Roman Catholic. After all, the Episcopal Church is said to be the *via media* – the middle ground – between Catholicism and Protestantism. I had earlier dismissed the Episcopal Church, primarily because of its weak position on abortion, but now I was desperate. I was hoping the Episcopalians would be able to teach me how to stay out of the Catholic Church without being a heretic. After engaging in many hours of discussion with these fine men, I was left stunned at the similarities between the Episcopal Church and gender feminism.

I found a serious breakdown in moral teaching reminiscent of the “tolerance” model of feminist ideology in which no one or thing should be judged lest someone be made to feel uncomfortable. One priest, who claimed to be pro-life, told me he believed in a woman’s right to an abortion and that he would not discourage a parishioner from having an abortion if she thought it was the best option for her! Another priest responded to the Catholic stance on artificial birth control by saying, “You simply can’t run a church like that today.” And I discovered that ordination of noncelibate homosexual priests was a quiet but regular practice in the Episcopal Church.

I also saw that old, familiar subjective truth model raising its ugly head again. It was explained to me, by the dean of an Episcopal seminary, that the Episcopal Church is not a “confessional” church in which one is required to concur with any particular interpretation of doctrine. An Episcopalian, he said, cannot *ignore* the articles of faith (found in the Book of Common Prayer) or the creeds, but at the same time he need only profess them with regard to how he personally interprets them. Shocked, I remember clarifying, “Do you mean that one man in the pews can profess belief in a literal resurrection, and the man next to him can profess a metaphorical resurrection, and they’re both right in the eyes of the Episcopal Church?” The answer was a definite “Yes.” I was told numerous times that Episcopalians believe that “everyone is right, both Protestants and Catholics.” But I had already learned that it is only in the world of subjective truth that two opposing doctrines can both be right. Subjectivism is simply antithetical to the objective Truth of Christ.

Another priest, a former assistant to the Archbishop of Canterbury, encouraged me to join the “Roman mission” *if that was where I felt more comfortable*. Making decisions based on feelings and personal experience was another tenet of feminism that I had rejected as contrary to an objective Truth.

And I learned that Episcopalian rejection of the papacy is not based on any solid historical, scriptural, or theological reason. It is simply a refusal to submit to Church authority, just as it was for its founder, King Henry VIII. This disdain for binding authority is classic gender feminism, where the “patriarchal model of hierarchy” is seen as an abusive male construct.

The Episcopal Church I found is not the same creedal church my father grew up in – the one that taught me to seek objective truth. Moreover, it is schism from the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, therefore schism from the assured guidance of the Holy Spirit, which creates creedal chaos and has led Anglicanism into heresy. One Episcopal priest put it beautifully: “The Catholics are specific [about doctrine] while we Episcopalians think of ourselves as tolerant.” Exactly! The magisterial teaching of the Catholic Church is the unchanging and knowable Truth – rooted in a 2,000-year history. That Truth is incompatible with “tolerance” of heretical philosophies.

Everything I had rejected and escaped in gender feminism had surrounded me once again in Protestantism: personal interpretation, subjective reality based on emotion, moral relativism, and rejection of legitimate authority. I had not come all this way back to Christianity only once again to subscribe to the right-brain, subjective, emotional, and morally ungrounded philosophies that I

had rejected in feminism.

It was finally over – I realized that I could not remain outside of the Catholic Church.

Since my decision to be reconciled with the Catholic Church, I have been thoroughly analyzed by bewildered friends and family. I have been accused of becoming a Catholic because my friend is Catholic, because I like liturgical services, because I am committing some long overdue rebellion, or because I have a psychological wound from my past that has me on a neurotic search for an authority figure. But I became a Catholic at the Easter Vigil Mass 1996 because I sought objective Truth, a Truth that leaves both feminism and Protestantism in the dust. Jesus said He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, so I took Him up on it. Much to my surprise, and now inestimable joy, I found His promised Truth, His objective, unchanging, divinely protected Truth, in His Holy Catholic Church. I thank God I'm home.

