

NewEvangelists.org

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monthly

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New Evangelists Monthly #6

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Forward

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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.

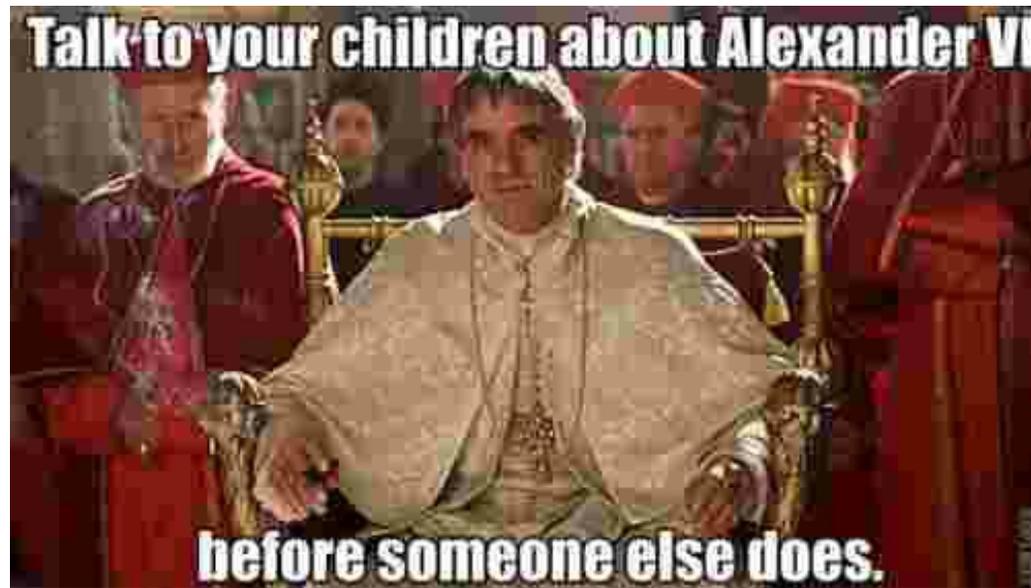
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Argumentum Ad Borgia [at The Back of the World]



Thanks to Catholic Memes for the above pic (and by the way, if you aren't following them on Facebook yet, you really ought to be...).

When I taught Formal Logic in the Fall semester, we spent a lot of time covering logical fallacies. Fallacies are arguments that, in one way or another, break the rules of logic. Lots of them have awesome sounding Latin names: *Argumentum ad hominem*, *Argumentum ad populum*, *Argumentum ad ignorantium*... but they're all fairly simple to understand. For instance, an *argumentum ad hominem* is something we all know is wrong intuitively from the time we're in kindergarten: "you're wrong because you're a poopy face" just doesn't sit right with our rational minds, even when we're little kids.

Often times, one will hear critics of the Catholic Church—particularly Evangelicals, in my personal experience—say that Catholicism cannot possibly be true, because some Popes in history have been, well, less than wholesome characters. I like to call this the "*Argumentum ad Borgia*", in honor of Pope Alexander VI, an infamously bad Pontiff who reigned during the Renaissance, who was born with the name Rodrigo Borgia (yes, *those* Borgias). And yes, I do believe it's a fallacious argument.

Don't get me wrong: even though historians believe that a lot of the wilder stories you hear about him were fabricated by his critics, I think it's fair to say that Alexander VI was not exactly a saint (he had **a lot** of mistresses)... and he's certainly not the only Pope we've had who had questionable moral character. But it simply does not follow that, because we've had some terrible people sitting on the throne of St. Peter, Catholicism is therefore false.

For one thing, while the Catholic Church ascribes *infallibility* to the Roman Pontiff, she does not say he is *impeccable*. What that means is that we believe the Holy Spirit preserves the Pope from

making mistakes when he solemnly defines a dogma (note: this is a pretty rare event...). It emphatically DOES NOT mean we think he's sinless, or that every last opinion he holds is 100% true. Heck, the very first Pope is famous for publicly denying Christ 3 times before the cock crowed... to throw our boy Borgia in our face and say, Catholics are wrong about the Papacy, Q.E.D., is to defeat an argument that we aren't making.

Secondly, the Argumentum ad Borgia bears at least some resemblance to a logical fallacy called the "fallacy of composition," which is when one assumes that something is true of the *whole* simply because it is true of some *part* of the whole. That is to say, I think a lot of people who rely on the "ad Borgia" go on to say "and therefore, the whole institution of the Papacy is rotten." Yes, we've had bad Popes. But we've also had some pretty fantastic ones. A lot of them are saints, and deservedly so. If one is going to throw out the whole of the Papacy, then one is going to need to come up with a more sound argument than "several Popes have been rotten people, so I assume that all or most of them are jerks."

Lastly, we Catholics have always expected there to be some rotten apples in the bunch, ever since Jesus gave the parable of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13. This applies, unfortunately, to our leaders, not just to laity. So while we're deeply grieved by immoral Popes and bishops, we're never surprised. If, God forbid, we ever end up with another Alexander VI, we simply cannot let that shake our faith; it would be illogical to do so.

So, please do talk to your kids about Alexander VI—call it the "birds and the Borgias" talk, if you will—but don't let them despair over him. Jesus Christ has preserved His Church through some tough times and some bad Popes, and we need not fear that the gates of Hell will ever prevail against her...

This contribution is available at <http://backoftheworld.com/2013/05/25/argumentum-ad-borgia/>
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My Visitations [at The Breadbox Letters]



I often reflect upon Mary's visitation to Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-56). I think about the fact that the original scene probably attracted little attention from observers. Two women, two relatives, greeted one another. It was something that happened all the time. No one watching would have shouted out: "Quick! Come see! Here's a scene that will be written about in the Bible!" Mary visited Elizabeth because both had first BEEN Visited - Mary in a totally unique way, of course. She came to Elizabeth carrying God Himself within her. What particularly strikes me is that while I do not carry Jesus in the same way Mary did, I can indeed carry Him in my heart. *"Perhaps you yourselves do not realize that Christ Jesus is in you.."* (2 Corinthians 13:5)

"We may well tremble to think what sanctuaries we are, when the Blessed Sacrament is within us." (Frederick William Faber)

Imagine. The Lord of the universe within us, within me. Imagine.

And I have the opportunity to "carry Him" to everyone I meet.

What might happen if I make a conscious effort to go through today "on visitation?"

What if I first visit the Lord in prayer, and then specifically visit every person I encounter with the love of Christ? This does not mean I have to say or do anything that will draw attention. It may mean that I pray a silent aspiration for the letter-carrier, smile at a harried store clerk, relate to

family members with patience. I might write a note of encouragement, call a lonely relative.

My visitations will be simple and unnoticed.

But as I carry the love of Christ to those around me, I have a feeling that all of heaven will rejoice.

Painting: La Visitation, James Tissot, Brooklyn Museum [Portions of the above were previously posted on The Cloistered Heart blog in 2012.](#)

This contribution is available at <http://thebreadboxletters.blogspot.com/2013/05/my-visitations.html>
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How we survived the F4 Tonrado (Revisited) [at Written By the Finger of God]

As I pray for people of Moore especially the heartbroken parents, I remember our own F4 tornado two years ago, and repost my article on how we survived THIS...



Baptist Church made of brick downtown.



Two storey cement home.



One of the few structures left. Everything else was leveled.



The view from our backyard...

If you've ever seen a tornado make the inevitable approach to your backyard, you'll know what a deer facing headlights must feel like. But of course, you won't be thinking about deer or headlights at that moment. You will think: "Lord, have mercy on us! Our Lady protect us!"

At 3:00 PM on April 12, 2011, the hour of Divine Mercy, when my girls and I stepped inside our storm shelter, the only prayer that was on our lips was the Divine Mercy Chaplet. The lights fizzed and blacked out, interrupting our prayers, and letting us know without inky words, that the tornado was on us. I expected to hear a train rambling through the walls or the crashing wreck of a roof, but all was quiet –not even the children stirred.

In the darkness, we resumed pleading: "For the sake of His sorrowful passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world" and closed with the

Memorare

to Our Lady. When we finished, we cracked the door open and peeked out.

No furniture out of place, no shard of broken glass, no shingle unhinged. Outside, a sturdy tree hung over our neighbor's electric pole; several other trees trashed a handful of other houses; and more downed trees demolished barns and chicken coops. Behind us, a neighbor's fence had been blown off into who knows where. Later, we learned two people died down the street.

We lost fifteen trees to the storm, the most prominent one being our beloved thirty-foot picnic tree. The high-tail winds had uprooted its thick, gnarled roots and toppled it over. But the two-

foot statue of Our Lady of Lourdes that stood next to it remained untouched, unfazed, as peaceful as ever with her hands folded in prayer and eyes still fixed on heaven. (I took my camera out and posted a photo on FB to tell my friends and family we were alright and exactly

who

looked out for us that day.)



Our Lady of Tornado Alley

There were many stories exchanged about D-day on Cullman Alabama but my favorite was one told by our brick-layer, who witnessed that storm when it passed over our neighborhood. “There were three fingers poking out of that black cloud,” he said. “Then the three fingers lifted off the ground and disappeared into the cloud overhead. It moved forward and suddenly, one huge funnel dropped on the ground.”

When I surveyed that F-4’s wake, I could tell where the funnel crash-landed... a wooded area five houses down from us where twisted trees and a metal bridge were knocked out like broken teeth in the aftermath.

Our Catholic Church downtown stands as a miraculous testimony to divine protection as it is the only church among the sea of Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist Churches that did not suffer from any damage whatsoever. Nearby, the monks in the Abby said they saw the tornado headed their way but at the last minute, it turned. I have two words for my theory why both Catholic Churches were spared: the Blessed Sacrament.

Gratitude, amazement, awe... all these emotions sweep you up when you are this close to losing everyone you love and everything you have. And when you encounter others who lost all they had and those they love, your heart can’t help but be moved to share, to comfort, to help, to pray and to wonder: why them and not me?

Then you realize it's never about them or me. It's all about

her.



When we consecrate ourselves to Our Lord through Our Lady, we become hers and she guards us with her mantle as her people, her property and possession. But far more valuable than bodily and earthly protection, consecration also comes with the promise that when we walk through the valley of death we will fear no evil for Our Lady will guide our souls safely on the path to heaven to her Son's kingdom. Even past tornado alleys.



Barn down. Chickens on the loose!

+AMDG+

This contribution is available at <http://www.anabellehazard.blogspot.com/2013/05/how-we-survived-f4-tonrado-revisited.html>
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Nun of the Above [at Forget The Roads]



Hey, how about those Dominican Sisters of Mary?

They've made it all the way to the final round of the American Bible Challenge!! What winsome ambassadors those ladies are – radiantly Christian and really, really good with a Bible. We can hope that this will serve to allay some of the Evangelical concerns about the Catholic Church's stance vis-à-vis Bible-reading. Let's just say there's a lot of weirdness out there. Many Evangelicals "know" that Catholic nuns are ignorant of Scripture (*of course they must be*, the thinking goes – *if the Church allowed nuns to read the Bible, the Church wouldn't have any nuns!*) If you google around, you can find testimonies by former nuns who claim that the Church discourages or makes difficult or even forbids Bible-reading by religious sisters. Three former nuns tell their stories:

In fact, during the whole 10 years I was in the convent with 200 other nuns, we had one Bible between us. But – we never opened it.

When I had those quiet times in my room, I remember one time trying to read the Bible but found it very boring. I was in the convent for almost two years and I can only remember picking up that Bible that one time.

Following her operation she awoke praising the Lord for sparing her life and asked me to read aloud from the Bible. I began to shake all over for, as a Roman Catholic nun, I was never allowed to read the Bible.

Two of these stories demonstrate a lack of interest in the Holy Scriptures on the part of some nuns, which is sad but plausible. The third, however, corroborates the suspicions of Evangelicals who have been told that the Church would really, really rather that Catholics not crack open the Bible lest they find out how badly they have been hoodwinked. The Bible-smart Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist, with their glowing faces and Christ-like demeanor are hard at work laying that myth to rest. It's kind of hard to support this story of the "forbidden Bible" when comparing it with the success of the sisters on the Bible Challenge, or with the historical record, for that matter. After all, Pope Leo XIII, who reigned from 1878 to 1903, made no secret of the fact that he thought that Bible reading is kinda important:

...it is well to recall how, from the beginning of Christianity, **all who have been renowned for holiness of life and sacred learning have given their deep and constant attention to Holy Scripture.**

Those who believe in the putative diabolical conspiracy to keep religious sisters ignorant of the Scriptures have a hard time explaining words like that; the pope was basically exhorting anyone who wishes to lead a holy life – like nuns – to immerse herself in the Bible. Of course, a variation of the myth claims that the Catholic Church, which USED TO forbid nuns to read the Bible, has been forced to change its tune by the constant clamor of Bible-loving Protestants against this obvious injustice. The historical record, again, makes that claim look pretty dopey. Take St. Thérèse of Lisieux, who lived and died in 19th-century France:

In my helplessness **the Holy Scriptures and the Imitation are of the greatest assistance; in them I find a hidden manna, genuine and pure. But it is from the Gospels that I find most help in the time of prayer;** from them I draw all that I need for my poor soul. I am always discovering in them new lights and hidden mysterious meanings.

So **I sought in holy Scripture** some idea of what this life I wanted would be, and I read these words....

It has long been the custom among men to reckon experience by age, for in his youth **the holy King David sang to His Lord: "I am young and despised," but in the same Psalm he does not fear to say: "I have had understanding above old men, because I have sought Thy commandments, Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my paths; I have sworn, and I am determined, to keep the judgments of Thy Justice."**

We live in an age of inventions; nowadays the rich need not trouble to climb the stairs, they have lifts instead. Well, I mean to try and find a lift by which I may be raised unto God, for I am too tiny to climb the steep stairway of perfection. **I have sought to find in Holy Scripture some suggestion as to what this lift might be which I so much desired, and I read these words uttered by the Eternal Wisdom Itself: "Whosoever is a little one, let him come to Me."**

I opened, one day, the Epistles of St. Paul to seek relief in my sufferings. My eyes fell on the 12th and 13th chapters of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. I read that all cannot become

Apostles, Prophets, and Doctors; that the Church is composed of different members; that the eye cannot also be the hand. The answer was clear, but it did not fulfill my desires, or give to me the peace I sought.

Then descending into the depths of my nothingness, I was so lifted up that I reached my aim. Without being discouraged I read on, and found comfort in this counsel: “Be zealous for the better gifts. And I show unto you a yet more excellent way.” The Apostle then explains how all perfect gifts are nothing without Love, that Charity is the most excellent way of going surely to God. At last I had found rest.”

In a nutshell, St. Thérèse had a Bible and she knew how to use it, unlike the ex-nuns quoted above.



Bible-literate nuns could be found wherever and whenever female religious orders existed. Sister Juana Inés de la Cruz of 17th-century Mexico wrote a letter (now known as “A Reply to Sor Filotea de la Cruz”) in which she cites or alludes to Lk 1:43, 1 Sam 9:21, 2 Cor 12:4, Jn 21:25, Ex 33:13, Est 5:2-3, Ps 50:16, 2 Cor 12:11, Dan 9:21-27, Job 38:31-32, Gen 18:23-33, Mk 3:6, Jn 11:47-57, Ex 34:30, Jn 11:47, Isa 11:10, Lk 2:34, Mt 27:28-31, Job 1:7, 1 Pet 5:8, Jn 12:31, Gen 3:18, Lk 23:27-28, SoS 3:11, Jn 11:8-9, Jn 10:1-31, Jn 11:16, Jn 10:32-33, Lk 22:54, Lk 9:33, Lk 22:57, Lk 22:56, Judges 4:4-14, 1 Kings 10:1-3, 1 Sam 1:1-20, 1 Sam 25:2-35, Est 5-9, Josh 2:1-7, 1 Cor 14:34, Titus 2:3-5, Wis 1:4, Rom 12:3, Ps 141:5, Joel 2:13, Pr 31:23, Lk 7:44-45, SoS 1:2, Ps 116:13, 1 Tim 2:11, Mk 16:1, Jn 12:3, Lk 10:40-42, Acts 17:28, Titus 1:12, Lk 1:46-55, and Ex 2:1-10.

A letter!

Imagine if she had been writing a book....

By the way, where did she get all that from if the Catholic Church allowed her no access to a Bible?



Ana T. de J. J.

The case of St. Teresa of Ávila needs no comment; she is said to have quoted from Scripture over 600 times in her writings. St. Teresa lived in 16th-century Spain, at the time of Martin Luther who as everyone knows spent a great deal of time studying the Bible, which the Church made no attempt to keep from him, when he was an Augustinian monk.

Of course many religious sisters have been unable to read the Scriptures for themselves; in that case the Church herself taught them the Scriptures. St. Clare of Assisi, who lived in the 13th century, was “unlettered” and learned the word of God from the friars who preached at her abbey. As the Golden Legend tells us:

On a time it happed that the pope Gregory defended that no friar should go to the house of the ladies without his leave. And when the holy mother St. Clare knew that, she had much sorrow in her heart, because she saw well she might not have that which was needful, which was the nurture of Holy Scripture, and said to her sisters with a sorrowful heart; Now forthon well may the pope Gregory take from us all the friars, when he hath taken from us them that nourished our souls with the Word of God. And anon she sent again all the friars of her house to the master or minister, for she said she had nothing to do to have friars to get them bodily bread, when they failed them that nourished her and her sisters with the Word of God. Anon as the pope Gregory heard this tiding he repealed that which he had defended, and set all at the will of God.

Other nuns were better educated. History records that St. Gertrude the Great, a nun in 13th-century Germany, devoted herself to studying the Scriptures, patristic writings and theology, and wrote simplified versions of difficult scriptural passages in Latin and in her native German. Her devotion to the Bible comes as no surprise, because her abbess, Gertrude of Hackeborn, required

her nuns to be well-educated in the Scriptures.



St. Leoba, an 8th-century native of England, traveled with St. Boniface to the court of Charlemagne, where she was a good friend of and tremendous influence upon his queen, Hildegarde. St. Leoba's Vita tells us that "So great was her zeal for reading that she discontinued it only for prayer or for the refreshment of her body with food or sleep: the Scriptures were never out of her hands.... When she lay down to rest, whether at night or in the afternoon, she used to have the Sacred Scriptures read out at her bedside, a duty which the younger nuns carried out in turn without grumbling." And the Vita Sanctae Geretrudis tells us that the Belgian St. Gertrude of Nivelles was very familiar with Holy Scripture, to the point where she had much of it memorized. Perhaps these were exaggerations, but they are strange claims for contemporaries of Sts. Leoba and Gertrude to put into writing *if the 7th- and 8th-century Catholic Church did not permit nuns to read the Bible.*

Examples stretch from the 19th-century American St. Elizabeth Ann Seton who "prayed her way through life's joys and struggles using Sacred Scripture," to 5th-century French abbess St. Caesaria of Arles who insisted that her nuns be literate so that they could read the Scriptures, because "There is no doctrine which could be better, more precious and more splendid than the text of the Gospel. Behold and retain what our Lord and Master, Christ, has taught by His words and accomplished by His deeds!" Saints like Thérèse, Elizabeth Ann, Teresa, Clare, Gertrude, Caesaria and Leoba, and run-of-the-mill sisters like Juana and Gertrude of Hackeborn lived in different parts of the world in different centuries over the past 1500 years – *where and when exactly* did the Catholic Church keep the Scriptures from its religious sisters??

Have there been nuns who were ignorant of the Scriptures? I'm sure there have been, and still are. The point is, there has never been a Church conspiracy to keep them that way.

Former nuns hoping to sell horror stories to those with a conspiracy-theory bent have fallen on hard times. While there have always been (and sadly, always will be) religious sisters who find the Bible boring, the Church has never stood between them and Jesus. History is full of biblically literate, Christ-honoring religious, and the Dominican Sisters of Mary put a modern-day face on that. *And I say, God bless them!!* All the best to them – if the Bible Challenge would quiz the contestants on the 7 books Protestants removed from the Old Testament, I know the sisters would have the competition all sewn up!

Does or did or will the Catholic Church ever keep religious sisters from reading the Holy Scriptures?

Nun of the above.

On the memorial of St. Mateo Correa Magallanes

Deo omnis gloria!

This contribution is available at <http://forgettheroads.com/2013/05/21/nun-of-the-above/>
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Requisite for Following Jesus [at A Spiritual Journey]

The Gospel reading came from Mark 10. A man asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus mentioned the commandments and the man said that he had observed them from his youth. Then Jesus said, "You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." At that statement, his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions. The Lord could be testing the man. Nevertheless, he showed that detachment from all material possessions goes beyond obeying all the commandments; without it, you won't be able to follow the Lord freely.

This contribution is available at <http://journeyofimperfectsaint.blogspot.com/2013/05/requisite-for-following-jesus.html>
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Do Men Need Help? [at The Veil of Chastity]

Have you ever had an encounter with a guy who flirts with you **but never follows up**? Did you blame yourself? Were you tempted to follow-up with him in the hopes of it turning into a date?

It is easy to think that your response to a man's flirtation is either too enthusiastic or too nonchalant and that if you could just **strike the perfect balance**, you would secure more dates. It is also easy to believe that if a man does not follow-up, then it is because he needs your help.

We Respond

Emotional Chastity includes the understanding that the **responsibility** for the initiation, follow-up and pursuit lies on the **man**. As the girl, your job is only to **respond**. So, what is the best way to respond to those initial flirtations by men? What is the fine line between a proper, balanced response and **'helping' the man**? Does he even **need** your help?

Dropping Your Hanky

I received an email from a girl named Becky asking for my advice. Becky met a guy who **flirted with her** during a tour he had given to her and a couple of her friends. His flirting seemed to be directed at her specifically. She was highly attracted to him and he was **exactly her type**. From the way she described him, he was gorgeous, successful and confident. He was also not wearing a ring.

So, Becky did a little research on Facebook and Google. She learned that he was not married. Check! He was Catholic. Check! And, that he was also slightly older than her. Check! So, she asked me if I thought it would be okay if she sent him a little email thanking him for the tour.

Because of her description of him, I did not feel that he was in need of encouragement from girls. But, I have been wrong, so wrong, before. So, I told her that her email could be thought of as an old-fashioned *'dropping your hanky.'* If he picks it up, great! If he doesn't, then she at least knows his intentions towards her.

So, she sent him an email. He responded with a polite, *"You are welcome. Nice to meet you too!"* It seems he did not need any encouragement from her. Mr. Gorgeous, Successful and Confident knows how to pursue a girl. He does not need help.

Examples Of Helping

Oh there are so many examples of 'helping' to pick from! Here are some things that we girls do in order to **help** the relationship get started or continue:

- Asking for his number, email, twitter, facebook account
- Directly asking him out on a date
- Contacting his mother, sister, brother, best friend
- Changing Churches in the hopes of running into him
- Unnaturally placing yourself anywhere in his orbit
- Sending him an email or text, commenting on his FB page, calling him
- Frequenting his workspace, workplace, dorm
- Becoming a doormat in order to make the relationship easy for him

Men Decide, We Consider

Another part of **Emotional Chastity** is realizing how romance works. In [this post](#), I wrote:

*“...Do not even consider a guy or allow him to occupy your heart or thoughts until he has taken you on **3 dates**. Yes, 3 real dates where he pays and impresses you. Why?because that gives the guy enough time to **decide** on you. And, if he has **decided** on you, then you can **consider** him. But, not until then. That is just the way it works. Sigh.”*

In the world of romance, men **decide** on us **first** and then we **get to consider** them. My Mom always told me this and I did not believe her. I did not like the **consider-this-subset-of-men-only** rule. I guess I was concerned that I would not like the men that **decided** on me and therefore my pool of candidates to **consider** needed to be expanded through my helpful actions. In my younger years, I was a helper of the *doormat* variety. LOL



Faith

[Emotional Chastity](#) begins with the belief that you can **trust God** and that He has a plan for your life and for your vocation. Once you have this belief, you will have peace. This peace will guide you in all your **actions and responses** to men. It will free you from the belief that you have to help men.

Supernatural

Emotional Chastity also requires that you believe in the **Supernatural** realm. It is in that realm where God fulfills His plan. If your vocation was left simply in the **natural** realm, then I would advise you to do all you can to capture your man before some other girl gets him. Help him, call him, email him, text him and chase him. Be the doormat.

But that is not how God designed us women. He designed us to be the receivers and the responders. He designed men to be the initiators and the pursuers. Therefore, you can count on God to infuse Supernatural grace into your man so that [he will not need your help](#).

Of course, this can only happen within the Supernatural realm of God's will. So, **stay in His will**. Do not stray from His path.



Once you wrap your arms around this truth, you will have peace even when guys fail to follow-up with you. You will be able to **stop yourself** from following up with them, helping them in their pursuit or becoming the doormat. You will be able to **temper your emotions**. You will be able to wait on the Lord and His Supernatural Grace.

How Should You Respond?

You will not know if the man who is flirting with you is the one that God has for you so if a man starts to flirt with you, what should you do? For example, what if you meet a man at Home Depot and he flirts with you? What if he asks for your number? What if he **texts you instead of calls you?** What if he calls once but never follows up beyond that? What if he never calls? What if he says, “*We should go out **sometime**.*”?

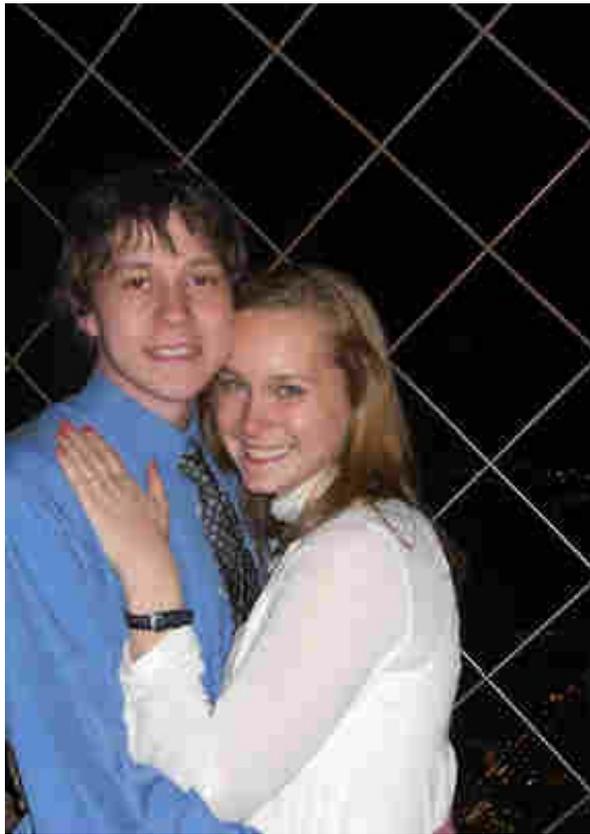
If our job is to respond, what should our response be to each of the above scenarios? Next week, I will share with you some ideas on how to respond.

God love and bless you!

This contribution is available at <http://theveilofchastity.com/2013/05/30/do-men-need-help/>
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Why We're Contraception-Free, Part 1: Asking the Question [at Young, Evangelical, and Catholic]



Newly engaged at the top of the Eiffel Tower in Paris

It was nighttime and we were at the top of the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France when I knelt down on one knee, pulled out the ring box, and asked Krista if she would do me the honor of marrying me. The reply: "

Yes with all my heart!

"

What can I say?

We were young and in love, and Krista, my then-girlfriend, was studying abroad in France. Of course I had to fly out there to propose! I'd have been a fool to pass up such an opportunity.

It was the Spring of our Junior year at

[Wheaton College](#)

and we had the plan to get married that summer just before our Senior year. Before deciding to

propose, I had done a lot of work figuring out how we'd get by for the year while we both finished our degrees, looking into everything from financial aid and health insurance to housing and making a budget. But there was one thing that neither of us considered in the least bit:

children

And why would we have

? We were just wanting to get married, not start a family. Two entirely distinct choices, right? Marriage was just about us. As Christians, it was what would let us legitimately express our affections sexually.