Kimberley Manning

Story first published in the *New Oxford Review*, 1996

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This contribution is available at <http://littlecatholicbubble.blogspot.com/2013/01/from-radical-feminist-to-devout-catholic.html>

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# Seeking Contemplation and a Grateful Heart | Harrington Harmonies

Some days I get so busy. It's not a good thing. I know you can probably relate. This post is for all you overachievers out there.

Psalm 46:10

He says," Be still, and know that I am God;

I will be exalted among the nations,

I will be exalted on the earth."

It really is important for me to settle down and just be. Preferably in prayer. To relax. But not like my lazy relaxed state, my aware relaxed mode. Time for contemplation if you will. This is an invaluable resource for me that I often forget to tap in to. If your anything like me, you forget too.



Eucharistic Adoration

It doesn't matter how I do it. It can be formal prayer, adoration before the Blessed Sacrament (a Catholic devotion), even thoughts while cleaning, gardening or some other quiet activity. Just

taking a break from the business of life.

Life can be so overwhelming at times and I just don't feel that the Lord wants me to function that way. I know he wants me to have peace -so I must make time for peace. I know that I can't hear God's "voice" to me unless I am quiet both in my words and inner thoughts.

Once I do that, once I slow down and open my heart to whatever direction the Lord leads me then everything seems more manageable. Clearer. I also find that I am more productive and less distracted. So for the next few days I am gonna take some extra time for slowing down. I also will focus on positive thoughts. Because even though life always brings challenges, if I can make an effort to see how much good there truly is, it makes life so much more enjoyable even if things are difficult.

Speaking of, here's my Gratitude list for the week:

- my husband being here right now
- this weekend is a four day weekend
- adoration
- the life of St. Agnes- wow- an amazing and inspiring saint
- time with my son
- [our new deployment jar](#)
- auditory learners: sometimes it's nice not to have to write everything
- my daughter got a job
- girls night out
- not getting as much done as I want and being OK with it:)

Join me this weekend. Whatever is going on in your life this week, don't let busyness have you. Rather, make it your business to invest in good and helpful thoughts.

*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. — Philippians 4:8*

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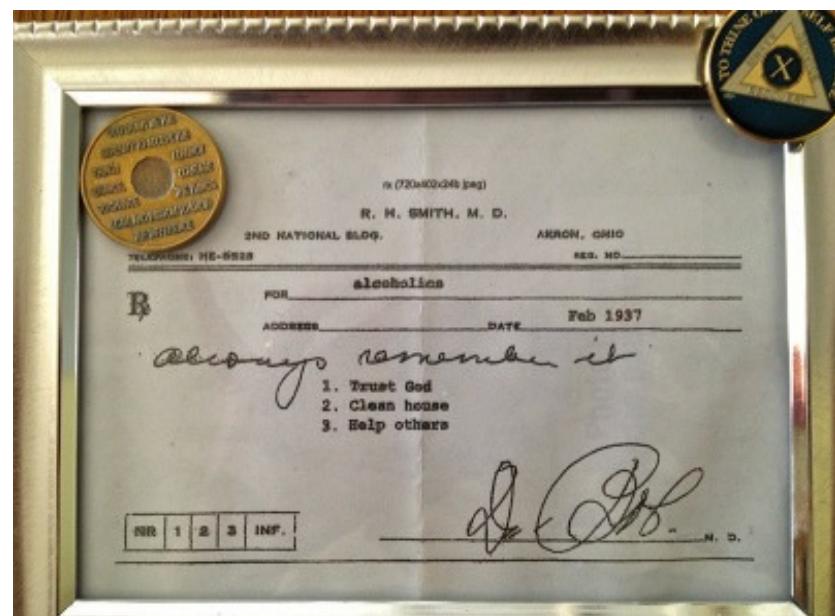
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# A decade of sobriety [at makingthetrek]



10 year coin and copy of AA founder's actual prescription to his patients.