Of course, we knew - more accurately, assumed - we wouldn't want a child right away. Not only were we both going to be still in school, but we just weren't ready for that yet, even if just mentally. We needed time for ourselves, for our relationship.

This all meant that we would need to use some sort of contraception. Not using contraception wasn't even a relevant option in our minds. Everyone used contraception. It was the responsible thing to do. The question for us, then, was what kind of contraception we would use. We were aware of the general kinds of contraception but since neither of us had been sexually active we were unfamiliar with all the details. Research needed to be done. We were both pro-life, and so we knew we didn't want to use anything that was

[abortifacient](#)

(including anything that prevents implantation).

Research led to a snag right away

: reading about various types of contraception online, I was uneasy about all of them. While I had no objections to the idea of contraception in the abstract, all of the actual options seemed unappealing, even perverse. Have Krista take unnecessary hormones to make her body dysfunctional? Nope. Have some device implanted in her? Seems extreme. Or make sure we're always wearing plastic or using chemicals to protect ourselves from each other? Seems wrong to bring any foreign object into our most intimate expression of love for each other.

I didn't want any of that. Even at that point, I remember thinking,

Why would we go so out of our way to disrupt what is so obviously just the natural process?

The whole thing seemed a bit ridiculous to me. Why was it so important to be able to have sex and yet intentionally disrupt for what the act is clearly directed? Besides, most types were either

[known to be abortifacient or were suspected of it](#)

(though concerns regarding some forms of contraception being abortifacient have been [challenged by newer research](#)

). There didn't seem to be many options for people who respect human life and didn't want to take any chances.

And yet, I knew that we couldn't possibly allow ourselves to conceive a child right away. Using nothing was out of the question.



Enjoying Paris the day after getting engaged
While thinking all of this through

, I remembered from my time in Catholic schools growing up that the Catholic Church taught that the use of contraception was immoral. I basically had no idea why - it had something to do with the purpose of sex? - but something about the idea had always sort of rung true for me. Though I was still an evangelical, by this time I had a growing interest in the Catholic Church. I had come to respect the Church's theology as being well thought-out, consistent, and representative of historic Christianity, even if I wasn't sure I agreed with everything. Since most of my research into the Catholic Church had focused on the more central issues of authority and justification, I hadn't studied their sexual ethic at all.

In the least, I was intrigued, and since we were looking into the matter, I figured it wouldn't be a bad idea to see what the Catholic Church had to say. I didn't think I'd be convinced to not use contraception at all - given our situation, such an extreme position would have been irresponsible - but I wanted to be informed about the different sides of the issue, and I knew reading the Catholic view would be worth my time.

I'm not entirely sure how I knew about

[Humanae Vitae](#),

Pope Paul VI's 1968 encyclical on proper and improper types of birth control, but I found it on the Internet and asked Krista, who was still in France, if we could both read it and discuss it. Krista agreed, though she has since told me that she wasn't expecting to change her mind about using contraception and read it only because I asked her.

Pope Paul VI begins [Humanae Vitae](#)

by reminding Catholics that he, as Pope, is in a position to teach authoritatively on moral matters. I wasn't Catholic and didn't believe that the Pope had any authority, so I skipped down to section two. I was interested in his arguments.

Section two gave an argument from the

[natural law](#)

. 'Natural law' refers to the moral law that all people can know via their consciences. God has created the universe with a reasonable order. That order can be discerned by way of reason and must be followed. Morality, then, is simply acting in accord with reason and the way things are supposed to be. The natural law is "natural" in that it exists in nature and is prior to and independent of any civil law. It's a 'law' in that all humans are obligated to follow it. The idea of natural law has been standard throughout the Church's history and is reflected in passages from Scripture like

[Romans 2.14-15](#)

,

[Romans 1.26-27](#)

,

[John 1.1-3](#)

, et al.

So the starting point of the natural law argument of

[Humanae Vitae](#)

is simple: we have been made by God with purpose and this purpose must be respected. So what is the purpose of the sex act? We can discern its purpose by reason and examining the act itself.

In the sex act, the man and the woman

express their love for each other by giving of themselves in total to each other as male and as female, and in doing so consummate and express their marital unity ("and they shall become one flesh")

[Gen 2.24](#)

). In this complete openness and self-gift, the couple is at the exact same time engaging in the procreative act.

The unitive act is the same thing as the procreative act

. So the sex act has two natural purposes or ends towards which it is ordered: the unity of the couple and the procreation of children. Both aspects are part of the natural purpose of sex and, since we are "not the master of the sources of life but rather the minister of the design" (

[HV](#),

13), both must be respected. Any attempt at frustrating either purpose is contrary to the nature of the sex act and therefore immoral.

It's obvious that contraception frustrates the procreative aspect (that's its explicit, intended purpose), and by that fact alone contraception is contrary to nature and therefore immoral. But contraception also frustrates the unitive aspect. The only way for contraception to close the sex act to procreation is by preventing the man or the woman from giving of themselves as male and as female to the other in total, which is a frustration of the unitive purpose. Thus, since it frustrates both of the natural purposes of the sex act, the use of contraception is immoral.

Pope Bl John Paul II later put the same idea this way:

[T]he innate language that expresses the total reciprocal self-giving of husband and wife is overlaid, through contraception, by an objectively contradictory language, namely, that of not giving oneself totally to the other. This leads not only to a positive refusal to be open to life but also to a falsification of the inner truth of conjugal love, which is called upon to give itself in personal totality. ([Familiaris Consortio](#), 32)

In trying to frustrate the natural procreative aspect of sex by the use of contraception, one is necessarily - even if unintentionally - frustrating the unitive aspect as well.

So, sex is ordered toward

the unity of the couple and the procreation of children. That may sound fairly simple, but life is never that simple. What if someone needed to, say, take the Pill for medicinal reasons? Pope Paul VI makes it clear that the Church does not intend to limit the use of legitimate medical treatments:

[T]he Church does not consider at all illicit the use of those therapeutic means necessary to

cure bodily diseases, even if a foreseeable impediment to procreation should result there from—provided such impediment is not directly intended for any motive whatsoever. ([HV](#), 15)

And what if a couple honestly cannot handle another child?

If...there are well-grounded reasons for spacing births, arising from the physical or psychological condition of husband or wife, or from external circumstances, the Church teaches that married people may then take advantage of the natural cycles immanent in the reproductive system and engage in marital intercourse only during those times that are infertile, thus controlling birth... ([HV](#), 16)

This technique is known as

[natural family planning](#)

and is based on how our bodies already function naturally. It requires no hormones that mess up the woman's cycle, no implants, no barriers between the husband and wife - there is no need for anything artificial to distort the sex act. It requires only a knowledge of the woman's monthly fertility cycle and the self-control and mutual respect to act accordingly. Thus, natural family planning works

with

the order of nature rather than

against

the order of nature as contraception does.

Before closing with some pastoral directives

for the application of

[Humanae Vitae](#)

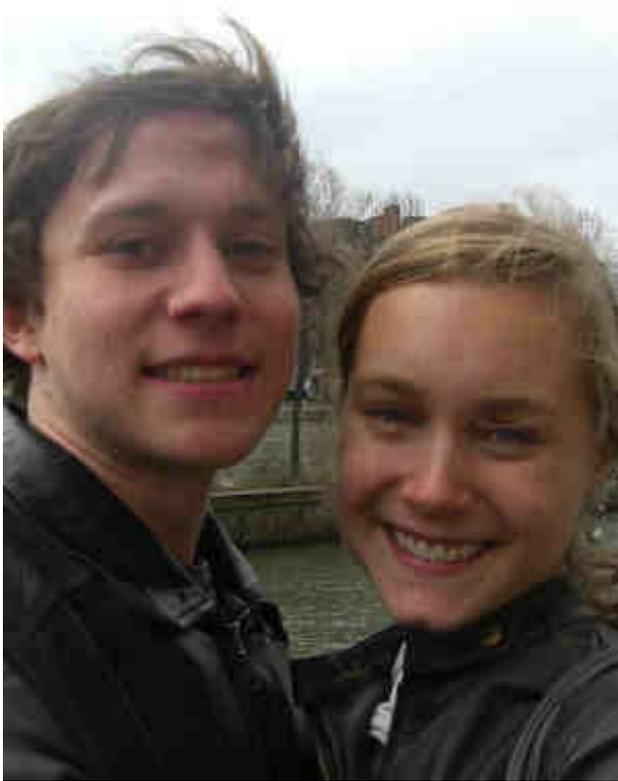
- including a call for scientists to develop easier methods for couples to determine when a woman is fertile and thus when to abstain when they want to avoid conceiving a child - Pope Paul VI makes one last argument against the use of contraception by predicting the negative consequences of its widespread use. He warns:

(1) "[F]irst consider how easily this course of action could open wide the way for marital infidelity and a general lowering of moral standards...and especially [for] the young..."

(2) "[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."

(3) There is "danger of this power passing into the hands of those public authorities who care little for the precepts of the moral law. Who will blame a government which in its attempt to resolve the problems affecting an entire country resorts to the same measures as are regarded as lawful by married people in the solution of a particular family difficulty? [...] Should they regard this as necessary, they may even impose their use on everyone." ([HV](#), 17)



Overlooking the [Seine](#) in Paris

Has contraception encouraged sexual promiscuity, particularly among the young? Definitely. Now that the use of contraception is expected, are men more likely to view women as mere sex objects to whom little responsibility is owed? No question. Have governments used contraception against their own populations?

[China's brutal one-child policy](#)

is just one example of many in the last few decades. It seemed Pope Paul VI was right.

My first time through [Humanae Vitae](#)

left me rocked. I found it well reasoned, nuanced, and - most unexpectedly - very compelling. But I honestly did not want it to be right. I had read

[Humanae Vitae](#)

just to be more informed, not to have my plans turned upside down.

We were going to be in school. I'd have no way to provide for a wife and child if we were to conceive right away. Of course, it would be possible to not consummate the marriage for a few months, but that didn't seem to make any sense. If we were going to get married, we were going to be having sex, which meant it would be possible to conceive a child right at the beginning of the school year. I figured out that if we were to conceive right away, Krista could be going into labor during finals week. It was also very important to me that Krista was able to finish her degree. Another option would be to put off the wedding for a year. But we had already gone through a long process of thinking through when we wanted to get married, and we had already gotten engaged, set a date, and made the announcement - it would be embarrassing and disappointing to change it all now.

But my conscience had been twinged.

We still had several months

to work it all out, though. I had time to give it more thought. And besides, the question wasn't mine to settle alone. Krista and I would discuss

[Humanae Vitae](#)

in a few days and we would think it through together. I was sure she'd bring me back to my senses, that of course it was the right thing for us to use some sort of contraception.

Keep reading: [Part 2: Flipping the Switch](#)

This is Part 1 of a [six-part series](#):

Part 1: Asking the Question[Part 2: Flipping the Switch](#)[Part 3: No Longer Afraid](#)[Part 4: Hey Baby](#)[Part 5: Tested Twice](#)[Part 6: No Regrets](#)**Post Script****Resources**

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[Humanae Vitae](#)

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[Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan](#)

-
[Children of the Reformation: A Short and Surprising History of Protestantism and Contraception](#)

-
[Sanger's Victory: How Planned Parenthood's Founder Played the Christians—and Won](#)

-
[Birth control is moral \(but not all methods\)](#)

-
[Organic Sex, Organic Farming](#)

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[The Vindication of *Humanae Vitae*- *Adam and Eve After the Pill: Paradoxes of the Sexual Revolution*](#)

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[iUseNFP.com](#)

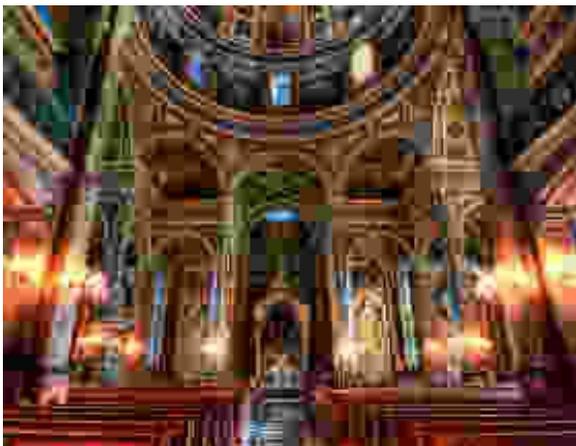
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The Ordination of Fr. Paul Schneider, OFM Conv. [at Imprisoned in my Bones]



The Basilica of St. Josephat (for more photos visit [this link](#))

Heaven came down to earth this past weekend, of that I am certain. My friend, Fr. Paul Schneider, OFM Conv. was ordained to the priesthood at the Basilica of St. Josephat by Bishop William Callahan and it was one of the most perfect, magnificent, holy and beautiful experiences I have ever known. There is nothing more beautiful than watching a man lay down his life for the Lord, but to witness an ordination in the grandeur of the Basilica, with a choir of what sounded like angels accompanied by trumpets and strings and drums, praying in the company of the sweetest, most wonderful and most joyful of all nuns-

[The Handmaids of the Precious Blood](#)

, whose purpose is to pray for priests, and watching the new priest, in beautiful Marian vestments shed tears of joy while celebrating his first Mass and presenting his mother with a long-awaited maniturgia (Fr. Paul is a late vocation), all amounted to holy perfection, and I was so blessed to be a humble witness and participant of it all. I smiled until I thought my face would break and cried until I thought my heart would melt-it was all so incredibly wondrous.



Fr. Paul and I met in the noon hour confessional line at the Church of the Gesu in downtown Milwaukee in November of 2011. I had recognized him from my visits to St. Francis de Sales Seminary where he had spent some time studying, and so I introduced myself. He told me that he

had less than two years left before ordination to the priesthood and he asked me to pray for him. What he didn't know was that very night I was to be enrolled as a candidate for the Oblates of the Precious Blood and would be committing my life to praying for priests along with the

[Handmaids of the Precious Blood](#)

. I took his request for prayer as a sign from God that what I was about to do was indeed His will for me. The next month, in a Christmas letter from the Handmaids, I discovered Fr. Paul's picture and learned that he, too, was an Oblate of the Precious Blood! Since then, Fr. Paul has been a wonderful friend, helping with events for

[Roses for Our Lady](#)

, an organization with which I am involved, and being a confidant and advisor in some of my personal faith issues as well. Being invited to his ordination was a joy of the greatest magnitude.