10 years ago this month our life was forever changed. My dear Hubby's drinking problem finally came to a head and he hit his "rock bottom". This post isn't about that moment. However, just to give you a SUPER brief overview: there was an *event* fueled by an alcoholic binge, the *event* led to prison...for 7 years. I moved in with my parents for 5 years to have help with the kids (1,2,5&7). Later I bought a house (awesome God story in that one!!). Hubby came home roughly 18 months ago. I have stories galore of God and His plan and the countless mercies and graces He rained upon us through our family and our friends but those are for another time (or when I feel led to copy them over from my prior blog); **this** is about my Hubby. About staying sober. About losing everything and gaining even more.

Immediately following the event, Hubby went to Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). In the midst of losing his job, draining our retirement account and preparing to sell our house to prepare for what lie ahead, he continued to attend meetings; everyday, sometimes twice a day, faithfully trying to figure out how to repair his life, our marriage and live without alcohol. He also went to an inpatient rehab center for 28 days. Though it was difficult (to say the least) with him gone, we both knew there was no other option if he was going to make sobriety a priority first for himself, secondly for our marriage and family. He was in it for the long haul.

The time apart was good since it gave me time to process everything that had happened, was happening and would likely happen. It gave me time to choose if I would throw in the towel or stay and fight for our marriage. Neither would be easy, but the fight would be A. FIGHT. In the end, God gave me the amazing gift in the ability to forgive my husband. The peace that followed lit a firestorm in my faith, gave me amazing strength and removed the weight of grief weighing my heart down. It was at that time I received a clear and concise promise through my quiet time:

***“For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for good and not for evil, for a future and a hope.” Jeremiah 29:11***

It's become our family's Scripture. Our mantra. Our lifeline. His plan is not always ours, but He can most certainly use ANYthing for good. And He most certainly did.

From rehab Hubby and I both learned that Alcoholism is a hereditary disease. In talking with the kids, we explained it as an allergy; ‘some people can drink alcohol with no problems, other people can’t’. It may not BE an allergy, but it’s a realistic analogy. We also learned it takes hard work, not to mention that family and friend support is crucial. This was a HUGE help for me in not being resentful at the time he spent at AA meetings and with his sponsor. These times away were for the long run and this was a marathon for our entire family.

For my Hubby (and I know this doesn't hold true for everyone), drinking alcohol is a non-issue. He has no desire or urge whatsoever. He lost his job, career, financial status, friends, and years in prison to alcohol...no amount of Miller Lite is going to wash that taste out of his mouth. Ever. As for me, I can take it or leave it. On that note, we keep our house “dry”, it is a small sacrifice for me in supporting him. On occasion, I do meet up with my girlfriends or my mom or my sister and have a glass of wine. Just not with my husband. And it is rare. Maybe once or twice a year. Seriously. Guess what? It's no big deal. However, everyone is different and I know that for us, we chose to seek God in showing us the way to work it together. It works for us.

The thing is when you are an alcoholic and choose sobriety, your life changes. Even if you don't go to prison, but have come to your “rock bottom” or close, it is a lifestyle change; sadly not everyone will be on board. Our family recognizes this and respects our dry house and go on about their business in their own homes. Some family members just don't get it. at all. period. They can't understand why it's even an issue. Often they are the ones steady hitting the bars and/or regularly “tying on one”. You just have to be ready to change and willing to put in the sweat equity.

For us, ten years later, our marriage is stronger because we can communicate—even if we disagree on something—and respect each other's opinions and work toward a compromise. We are setting an example for our children in pushing through difficult times and staying true to your self, even if that choice is contradictory to everything the world tells you. Our health is good (knock wood, we are getting older you know!) and Hubby even ventured back into triathlons at the end of the season last summer. We have jobs (although in this economy and uncertain job market that can change at any time for any one) and are thankful for them. Our finances are improving and recovering from our total drain. Our faith grows. Everyday. So many ways. We take each day, one day at a time. Today is all we have.

Honey, I'm proud of you. Of all your hard work. For every effort you make at improving yourself for us and for yourself. You are an awesome Husband, Father, and Friend and I look forward to every day and am excited to see what God has in store for us for the next decade...and so on and

so on!

## ***So far, so good, so much better than it was. 10 years later.***

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This contribution is available at <http://makingthetrek.wordpress.com/2013/01/27/a-decade-of-sobriety/>  
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## Making Communion Sacred Again [at TASTE and SEE]

A few years ago, I learned about the overuse of Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist by priests. I realized this overuse is influenced by parishioners' impatience, parishioners who want to get out the door as quickly as they can, parishioners who want to make it to the parking lot so they will not be stuck behind the other cars. It saddens me to write that, but it is true.

It also saddens me that priests allow themselves to give into that kind of pressure. I was going to say "peer pressure", but that is not true. Priests are not our peers, which does not mean they should not socialize with us, but when it comes to the Faith, they are the pastors. They are the ones who are supposed to take our input into consideration and then do the right thing according to Jesus. Sometimes it is in sync with the opinion of most of the laity; sometimes it is not.

As for Communion, I have been to too many Tridentine Masses and Melkite Divine Liturgies to think that being in church for over an hour is too much to ask for. It is not, and I believe it is therefore not too much to ask us laity to be patient while the priest gives out Communion - to everyone. We should be encouraged to pray during that time.

Along those lines, this article expresses some of my deepest yearnings about Communion and its sacredness.



image - [http://www.epiphany-](http://www.epiphany-net.org/Epiphany_About_Us.html)

[http://www.epiphany-](http://www.epiphany-net.org/Epiphany_About_Us.html)

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This contribution is available at <http://tasteandsee2.blogspot.com/2013/01/making-communion-sacred-again.html>  
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## Child-like Faith [at 8 Kids And A Business]

I teach the First Communion class at my parish in a large room in the basement of the church. For safety reasons, I ask the parents to come downstairs after class and pick up their child. I tell the kids that if they don't see their parent, they have to stay with me and we'll go upstairs together and wait. Simple rules. Easy to follow.

One recent Saturday morning after seeing who was left after dismissal, I rounded up the handful of kids and proceeded up the stairs. As the last of the parents arrived, I deposited their children into their care, all the while exchanging small talk. It suddenly occurred to me that I lost track of one of the girls and I was certain that she hadn't been picked up yet.

My mind started racing trying to re-trace our steps. She wasn't back in the classroom. She didn't go to the washroom; it was empty. In the church hall was the Confirmation class so she definitely wasn't in there. She wasn't outside in the cold. I peeked through the glass doors leading into the church and saw only a couple of adults praying in dimly lit silence. I went in anyway; there was no where else to look. As I slowly went up the main aisle, looking to the left and to the right, up ahead I caught sight of what may have been part of a pink, flowered knapsack. And was that a bit of fur-trimmed hood hanging over the edge of the pew? I walked up and breathed a sigh of relief. There she was in the pew, curled up in the fetal position and snuggled under her warm winter coat.



Bending down towards her, I quietly asked, "what are you doing?"

"I was just praying," came the confident and somewhat puzzled answer.

"I've been looking everywhere for you," I sighed.

"You have? But I just wanted to pray."

We gathered up her things just in time for her mother to arrive. As I drove home, I remembered that something very similar happened 2,000 years ago when a 12-year old boy frustrated his worried parents.

"Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" was his confident reply when they finally

found him.

My beautiful little student came to class that morning to learn about the Faith, but she ended up teaching me a valuable lesson: the innocence and confidence of a little child who just wanted to pray. Would that we all had her child-like faith.

## ***Deo Gratias***

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This contribution is available at <http://8kidsandabusiness.wordpress.com/2013/02/08/child-like-faith/>  
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