Every single part of Fr. Paul's ordination—from the lovely image of Our Lady of Guadalupe on the invitation, the order of worship and his holy card, the quiet prayerfulness of the holy hour on the eve of ordination (see Fr. Alejandro Castro's fabulous priestly reflection with personal stories of Fr. Paul's life based on Luke 9 below), having the opportunity to sit next to and pray with the

[Handmaids of the Precious Blood](#)

, who, although they are cloistered, were given special permission to attend his ordination, and the joyful smile and easy approachability of Bishop Callahan, who had formerly been the rector and pastor of the Basilica and who was the bishop who ordained Fr. Paul, to the choir resounding magnificent hymns of praise (a video follows-or

[visit this link](#)

- not of the actual choir but a perfect likeness in sound of the offertory song,

Let All the World)

, to the sweet sight of Fr. Paul bringing flowers to the altar of Our Lady during the Ave Maria- every moment was a treasure I will never forget.



Fr. Paul with my husband and I from my Solemn Resolution of Love as an Oblate of the Precious Blood last October

I praise God for Fr. Paul Schneider, OFM Conv. and I pray that the love and joy that filled his heart on his ordination day and during his beautiful first Mass will remain with him forever as he journeys to his first assignment in Peoria, Illinois, and wherever the Lord may call him to serve in the years to come.

Enjoy this touching reflection on the priesthood based on Luke 9, graciously shared by Fr. Alejandro Lopez OFM Conv.:

Perhaps it was the preaching

of a *particularly* inspiring, Cuban priest.

Or a documentary on Mother Teresa or St. Maximilian Kolbe.

Or a rerun on EWTN

of some mutton-chop, side-burned fellow

on fire for the Lord.

Or a pilgrimage or two, to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe...

Whatever...the Lord uses the moment to kick-started your vocation.

Kick you in the rear.

And **suddenly**...all those reasons why you're "**not enough**"

don't seem to amount to **a hill of beans**.

And you think maybe he **does** want me!

Maybe he really does want **me!**

As incredible as that may seem!

And off you go running...as if in love for the first time!

But then...there's a stumble.

A trip up that comes...perhaps **many years** later.

When in the midst of your studies. Or as a deacon.

After years of running well.

When the old, familiar doubts creep back in

like a homeless Gila monster.

"I'm not smart **enough**."

"I can't sing well **enough!**"

"I'm **certainly not** holy **enough**."

“I tried before and it **didn't** work out.”

“I'm **too old**, now.”

And you admit to Jesus in prayer,

“Dismiss the crowds,

for it's a deserted place **here**.”

What you're saying is what you think you **know**:

“I don't have **enough** for **so many!**

I **barely** have enough for **myself!**”

But Jesus challenges,

“Give them some food, **yourself**.”

And this will be your vocation.

As a deacon, you **already** know this.

As a deacon you've **already** been “preparing meals.”

Not from some “five ingredient”

crockpot cookbook!

But **in and through** the Holy Spirit.

At work **in and through** your life.

Helping you to break open the Word.

And feed **crowds** at Mass!

To be an instrument of peace in your friary.

To open doors in the dark

and be a brother to a stranger

whose mind swims with **his own** alcohol-fed fears.

Tomorrow, and for the rest of your life,

Jesus will encourage you to make him present to others:

“Give them some food **yourself**.”

And his command may haunt you!

If you take your vocation seriously,

I think it **must scare you** at **some time** in your priesthood!

For you will fear

that God’s people **will** go hungry.

Because **you** failed to find them some food!

“But **five loaves** and **two fish** are **all** I have!”

Thankfully, Jesus understands!

And he **has** a plan!

A plan that includes **poor** priests **and** their **poverty**!

That takes into account our **pitiful and small** humanity

and makes it part of *the Feast!*

He teaches us by example that life *isn't* a solo act.

Insisting that his disciples help.

And in today's Gospel, the Lord takes what they bring
and gives it right back...*to them...to us.*

Tonight I'm thinking how he gives us, *priests,*

the Food that will nourish.

How our consecrated lives are part of the meal.

As our Lord takes *us* and blesses *us.*

And allows even our doubts and fears to break *us* open.

And then gives *our lives* away.

All the while letting us have the places of honor!

Letting us appear to be *heroes!*

Humbly letting folk imagine

we walk a tightrope *gloriously* without a net.

(The secret is *we don't!*)

For each, *alone, is never enough* to feed *so many!*

Yet *neither* were we, priests, meant to be the meal!

Not by ourselves.

We're served, by the Grace of God,

with his Body and Blood!

And we must ***never*** forget that!

Father Paul, ***you*** must ***never*** forget that!

Each and every day of your life, as a priest,

the Lord will remind you

that you are ***not*** the main course!

At ***this altar***...but ***also*** in the nursing home...

Or in a ***parishioner's*** home...

Or in your office...or friary.

Or in the back of church after Mass.

As the People of God, the Body of Christ,

lift you up when you are down,

like a consecrated Host!

Helping make your priestly vocation holy!

And when you are proud,

whenever you imagine you ***can*** feed them by yourself,

the People of God, the Body of Christ,

will humble you, too.

Helping make your priestly vocation holy!

Paul, tonight we gather with the Lord,

to pray for you.

Not because we know your musical skills.

Or how old you are.

Or how much you like “Fiddle Faddle,”

or a trip to Leon’s every now and then.

We pray for you because we know you’re human.

And we know you **are** called

to a **special** role in his Church!

We know that Christ plans to make of you

something new and wonderful...**and holy**.

And we pray for you because we **know**

God answers **every** prayer.

And will help you...even in your fears.

Way back in the beginning of *Genesis*

God beat back the **first** fear.

The Lord told Adam, wounded by sin,

“Who told you that you were *naked*?”

In other words, “*Enough* with ‘*not* enough!’”

And maybe that’s what he says *to us*.

As we gaze upon him.

And adore him in the Eucharist.

Mysteriously appearing

in his Glorified, Risen Body and Blood

as something *so lowly* as a piece of bread.

Something that to our senses seems

“*not enough*” to satisfy even *one little child!*

By his Grace...By the power of his Holy Spirit...

By His Glorified, Risen and Ascended Body and Blood

present in the Eucharist...

You, and *every other priest* called to follow him,

will be *more than enough!*

Tonight we gaze upon the Sacrament of the Mystery of God’s Love.

In the silence we pray that it will transform you!

See what you are...become what you receive!

Allow the Lord to consecrate you in your priesthood

as **his** Body and Blood ***for the salvation of all the World!***

This contribution is available at <http://annebender.blogspot.com/2013/05/fr-paul-schneider-ofm-conv.html>
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Forgiveness, the healing that prevents paralysis [at Catholic Deacon]

Being Christian means living your life

sub specie aeternitatis

(i.e., under the aspect of eternity), living in the awareness of your destiny, seeking to fulfill the end not for which you were created, but for which you were redeemed at a great price. One reason why health and wealth preachers, psychics, horoscopes, astrology, etc. all hold a certain attraction for so many is that they feed off the underlying belief that this life, here and now, is all that ultimately matters. This is not true, which is not to say that this life doesn't matter, it matters hugely, but as something like a means to an end. It is not

a

means to

an

end, but

the

means to

your

end. So, what we do, how we engage reality, does

really

matter.

Let's look to the life of Jesus, which as Christians we do too little, to show us what matters.

And there people brought to him a paralytic lying on a stretcher. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Courage, child, your sins are forgiven." At that, some of the scribes* said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." Jesus knew what they were thinking, and said, "Why do you harbor evil thoughts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he then said to the paralytic, "Rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home." He

rose and went home ([Mark 2:1-11](#))



You see, the physical healing was secondary, or even tertiary. It was not primary. What Jesus did for the man who was paralytic was forgive his sins, heal his soul, restore his heart by an incomprehensible act of love, not enable him to walk, which was something the Lord did merely to silence His critics.

In his book

[*Follow Me: A Call to Die. A Call to Live*](#)

, David Platt lays this out pretty simply: "Forgiveness is God's greatest gift because it meets our greatest need."

Pope Francis laid it out more comprehensively and just as simply in his first

[*Angelus*](#)

appearance on 17 March:

Let us not forget this word: God never ever tires of forgiving us! "Well, Father what is the problem?". Well, the problem is that we ourselves tire, we do not want to ask, we grow weary of asking for forgiveness. He never tires of forgiving, but at times we get tired of asking for forgiveness.

Let us never tire, let us never tire! He is the loving Father who always pardons, who has that heart of mercy for us all. And let us too learn to be merciful to everyone

Forgiveness gives us hope, which often gives us the strength we need to carry on. Hope is the antidote to despair. It is the cure for being paralyzed in the face of reality, which is often overwhelming because it is unyielding.

Hard Lessons Learned from the Russell Ford Scandal [at DavidLGray.INFO]



If you've never heard of Russell Ford, you should. In 1987 he plead guilty to raping a woman and was sentenced to serve a twenty-five year prison term in the state of Alabama. The allied offenses of sodomy and kidnapping were dropped as part of the plea agreement. Ford seems to have always held that he was duped into taking a plea agreement and didn't rape his accuser.

While in the second year of his prison sentence, Ford was received into the Catholic Church and from that point forward he devoted his remaining time in prison to catechize the teach the Catholic faith to fellow prisoners. In addition to that he wrote articles for Catholic publications, co-founded the Alabama prison systems' GED Program, founded the Killian Mooney Catechetical Institute, earned a business degree, helped to facilitate an anger management course for inmates, founded the First Century Christian Ministries (FCC), and published a book entitled, 'The Missionary's Catechism'. This man tells a story of great suffering in prison at the hands of prison guards who persecuted him physically for his faith.

His conversion story and missionary work has been documented online in detail at many of the Mainstream Catholic Media (MSCM) Outlets:

Being that I too converted to Catholicism while incarcerated, and wrote three books on the faith while in prison, and evangelized the faith to my fellow inmates, I couldn't get enough of listening to Ford's interview on 'The Journey Home' with Marcus Gordi. In fact, don't know how any disciple of Christ who wouldn't be moved by this man's testimony. His experience in prison reminds us all that God is still in the business of confounding the wisdom of men by taking the worst of sinners and doing the impossible with them. Due to Russell Ford's misrepresentation of his actual legal standing, he has also reminded us that sometimes we get in the way of what God is trying to do.

Even though Ford had already plead guilty to raping a woman nearly twenty years prior, around 2006 he began to launch appeals “based upon new evidence that has come to light”, seeking relief from his sentence because of new evidence that had been uncovered that proves him innocent of the crime, and petitioning the Alabama state appeals court for a modification of sentence on the grounds that he had been a model prisoner – letters of endorsement from various Catholic leaders accompanied that petition. According to Mark Gordon, in his [groundbreaking expose of the Russell Ford scandal](#), none of those efforts to prove his innocence or lack-of-guilt were successful. This, despite the fact that an appeal to raise money to help Ford with legal cost was published in [Volume 22, No 1 – January 2011](#) of ‘This Rock Magazine’ (now called Catholic Answers Magazine).

Nevertheless, after Ford was released on June 19, 2012, after serving his full sentence, he has continued to hold onto his claim of innocence. And it’s perfectly fine that he believes that he is innocent, but the story he is telling is that the courts (even the Supreme Court of the United States) have ruled that he has proven/shown his innocence. Such is even published on the landing page of his [First Century Christian Ministry](#) website, “*Carrying a large amount of tenacity into prison when he was wrongly convicted of a violent crime in 1987 . . .*” Russell Ford said on ‘The Journey Home’ interview with Marcus Grodi that he was legally proven innocent. He told MSCM darlings Karl Keating and Patrick Coffin that he was legally proven innocent, and they, in turn, [have told others](#). MSCM magazine ‘The Catholic World Report’ published an exhaustive interview with him, in which he restated his legally proven innocence. This interview was later [removed from their website](#) after Gordon’s expose was published. You can read the cached version [here](#). In it Ford states:

” . . .the judge plans to vacate my conviction, grant the decree of innocence, and expunge my record sometime this month or next month (letting us know what he’s going to do is called ex parte, which is highly illegal and considered unethical, but it’s common in Alabama’s good-ole-boy system). In order to make that happen, I had to sign an affidavit forfeiting my right to compensation for wrongful incarceration, but my good name and reputation mean far more to me than the \$4-5 million I could get in litigation... after about 10-15 years. Anyway, after the judge grants my decree, we plan to put everything pertaining to my case on our website.”

I contacted Mark Gordon about this article, and asked him why does it matter (as far as supporting Ford’s prison ministry) that Ford is misrepresenting his actually legal standing. Gordon’s response was that Ford is FCC and FCC is Ford, “. . . and as we demonstrated Ford has not been truthful about a central element of his story. Are you really sure he’s being truthful about the rest?” Gordon also went on to raise issue with the fact that the scale/success of Ford’s apostolate can’t be or have yet to be documented to be true, and that he hasn’t registered his not-for-profit ministry in the dioceses where he is operating as a Catechesis instructor.

Gordon asked me if all that gives me pause? Actually none of what has transpired yet in regards to the individual Russell Ford gives me pause. I pray for him and I really hope he comes to realize that just telling the truth is what allows Jesus to use his disciples and their testimony for His Glory. We don’t need to add anything to the truth – our testimony is not open for embellishment.

Rather, it is when we lie that Satan is able to slither in and use our dishonesty for his glory and for our destruction. (See also: '[Scandal Time](#)' by Harold Fickett, which explains why ALETEIA.ORG published the Russell Ford expose).

To the contrary, what does give me pause is the dangers of Mainstream Catholic Media, which has the potential to be even more dangerous than the secular mainstream media because we actually trust it. In 2011 I wrote about the complete [Death of Black and Hispanic Catholics](#) in MSCM in the United States, and to-date nothing has changed. MSCM in the US still doesn't look very Catholic, and it's never going to reach anyone other than Whites until it realizes that you have to meet people where they are, and that requires that we appeal to people through their self identification, which sometimes means appealing to people through base identifiers of skin color and ethnicity. Non-Catholic Blacks have a great deal in common with the content on EWTN, but content is not the reason why they'd always choose BET over it. They'd appreciate the content of most Catholic magazines and blogs more than they would JET, Ebony and etc., but no one writes for those publications who they could identify with enough to give them a chance.

Now comes the hard lesson learned from the Russell Ford scandal. MSCM is going to have to consistently screen the people they put before the people of God, especially the ones who are asking us for money. I don't care who recommends these people. It could be Karl Keating again, or it could be Pope Francis himself. Recommendations in this regard are fallible, and should be treated as such. This man was out of prison for barely one year before he was put on 'The Journey Home' as a model covert? How does that happen? One year out of prison I was still trying to figure out how to live without someone turning my lights off for me and telling me when I could shower, and I was only in prison for five years and half years. But one year out of twenty-five year prison term and Ford is being created by MSCM as a the second coming of St. Paul? Come on!

MSCM has to realize that we want to keep trusting it. We don't want to disregard as we have the secular mainstream media. If it wants to keep our trust, it has to work everyday to earn it. Enough is enough, and once is enough of this type of scandal.

Russell Ford was solicited to make a comment in regards to Mark Gordon's expose, but did not return comment at the time of publishing.

This contribution is available at <http://www.davidlgray.info/blog/2013/05/russell-ford-scandal/>
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Sacramental Pilgrimage in the Year of Faith [at Plot Line and Sinker]

[This month's post](#) for Amazing Catechists shares highlights of my “Sacramental Pilgrimage.”

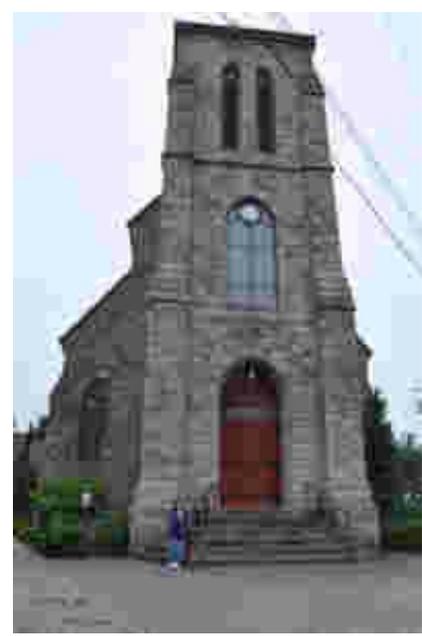
One of the ways for the faithful to gain a Plenary Indulgence in this Year of Faith is to... “On any day they chose, during the Year of Faith, if they make a pious visit to the baptistry, or other place in which they received the Sacrament of Baptism, and there renew their baptismal promises in any legitimate form.” (For more on the Plenary Indulgences during this Year of Faith, read about it [here](#).)

When I had initially heard about this Plenary Indulgence, I thought this might be difficult, given the fact that I now live 500 miles away from my hometown in New Jersey. In some respects, I envied those people (like my husband and sons) whose complete sacramental history is confined to one church close by. However, the more I thought about it, the more it intrigued me. After all, it had been 45 years since I had last visited the church of my Baptism. Once the decision was made, however, it just made sense to also visit the churches where I received my other sacraments, since all three churches were within a 15-20 mile range. So instead of embarking on a Baptismal Pilgrimage, I decided to make it a “Sacramental Pilgrimage.” My husband came along to photograph the journey.

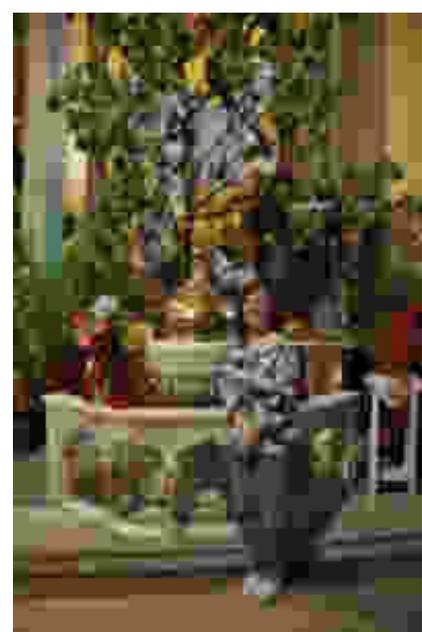
1. Sacred Heart Church, Camden NJ – The Sacraments of Baptism, First Penance, First Communion

My first stop was [Sacred Heart Parish](#) in Camden, NJ. This parish is situated in the heart of inner city Camden. Although it had been 45 years since I had last visited this parish, I recognized both the church and school immediately.

After taking a few photos in front of the Church, we tried to open the doors, but they were locked. We headed to the rectory and the secretary (Ann) answered the door with a smile on her face. When I told her that I was making a Sacramental Pilgrimage and that I was baptized (and made my First Communion) here, her smile widened and she excitedly invited us in to meet Monsignor Doyle and the staff, who were having breakfast in the small kitchen. This kind and gracious group of people made me feel special and I'm grateful for their generous and warm welcome.



In front of Sacred Heart Church, Camden NJ photo copyright James Hrkach



The baptistry. Photo copyright James Hrkach



The interior of the church. It seemed a lot smaller than I remembered. Photo copyright James Hrkach



At the side door entrance of Sacred Heart School which I attended from first grade to fourth grade, 1965-1969. Copyright James Hrkach

2. St. Richard's Church, Philadelphia, PA – The Sacrament of Confirmation

A short car drive across the Walt Whitman Bridge to South Philly took us to [St. Richard's Church](#), where I was confirmed.



St. Richard's Church. I attended St. Richard's School (in background...now St. Pio School) from 5th grade to 7th grade. Photo copyright James Hrkach



My confirmation, 1971, St. Richard's Church. Copyright Ellen Hrkach

Not only was I confirmed in this Church, my parents were married here 58 years ago.



My mother, a new bride, praying in front of the Blessed Mother statue. 1955. copyright Ellen Hrkach

I didn't realize that James took the photo (below) until I viewed the digital camera later...I said a prayer for my (deceased) parents after lighting a candle for them.



Photo Copyright James Hrkach

3. St. Maria Goretti Church, Runnemede, NJ – The Sacrament of Marriage

The last stop on my Sacramental Pilgrimage was to St. Maria Goretti Church ([Holy Child Parish](#)) in Runnemede, New Jersey. We actually attend this church several times a year when we visit New Jersey since it is close to my sister's house.



Copyright James Hrkach



May 1982, St. Maria Goretti Church. Copyright Ellen Hrkach

My Sacramental Pilgrimage was a day of fond memories, prayers and gratitude for the beautiful gift of my Catholic Faith. I highly recommend it to all who are able to visit the church of their Baptism (and other sacraments as time allows.)

Is the Church of your Baptism nearby or faraway? How easy or difficult would it be for you to make a Sacramental Pilgrimage? Feel free to comment below.

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This contribution is available at <http://ellengable.wordpress.com/2013/05/29/sacramental-pilgrimage-in-the-year-of-faith/>

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“To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit,” promises St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:7. I was born with the natural gift of writing. The Holy Spirit expanded that writing talent into a charism he uses to glorify God.

Just as he did for me, the Holy Spirit will hover over you and develop your charism, if you ask. He will inspire you to use it for God’s glory. He will surround you with love. You’ll find yourself in a Holy Spirit sandwich.

I didn’t always know this. Often he needs to remind me how this synergism transforms my gift into a holy instrument. When I am alert to the Holy Spirit, he sometimes prompts me with a theme from Scripture, a homily, book or Internet link. He reminds me of a struggle, problem, victory, or healing story. Half the time the prompt comes first; half the time the example.

Inspired, I write about what the example or idea teaches me. I read it aloud and simplify the sentences. On a clipboard I pair it with my 7-Point Red Pen Checklist for quality control in finalizing it.

Then I wait for the Holy Spirit to finish it. And he always does. He impresses me with a deeper meaning, sometimes in an hour or two. Or this may go on for a week with deep and extensive spiritual concepts overwhelming the initial idea. The original draft grows two or three branches, which end up in my Blog Ideas folder. I keep several clipboards going.

It’s a wonderful partnership. The Holy Spirit is the beginning and the end: a Holy Spirit sandwich. I fill in the details as he stirs them up in me, reflecting my personality wrapped in Holy Spirit creativity.

Under the shelter of his wings, I enjoy the grace and presence of the Lord. His joy lifts me along as I type furiously, look up words, correct passive voice and awkward phrases, check spelling and grammar for what I always think is the last time, but usually isn’t.

Holy Spirit power carries me willingly along a narrow twisting path to carefully negotiate the next curve. Sometimes he startles me awake at 3 a.m. to change one more word. Or prompts me to reach over the shoulder of my husband proofreading the almost final version to replace a phrase.

The Holy Spirit sandwich helps me when I get stuck between my original commitment and its

fulfillment. Since the Holy Spirit initiated this task, I needn't panic because of pressure from others or my own expectations. Confident that grace is always there for the asking, I ask for it! And it comes, usually from an unexpected direction. A phrase in a song or a word suggested by my best friend ties my stringy scribbling into a gift-wrapped treasure, ready to give away.

It certainly isn't me that keeps the momentum going. The Holy Spirit moves his agenda forward. It isn't even my agenda any longer. It never was.

The perfect place to write? Snuggled in a Holy Spirit sandwich!

(© 2013 Nancy H C Ward)

This contribution is available at <http://joyalive.net/holy-spirit-sandwich/>
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Angelina Jolie and Me: A Preemptive Strike at Breast Cancer [at Designs by Birgit]



When Angelina Jolie recently

[disclosed](#)

that she had had a prophylactic bilateral mastectomy, my first thought was, “good for her”. She, like me, watched her mother die of BRCA-1 breast cancer when she was in her 50’s. Jolie and her mother and my daughter and I also share membership in the BRCA-1 breast cancer club. Contrary to common thought, all breast cancers are not of the same magnitude. While many women have been diagnosed with breast cancer and gone on to live fruitful lives, for those of us with the faulty BRCA-1 gene it’s not quite that simple. We have a strong propensity for breast cancer (up to 87%) and ovarian cancer (50%). It’s also fast growing and aggressive. To make matters worse, triple negative (for hormone receptivity) BRCA-1 takes many common and highly successful treatment options – such as

[Tamoxifen](#)

–off the table. That happens to be the case with my daughter and me.

Our own family history presents a disconcerting outlook. As far back as we know, every woman on my maternal side has carried the BRCA-1 gene and paid with her life at a young age. My great-grandmother died in her 40’s and my grandmother was 42 when she died, two weeks after diagnosis. My mother died at 58 – after a 5 year long struggle with ovarian, then breast, then liver, bone and finally brain cancer – all due to the BRCA-1 gene. My

[diagnosis](#)

came 7 years ago – when I was 48, while our daughter was diagnosed when she was 28 and

20 weeks pregnant

This unbroken line of victims, and the deaths of women preceding us, gives us a unique perspective. We can't say, "*what if I become a victim of breast cancer?*". Unfortunately, we've *been there, lived that*. Our loved ones died young and we, ourselves, have traveled a difficult path. When our daughter found out about her cancer, she had to go to great lengths to find a doctor who was willing for her to maintain her pregnancy and still treat her. The answer came when she found the doctors at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, TX. They had been successfully treating cancer in pregnant women for 20 years – with no harmful side effects to any of the babies.



With MD Anderson's protocol and local doctors' cooperation, she gave birth to a healthy baby girl on Thanksgiving Day of 2009 – after having undergone chemo while pregnant. In an effort to help other women – our daughter has extensively shared her story. She has also won the Life Award for her persistence at maintaining her pregnancy. Likewise, Jolie has come forward and I find it laudable that a public personality is willing to be so transparent about something so personal – all in an effort to help other women. Among cancer patients this sense of purpose appears to be very strong. Perhaps the drive to help others, by relaying our own experiences, gives back a little of the power that cancer steals from us.

Unfortunately, some rumblings and judgmental comments have been aimed at Jolie (and me) for taking what must seem like an unreasonably drastic step. Contrary to this rash judgment, what she has done is a great service to others who may find themselves equally challenged some day. When the prognosis is so dire and the options are so few, it must be understood that it is morally acceptable to take preemptive steps to preserve health – especially for a mother of young children. That some find it repugnant that she willingly sacrificed her breasts in an effort to save her life, is

disappointing to me. After all, her breasts are not a vital organ. Removing them has not affected her fertility. So if she takes this step in an effort to live, it would be charitable to respect that decision.

Likewise, my daughter and I both chose bilateral mastectomy instead of only removing the tumorous breast. In fact, our story presented an even more difficult decision. At the insistent recommendation of my mother's team of oncological specialists, I had a prophylactic oophorectomy when I was 31. Although this step ended any hope of the

[large family](#)

we had hoped for, the risk from cancer was simply too great to ignore. After all, I was a wife and the mother of three young children who needed me healthy and alive. When our daughter was diagnosed at such a young age, while pregnant, the wisdom of my decision was revealed. Again, at the persistent advice of her oncologists, she too, underwent a prophylactic oophorectomy.

As a result of stories like the ones told by Jolie, my daughter and me there have been blunt statements that

no one should take such a drastic step – that it's a sinful choice. We should trust in God, not medicine.

If that were the only reasonable conclusion, why would we subject ourselves to chemotherapy? After all, this

acceptable

treatment/preventative measure kills cells in our bodies and causes long-lasting or permanent side effects. Yet, in the quest for preserving life, chemo is universally accepted as ethical. So why not remove breasts or ovaries that will almost certainly become cancerous and kill us? After all,

[double effect](#)

comes into play – the goal is not to end fertility. The single goal is to make a difficult, albeit necessary, decision for survival. Loss of fertility is the unintended consequence of that decision. According to the good and holy priests I have consulted and moral, pro-life experts this preventive measure is a licit course of action.

The struggle with cancer is a lifetime challenge. Even with years of good reports, the reality is that

it can always recur. With the BRCA-1 gene, there remains

[40% chance](#)

that even chemotherapy will not be an effective deterrent to mortality. You're never in the 'safe' zone. But contrary to other comments, I don't fear death, I made my peace with this world as a part of the acceptance process when I was first diagnosed. Yet I also know that, if it is the Will of God, I will do whatever is in my power to remain here on this earth with my loved ones.



Two survivors!

So if you've never walked this road, please be kind by refraining from belittling the decisions of those of us who have. A more charitable approach would be to say a little prayer. Thank the Lord that you haven't been forced to walk this difficult path. And ask Him to keep us healthy for as long as He wills it. Pray that our efforts to help others by sharing the painful reality in our lives does a service for them. We, in turn, will do our best to live our lives honoring Him. I, for one, know there is a purpose to my life - I have a God-given mission to share the

[pro-life message](#)

and the Gospel with as many people as possible. It is my firm belief that giving up on life is not an acceptable option when God has given us such unimaginable advances in the field of ethical medicine. Although the rest of my life will be lived with a unique awareness not shared by those who have not traveled this road; I have found a peace that can only come with a close relationship to God and a focus on His Will for the rest of my earthly life.

NOTE:

there has been much confusion and misinformation about this life or death issue since I wrote this post. Therefore, I found it necessary to offer more resources for an accurate picture to emerge. Find the update

[here.](#)

This contribution is available at <http://designsbybirgit.blogspot.com/2013/05/angelina-jolie-and-me-preemptive-strike.html>

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Why It Matters [at Catholic Sistas]



You never know. A seemingly innocent remark wounds a friend. Callous words from bystanders injure fragile survivors. A stranger is believed over a friend. Sticks and stones may break bones, but words DO hurt, especially when uttered by a friend.

Why does it matter? Why are words so hurtful even when intended as constructive criticism? Why do words injure that call personal judgment into question injure so much? Why aren't those schoolyard songs meant to build confidence remembered? Question why it matters.

Perhaps hidden personal turmoil is the root. Perhaps too much of an investment is in a project. Perhaps a knee jerk reaction leads to yet another knee jerk reaction. Perhaps a wound festers under a bandage, only getting worse when the bandage is ripped away. Perhaps mindsets have changed. Perhaps pride gets in the way. Perhaps there are multiple areas of attack. You never know. Learn why it matters.

Recently, I've been a hot mess of reactions on various levels. I usually have a long fuse that requires flooding with gasoline to light. It wasn't until recently that I've had time to take a deep breath and ponder the reasons for my reactions.

The worst of these reactions dealt with FaceBook 'friends' posting articles critical of Angelina Jolie's choice to prophylactically remove her breasts and possibly ovaries due to a faulty BRCA1 genes. Usually, movie star antics have no effect on me. However, I share not only a faulty BRCA1 gene with Angelina, but also share part her prophylactic surgery choice and beyond. Comments calling her prophylactic measures crazy, unnecessary, immoral, and worse created havoc on me. At the same time, other situations existed that also stressed my already weakened psyche.

Those that know me, know that my journey has been anything but easy. Much thought, research, prayer, and consultation went into every phase of my journey. Four years after my diagnosis, I

have lost both breasts, my original implants for reconstruction, my ovaries, my uterus, sensation in several areas of my body, sometimes the use of one arm, my left first rib, and even my job. Some argue that my situation differed from Angelina's because I was actually diagnosed with cancer prior to taking prophylactic measures. However, our decisions were based on the same facts, careful consideration, and reflection. Therefore, words against her decision are words against mine.

Normally, I'd get fired up by such comments and fire back with well-documented verbose rebuttals. This time, instead, I cried for two days. On the third day, I did further research. By the fourth day, I was finally able to ponder my reaction. Pride was a factor, yet not the most important. Solidarity with another cancer victim was also a factor, but again, not the most important. Righteous indignation plays a role as well, but not the lead. Finally, I identified the cause of my pain: re-opening of freshly healed wounds and dismissing of my suffering and loss.

As I said before, my journey has been fraught with difficulties. I struggled immensely with my decisions. Intense prayer, reflection, counseling, and though prefaced each action I took against my cancer. Yet, even knowing I made the best decision possible caused turmoil in my mind. To this day, almost 4 years after my diagnosis, I suffer with body image. As I step out of the shower I see only the scars. Some survivors call them "tiger stripes" or "battle scars" that show how hard we fought. At times, I do as well. However, at other times, all I can see is what I lost. See why it matters to me.

It is then that God begs me to look at what I saved: my life, my daughter's life, and my family unit. Then and only then can I find peace in my decisions. Then and only then can I summon up the strength to joke about my "tummy tuck and a boob job" reconstruction. Only then can I smile when I admit that I lost my fertility to reduce my risk of cancer. Money often gets tight since I no longer bring home the bacon, but I can acknowledge the benefit of staying home to homeschool my children. My termination was based on lies, exaggerations, and belittling of my suffering and competence, but I know losing my job was my gain. When I think about all the struggles as God's plan, I can actually smile and say so. God shows me why it matters.



Some say I'm strong and forget that **I'm** not the one that's strong – God is; and He's holding me up. That is often when silent tears course down my face in the dark of very early morning. Even in my weakness, I know God is holding me to His heart, but when friend's words are like Judas's kiss, my agony knows no bounds. Yet, worse than the wounds their words cause me is the admission of such to them or anyone. You see, although I realize God knows my inmost thoughts and comforts me, but even with His guidance, I cannot find the words to express my feelings. Often, I don't even admit my feelings to myself until they're out of control.

So while it's your right to use the First Amendment to express your views, be courteous of other people's journeys — especially if you claim to support them and be their friend. Another school-yard theme, "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all," comes to mind in these types of situations. Regardless of appearances, everyone suffers from something, and issues of controversy or extreme psychological distress are unpleasantly common. We all progress down different trails at different times. You never know why it matters.

For more information involving morality, medicine, and more:

National Catholic Bioethics Center on [BRCA1/2 morality](#)

A Benedictine Priest/MD on [tubal ligation and it's difference](#) from risk-reducing oophorectomy/hysterectomy

CCC reference about [moral conditions](#) for surgical sterility or so-called 'therapeutic mutilation'

A look through my eyes on [Erika's Miracle Journey](#) & in brief [here](#) on Catholic Sistas

A co-survivor (and also my mother) about the [BRCA1/2 journey](#) and her feelings about [critics](#)



Erika V. is a thirty-something mother of two (with four saints in heaven). With a degree in molecular biology, she works for her state's police crime lab; although her dream is to stay home with her children and homeschool them. Her newly converted husband is a sometime auto mechanic and primarily a stay-at-home dad. Passionate about pro-life issues and science, she is a survivor of breast cancer while pregnant. At 20 weeks pregnant with her daughter (pregnancy number six), she was diagnosed with BRCA1 stage II breast cancer. When local doctors were stumped with the diagnosis, she traveled to MDAnderson where chemotherapy on pregnant women has been done for over twenty years. After delivering her baby girl and undergoing more chemotherapy, Erika has had a whirlwind of surgeries to combat the cancer as well as the complications of cancer treatments. Three years and eight surgeries later, she continues to be passionate about pro-life endeavors, even winning the local Right to Life group's Life Award and serving on their working board of directors. She authors two blogs, one a mommy blog Biology Brain-Simon Says and one a breast cancer while pregnant blog Erika's Miracle Journey. Blog posts are often filled with pro-life references, including medical journal articles supporting the pro-life position. While there isn't often time, she also enjoys horses, reading, gardening, and KY bourbon.

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicsistas.com/2013/05/29/why-it-matters/>
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Readers: Can You Help Some Teen Musicians Make Joyful Noises? [at Rambling Follower]



I have written before about the wonderful chamber music orchestra that our older son is privileged to be part of. This eclectic group of musicians, called

[Stretto Youth Chamber Orchestra](#),

is gathered together by the

[amazing Sherri Anderson](#),

a joy-filled Christian whose life's mission is to bring music to everyone. Her musicians come from an extraordinary range of settings - from boarding schools to homeless shelters and foster homes.

I don't think I've ever asked my readers to consider making a tax-deductible contribution to a worthy cause, but I am asking you now.



In about a month, most of

[the orchestra](#)

is flying to Europe for a tour. Their itinerary includes Brussels, Cologne, Sofia and Belgrade. For some of the musicians, heading to Europe is no big deal; there is plenty of room in the family budget.

For others, it is a bit of a stretch to finance this. And for some, it is impossible.

Sherri shared this with me today:

"Allison, you know I believe the spirit moves and welcomes all the grace of everyday...of which there seems to be an abundance. Thanks for all your support in both the visible and quiet ways. We share the joy. You know what C. said at the last fundraiser when asked why the music was important to him. He said, "Because you can bring people joy!" It wasn't about him, it was about what he could share. These young ones teach us so much."

Families have been hosting fundraisers all year to make sure every musician who wants to go, can go.

The musicians are about \$2,500 short right now. If you are interested in making a tax-deductible contribution to the orchestra you can use the paypal button at

<http://bluemountainfestival.org/>.

Even a donation as small as \$20 will help us reach our goal. Whether you can donate or not, please take a listen as the orchestra plays Vivaldi's

Cum Sancto Spiritu!

This contribution is available at <http://ramblingfollower.blogspot.com/2013/05/readers-can-you-help-some-teen.html>

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Notes From a Second Clarinet [at Ten Thousand Places]

The Holy Spirit would appear to create disorder in the Church, since he brings the diversity of charisms and gifts; yet all this, by his working, is a great source of wealth, for the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of unity, which does not mean uniformity, but which leads everything back to *harmony*. In the Church, it is the Holy Spirit who creates harmony. One of Fathers of the Church has an expression which I love: the Holy Spirit himself is harmony – “*Ipse harmoniaest*”.

He is indeed harmony. Only the Spirit can awaken diversity, plurality and multiplicity, while at the same time building unity. Here too, when we are the ones who try to create diversity and close ourselves up in what makes us different and other, we bring division. When we are the ones who want to build unity in accordance with our human plans, we end up creating uniformity, standardization.

But if instead we let ourselves be guided by the Spirit, richness, variety and diversity never become a source of conflict, because he impels us to experience variety within the communion of the Church. Journeying together in the Church, under the guidance of her pastors who possess a special charism and ministry, is a sign of the working of the Holy Spirit.

Having a sense of the Church is something fundamental for every Christian, every community and every movement. It is the Church which brings Christ to me, and me to Christ; parallel journeys are very dangerous! When we venture beyond (*proagon*) the Church’s teaching and community – the Apostle John tells us in his Second Letter - and do not remain in them, we are not one with the God of Jesus Christ (cf. 2 *Jn* 1:9). So let us ask ourselves: Am I open to the harmony of the Holy Spirit, overcoming every form of exclusivity? Do I let myself be guided by him, living in the Church and with the Church?

Pope Francis, Homily, Pentecost Sunday, May 19, 2013

Reflection – This is an incredibly balanced and sane presentation of the whole question of unity-in-diversity in the Church. This week has seen a great deal of internet kerfuffle about Pope Francis’ remarks on atheists and redemption. In my typical contrarian fashion I have chosen not to blog about those remarks, on the sound principle that everyone else is saying everything else that needs to be said, so what’s left?

But I have to admit, I'm a bit baffled at how people are astounded (!), baffled (!), perplexed (!), shocked (!!!) at these various remarks by the pope. As far as I can figure out, he is stating fairly conventional Catholic doctrines, and doing so in a fairly simple, straightforward way. It is usually not a great shocking baffling astounding perplexing matter to learn that the Pope is Catholic. I even believe there is a proverb to that effect, often accompanied by one concerning the locative properties of ursine excretion. (What and where Catholic bears do is a matter I will not delve into here. This is a family blog.)

Ahem. So here we see the Pope's Catholicity in another expression. The Spirit brings diversity, but always within the Church. The Spirit has manifold gifts, charisms, and graces which create a beautiful harmony, but the melody to that harmony is always our holy Catholic faith handed down to us from the apostles. There is a rich polyphony of instrument and voice in the life of the Church, but the conductor drawing all these diverse musicians together into a symphony is the teaching magisterium of the Church.

But the conductor is not the composer. The magisterium has a task of unity so as to safeguard the beauty of the harmony of the Church, but it does not create that harmony, does not write the notes. That is the mission of the Spirit in the world, and it is a mission ongoing in each of our hearts.

We have to get as clear in our own minds about this as we can be, since the world is anything but clear about it and shows no signs of moving in that direction. The magisterium—the pope and the bishops together—is a servant of the Spirit and of the whole Body of Christ in all its diversity. But this service may and at times does take the form of disciplining, of correcting, even of 'silencing' a discordant oboe or out of tune tuba. Of course, the Church has no police force, no prison system, no control of public media, so 'silencing' is a relative term here, to say the least. (I will never forget the dissident theologian taking out a full page ad in the New York Times blaring "I HAVE BEEN SILENCED!")

For us second clarinets or third trumpets, our call is to give our whole heart and soul, our entire breath, to the notes, the beauty, that the Spirit is giving us to play in our lives, but always with our eyes on the director, the conductor, always ready to be 'harmonized' in the life of the Church by its leaders, never stepping out as a solo act, but also never retreating into passivity and sullen silence when we can't play our part exactly as we envisioned.

The magisterium is not the composer, but neither are you and I. And so we all strain together to listen to the Spirit, let Him write the movement of this long symphony called Christianity that we are just one small 'bar' to, and trust that the whole piece taken together possesses a beauty that is beyond our wildest imaging, a full beauty we will only hear in heaven, but what a joy it will be there, to hear the whole thing, and finally see how our little part fit into it.

This contribution is available at <http://frdenis.blogspot.com/2013/05/notes-from-second-clarinet.html>
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How Well Do You Know Your Guardian Angel? [at A Dreamer's Wife]



My fascination with angels began at age 11 when I had a brief supernatural experience at a cousin's house. I woke up one morning to see two silent, somewhat-transparent figures standing with their backs toward me. One had short brown hair and the other had long blond hair, and they appeared to be wearing white robes. I remember feeling afraid that they would turn around and I just kept chanting, "Please help me God, please help me God." My cousin, who also saw the figures, darted back under the covers while I remained frozen and stared at them. It wasn't until I turned on the bedside lamp that they disappeared. I'm not sure if they were ghosts or angels, but I like to think that they were angels!

Since then, I've always loved to read any story or watch any show that is about personal encounters with angels! I had a well-worn *Guideposts for Kids* magazine that was all about angels from cover to cover. My conscious awareness of my guardian angel has come and gone over the years, though, but my passion for angels was recently reignited again! Just as I talked about the importance of the [Holy Spirit](#) a few weeks ago, our guardian angels can be powerful aides in helping us do God's will.

Last week, I listened to a CD titled [Angels Explained: What You Should Know About the Nine Choirs by Dr. Mark Miravalle courtesy of Lighthouse Catholic Media](#). He offered a lot of great information regarding what the Catholic church teaches and what theologians have come to agree upon in regards to angels. There were a few points by Miravalle that really stood out to me. One of which is the following two-minute transcript specifically about guardian angels:

Now, I want you to imagine a civilization of people that are superior in most every way; more intelligent, more strength of will. A higher form of creative excellence in the whole hierarchy of being. And, that God reveals to another group, another civilization of people, i.e. humans, that this higher superior group are given, in large part, to help us, to protect us, to guide us.

Now think of this unfortunate fact. That the lower group, the human group, chooses not to pay any attention to the higher group. That the lower group, for whatever reason, whether it be will or distraction, fundamentally day-by-day, ignores the higher group. How can this be pleasing to God?

Now as we'll discuss, the lower, in fact the lowest, level of the angels, the ninth choir, from which the vast majority of guardian angels are taken, would have, fundamentally, one angel for every human being that's ever lived, because angels don't recycle. So just the lowest choir would have at least equal quantity of all humans from all times. This creature, your guardian angel, who was created at the beginning of time, has waited until this time for you. To guide you, to protect you, to love you, and to begin a relationship, which God-willing, will become a never-ending relationship for the rest of eternity...

We have to tap this God-given gift of spiritual persons. And, I believe in our present age, where there is a raging spiritual battle taking place, that A., God has given special graces to the angels for our times and B., We can only engage those special graces, we can only reap the power of these angels, by our human consent. We have to will it. We have to consent to it.

It's amazing to really contemplate that we each have our own protector to guide us along in life, so that we may grow closer to God! And just as with receiving gifts from the Holy Spirit, we have to ask and seek our angel's help in order to obtain their special graces.

On the *Angels Explained* CD, Miravalle also shared a beautiful [prayer of Consecration from the Opus Sanctorum Angelorum](#). There is a great line towards the end of *The Consecration to the Holy Angels* prayer that pleads, "enlighten my mind and my heart so that I may always know and accomplish the will of God."

So as we pray and strive to use our talents and do God's will, let's not forget about our guardian angels who can help us along our journey. All we have to do is ask!

For more information about what the Catholic church teaches about angels, visit [Catholic Online](#) or [Catholic Answers](#).

Do you have a special angel story to share? I'd love to hear it!

Update: I'm linking this post up with the for May! Be sure to check the other posts out, too!

This contribution is available at <http://adreamerswife.com/2013/05/03/how-well-do-you-know-your-guardian-angel/>
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I Never Noticed This Either [at Smaller Manhattans]



The beggar cried out, "Lord, I have not tasted food in three days."

And Jesus saith to him, "Don't worry- it still tastes the same."

This is a follow-up to [an earlier post](#); same subject, different angle.

It just occurred to me today: when Jesus worked miracles, did he ever partake of the benefits? I culled a list of a few dozen- didn't find a single case where he did. Which makes sense: why would God do something miraculous for Himself? In particular, consider the food miracles:

1. Water into Wine: He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast." So they took it. When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from..."

2. Miraculous Catch of Fish: "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." And when they had done this, they enclosed a great shoal of fish; and as their nets were breaking, they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them."

3. Jesus Feeds Multitudes: "Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. 12 And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten."

4. Another Miraculous Catch of Fish: Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, have you any fish?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, for the quantity of fish...When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish [already] lying on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." 11 So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came and

took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish."

On the other hand, I don't think Jesus ever met a meal He didn't like:

"...the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?"

"The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners..."

"And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat."

"See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have."...And while they still disbelieved for joy, and wondered, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them. Then he said to them, "What else ya got?" Just kidding.

And: "Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?"

Yet per the [prior post](#), Jesus eats the passover meal with the apostles only until He says, "This is my Body...this is my Blood... Take, eat...Drink of it, all of you." Looking at Jesus' miracles in general, and food miracles in particular, it makes sense that this was *also* a food miracle, although one not like the rest. That is, by *not* partaking of the food, Jesus shows that his words had effected a miracle; but one that requires we see it through faith, not through sight.

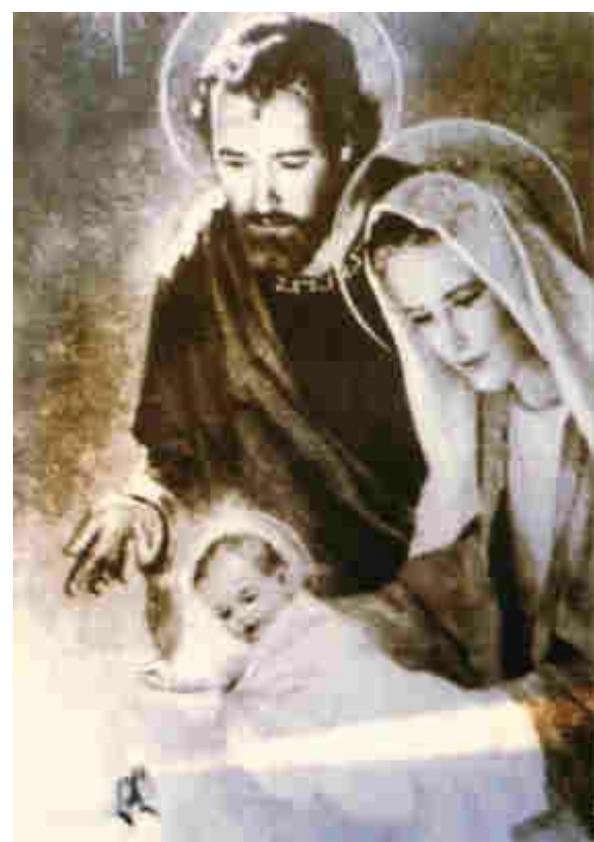
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HTTP/1.1 200 OK Date: Mon, 05 Aug 2013 14:32:14 GMT Server: Apache X-Pingback: http://catholic.com/xmlrpc.php Link: ; rel=shortlink Set-Cookie: wfvf_-1463816402=51ffb76edde17; expires=Mon, 05-Aug-2013 15:02:14 GMT; path=/ Vary: Accept-Encoding Transfer-Encoding: chunked Content-Type: text/html; charset=UTF-8



My uncle who is not a Catholic asked these questions on a Facebook group that I run after seeing the above photo. Was this statue of Jesus made out of Cement? Can it be called idol worshipping? If yes, why?...



The day Jesus Christ was born is referred to as Christmas day. So in that sense, Jesus was born on Christmas day. The only difficulty would be determining when the actual Christmas day was. Is the original day Jesus was...



No. Catholics don't believe Mary must be worshipped. It would be against what Mary stood for. (John 2:5) Catholics as imitators of their Saviour Jesus Christ follow the examples of Jesus who obeyed His heavenly Father and earthly mother. (Ephesians...



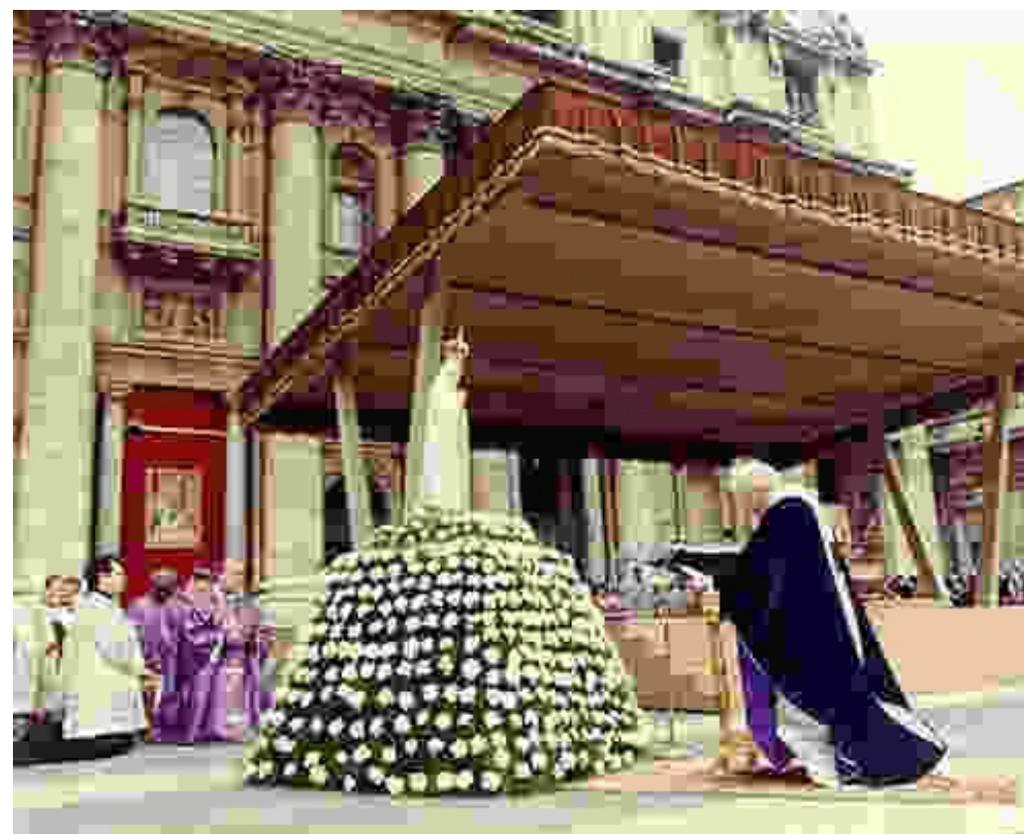
Catholics sing to Mary, the mother of Jesus because of Jesus and everything He has done for her. Some Christians consider singing as part of worship. They have what they call “praise and worship,” which is mostly made up of...



Swagg with the Rosary? Hey Mama! I got a Rosary It's such a luxury Full of mystery Need its history What is it at all with gangsters and the Rosary? It keeps showing up on their necks like the most...



A critique of an article by David J. Stewart of Jesus Is Savior Ministries entitled “God Hates Vain Repetitions”. The chanting of the Roman Catholic Rosary is VAIN REPETITION!!! It is exactly what God hates. God is not impressed with such empty and...



A response to those who ask any of these questions: Are Catholics Christians? Are you a Christian or a Catholic? Perhaps you have been asked this question in the past... Well, this question can be posed in another way to just...

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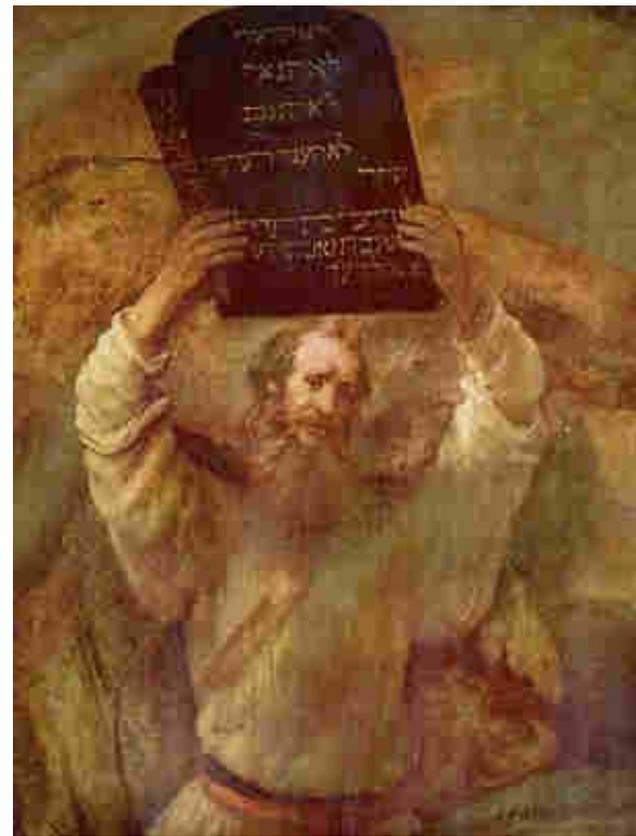
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Posted in



The Commandment: I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol. Apart from this commandment forbidding idolatry, it also commands us to put God first in all...



Common Sense Answer: To answer this recurring question, let us consider this: A child kneels in front of a bed whiles praying. Is the child guilty of worshipping the bed? A pastor lies on the floor whiles crying, singing and...



According to the Word of God man has sinned. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:6 KJV)...

This contribution is available at <http://catholic.com/do-catholics-worship-mary/>
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Pentecost is our Ordinary [at Naru Hodo]

I was at the Mass for the Vigil of Pentecost this evening, and had one of those moments where I was listening to the readings from so far deep inside that I forgot where I was or what was supposed to happen next. Which was kinda interesting, considering that I was the cantor and was supposed to get up and sing the psalm. I recovered quickly enough, but not without that sense of disorientation, wondering for a moment if I was doing the completely wrong thing at the completely wrong time.

The first reading: the Tower of Babel. (Deep breath, recovery..) Psalm petitioning God to send forth the Holy Spirit and renew the face of the earth. The bit about the Holy Spirit praying for us when we don't know how with groans that words cannot express. Then this great gospel:

On the last and greatest day of the feast,
Jesus stood up and exclaimed,
“Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink.
As Scripture says:
Rivers of living water will flow from within him who believes in me.”

He said this in reference to the Spirit
that those who came to believe in him were to receive.
There was, of course, no Spirit yet,
because Jesus had not yet been glorified.

There are those moments when familiar Scriptures take on a whole new layer of meaning, reveal another depth, when splashed over my life, my experiences, as they accrue to me to this day. That is the beauty of life with God: everything is always made new.

Here's how it struck me today.

There are two ways that people can be united, so to speak. The first is a unity unworthy of the name, but it is actually a very sticky unity. It is the unity of sin. Sin speaks one language, and that language says "me" in a thousand ways. Even when it says "you," it really says "me." This is the unity that humanity had at Babel. The people were all about making a name for themselves, establishing their own glory and power. They worked with other folks who had the same selfish intention, willing to use and be used for the purpose of self-glorification. When "God confused their language," they discovered that they didn't understand each other anymore. There is a grace here. The facade of unity crumbled away, and each one was revealed for what they were: out for themselves. Their language now betrayed "me" when it said "you." And each selfish builder went off to build for himself instead of being invincible in the sticky, fake unity of sin. This reminds me of how the devil will butter people up with attractive perks, only to kill, steal and destroy in the

end.

But this relationship amongst humanity and between persons is not God's will. This is not the image of God. God is a relationship, a family, a unity of self-giving. It is the Holy Spirit, sent by the glorified Messiah that refashions humanity to live as the images of God we are created to be.

When we are in Christ, when we have died with Him and risen with Him and we receive His Spirit, something happens to us. We experience this labor, this groaning as the Spirit births new things in us. It is glorious, but it is like a pain. But it is a pain we can't escape, and we wouldn't want to if we could realize what it is, for it is part of the birth of new life. That new life is not for ourselves. That new life is what God has done in us, and it is for His glory and His people. In our utter dependence on God for this process that we did not begin and that we do not control, we are completely surrendered to His action in our spirits.

This is the opposite of the self-seeking and other-using of Babel. This is living as self-gift, first to God, and then to the world. This is "I am not my own; no one lives as his own master, and no one dies as his own master." This is living in the awareness that God causes me to be, causes everything to be, that His love courses through me so that I sometimes do not even know (realize) what I am saying and doing, only I discover that there is a river flowing from within me that does not come from me. Jesus has given all to me, and in giving all I have in return, I find that I give God's life itself. This is living as images of God, as God intends. This is our joy.

This is why Pentecost is our "ordinary time." Yes, I know ordinary means "counted." But it is also true that the commonplace life of the Christian IS God's Holy Spirit present and active in and through us so that we are empowered to carry forth His work and His presence in this world. Don't leave out that part about Jesus being glorified, and remember that in the gospel "being glorified" means being nailed to a cross and dying. We share in that part first. But it all goes in onion layers.

This is the only way that joy is possible. This is how Christianity works. This is not about my efforts to be good, moral and nice. This is about transformation from dead to living. This is God's life soaking, flooding, pouring through my leaky, frail, clay pot and making it an outpost of His own life in this world.

This contribution is available at <http://lift-up-your-hearts.blogspot.com/2013/05/pentecost-is-our-ordinary.html>

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Dear Jacob XXIV [at Young Married Mom]

Dear Jacob,

You are two and a half years old, and when people ask me to describe you, all I can say is that you are a hoot. You can make sentences like, “I like to drink water!” some of the most exciting ever spoken.

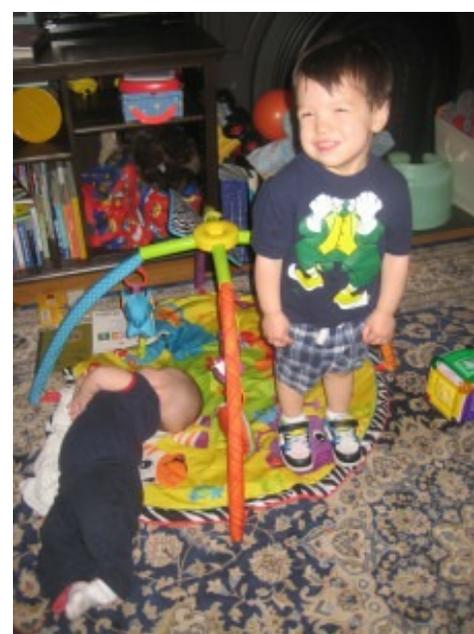


You wanted to play Hide and Seek this weekend, and went into the kitchen, calling out “Hide and seek! Hide and seek!” It was very funny when I correctly guessed where you were.

The other day, I told you we were going to make cake—this easily convinced you it was time to leave the playground—and you responded, “Ooh, I love cake.” When we were closer to home, you told me, “Mommy, you make a cake for me and I will make a cake for you.” You are as sweet as you are funny.

I spend a lot of time quoting you these days, because I want to hold on to everything you say. It’s not that I don’t love watching you grow. Last week, you put on shorts to go enjoy the warm weather, and all of sudden, you were dressed like a little boy—not a baby, a little boy.

When I went to take a picture of you, you insisted that Henry be in it, too. I love that you wouldn’t take a photo without him. I hope you keep this attitude for many years to come.



You love Henry very much, and not always as gently as I'd like. Henry doesn't seem to mind, for the most part, and I am trying to make sure you have positive interactions. You have the energy of a two-year-old, though, and your yelling does startle our little guy from getting fed sometimes!



Your daddy and I love, love, love spending time with you. Sometimes disciplining you drives me up the wall, but I remind myself what Jim Stenson says—"Pay now or pay later." I am being firm with you now so that you will have the strength of character to deal with what life throws your way later. The little things add up, for better or worse.

You are a strong boy, and smart. You can spell your first and last name, but not the middle one yet, despite that being the shortest! You'll get there. Recently I watched you work lacing cards with dexterity I hadn't noticed before. You learn more every day, and I am so impressed with the good-natured, friendly, happy person you are. You are sweet, kind, and so, so important. Don't ever forget that.

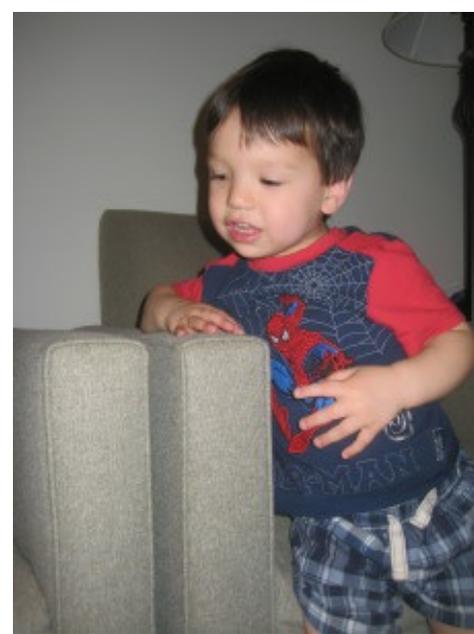
You still say no to just about everything, but then do what it is that needs to get done. You push your boundaries, and I understand that is part of growing up. Still, I lose my patience when this process takes too long, and I am sorry for that. When I feel like my brain is functioning, I am trying to be a strong, steady example for you.

I hope that I am doing all I can to help you be the person God needs you to be. From the moment I knew I was pregnant with you, I knew that my job was to help you be something for God, to somehow serve God. So far, you are doing that with your smile and love. Someday, I imagine it will be with much more. Whatever it is, it will be all the more fruitful if that pure joy doesn't fade.



I'll end with a new quote from you that just warmed my heart (pun intended). We made strawberry ice cream, and I asked if you liked it. Your sincere response was, "Mmm, it's very warm." For all you've got figure out, temperature is not your strong suit.

You are discovering this world, step by step. I pray we can lead you into it with grace, courage, and strength, so that you can be all that you are meant to be.



I love you, my sweet boy, today and always.

Love,
Mom

This contribution is available at <http://youngmarriedmom.com/dear-jacob-xxiv/>
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On Grace [at Martin Family Moments]



CCC 1996: ...Grace is favor, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life.

There have been many times in my life where I will get anxious about something that might happen, and then try to calm myself down by saying that God doesn't give us anything we can not handle.

We've all heard that saying, right? But what if my husband leaves or one of my children gets really sick? I don't think I can handle that. So does that mean that God wouldn't allow that to happen to me?

Nope.

What it means is that **when** we are called to suffer, we **will** receive the grace we need to get through it. The saying should read "God will never give us anything we can't handle without His grace".

And the funny thing about grace is that we don't get the graces until we need them. So we can look at a terrible situation like the

[kidnapped girls in Ohio](#)

, and wonder how those girls were able to make it through ten years of living like that. We can think that we would never be able to survive it with any dignity or faith, but that's because we don't have the graces to have gone through that.

When I was younger, I wanted to be a mother more than anything. Then when I got to high school and college, I did a lot of babysitting and worked in a daycare. I would sometimes come home after a long day and think, geesh, this motherhood thing looks really hard. Maybe I'm not cut out for it after all. Once I became a mother (as we all know) I realized it's completely different to raise your own children than to babysit someone else's. It's much better! And when I look at the supermoms who have 12 children and seem to do it all with ease, and think "I could never do that so well!" it's because I don't have the graces necessary for having 12 children yet. I don't need those graces. She does.

This realization about getting God's help once we need it (and not before we need it) was so eye-opening to me. I think I could have saved myself a lot of worry in my younger years. Looking back, it is so simple to see how God has always provided for us, and looking ahead I can trust that He will always do the same.



Colleen

This contribution is available at <http://martinfamilymoments.blogspot.com/2013/05/on-grace.html>
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Swinging Sisters: Book Review [at The Hill Country Hermit]

Swinging Sisters

Madonna Dries Christensen



A Fun And Inspiring Catholic Biography

Swinging Sisters by Madonna Dries Christensen is one of my favorite books. It shares an inspiring story (based on factual events, but with some fiction woven in to fill it out) of a devoutly Catholic Minnesota family with four musically-inclined daughters. The The Martin and Mary Jones family moved to San Antonio in 1926 when the girls were teens.

From The Texas Rangerettes To The Convent

When Evelyn, the youngest, was 18 the four daughters, along with two friends created a band, calling themselves the Texas Rangerettes. They hit the road (in an old hearse!) and played in gigs all over the country ... never missing Sunday mass along the way. After some years, Mr. Jones died, and these four girls, tired of their years of glitz, glamour, and constant travel, one by one decided to enter a convent. And, their widowed mother chose to become a religious sister as well! So, the four Jones girls and their mother gave away the bulk of their worldly goods and in 1938 entered the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament Convent in San Antonio.

Proceeds To The Incarnate Word Convent

Take A Look



An empty lot now stands at the plausible site of where the Jones family once lived:
421 Marshall St. in San Antonio, TX.



This contribution is available at <http://www.theresadoyle-nelson.blogspot.com/2013/05/swinging-sisters-book-review.html>

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Trinity Link up Reopened [at Tercets]



I have a great craft in mind for Trinity Sunday that I will post soon, but in the meantime I wanted to announce that I have reopened [the link up I hosted last year for the feast of The Most Holy Trinity](#). This link up contains some great ideas for teaching the Trinity to children, but there is always room for more ideas, including reflections and meditations, so please add your links at the bottom of this post. The link up will remain open until June 8 so you have plenty of time to link up your posts written on Trinity Sunday or even after.

You will notice a number of links below from Saint Patrick's Day because he used a trefoil or shamrock to represent the mystery of our One God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. If your post about Saint Patrick also mentions the Trinity you are welcome to link below.



Last year we made a lapbook about the Trinity and some Trinity stick puppets; you can read that post [here](#).



I am looking forward to reading your links! Include the button or a text link so others can find the party. Please share this link up with others who may be interested.

Notice: This blog may contain advertising links to vendors I have an affiliate relationship with. This means that if you click on one of these links, a window to that vendor's website will open. If you shop for products on the vendor's site and make a purchase, I may receive a small commission on what you buy, even if you purchase items during a later visit. I appreciate your support of this blog. You can read more about how I choose my affiliate relationships [here](#).

Offers from Book Closeouts



The advertisement features a red background with white and orange text. On the left, the 'book closeouts.com' logo is displayed in blue and white. Below it, a blue box contains the text 'ALL BOOKS ALWAYS 50-90% OFF' and an orange box contains 'THE BEST SELLER IN BARGAIN BOOKS'. A blue box at the bottom left says 'BROWSE OVER 90,000 TITLES [HERE](#)'. The main text reads '50 titles discounted 50% off every day' in white and orange, with a large orange circle containing '50% OFF' in white. At the bottom, it says 'VISIT OUR 50% OFF SELECTION' and 'new selection @ the beginning and middle of each month'. To the right of the ad, the text 'New Arrivals at [BookCloseouts.com](#)' is written in blue.

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This contribution is available at <http://tercets.blogspot.com/2013/05/trinity-link-up-reopened.html>
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Chivalry is dead [at Everything is Grace!]

Over the past couple of years I have noticed something quite significant and, in my opinion, alarming.

Chivalry is dead.

Outside of my male Catholic friends I rarely, if ever, experience acts of chivalry from unknown members of the opposite sex. Take for example, my weekly train journey to visit my parents which requires a medium to small sized suitcase. At a very titchy 5 ft 3" I take up one seat on my own, but because I do not have the strength to lift my suitcase above my head on to the rack, my suitcase usually requires a seat for itself, also. This is not right, I know it's not. I've attempted to put it up; I've struggled almost collapsing under the weight, and nobody attempts to help. Ireland is not short of burly men who could help me, but they look the other way and become suddenly absorbed in their phones or Kindles.

Chivalry is dead. And feminism has killed it.



Feminists, rightly so, want the world to know that women can do anything they want to do. They

are capable of carrying out tasks that are notoriously only for men. But in creating this persona (see image above) they have caused men to back off and to shy away from acts of kindness and respect. For once men have listened!!* As a woman, I don't see it as a weakness that I cannot lift a heavy suitcase above my head, but rather an acceptance of how I am built. Nor do I find it offensive if a man holds a door open for me, if he offers me his jacket on a cold or rainy day. These things make me feel respected and admired.

I don't prescribe to the modern definitions of feminism which supports the killing of the baby in the womb and contraceptives on demand, the mothers of feminism would turn in their graves at such notions, but that's a story for another day. I feel that feminism has gone too far in convincing women to stop being women, and mold themselves into men.

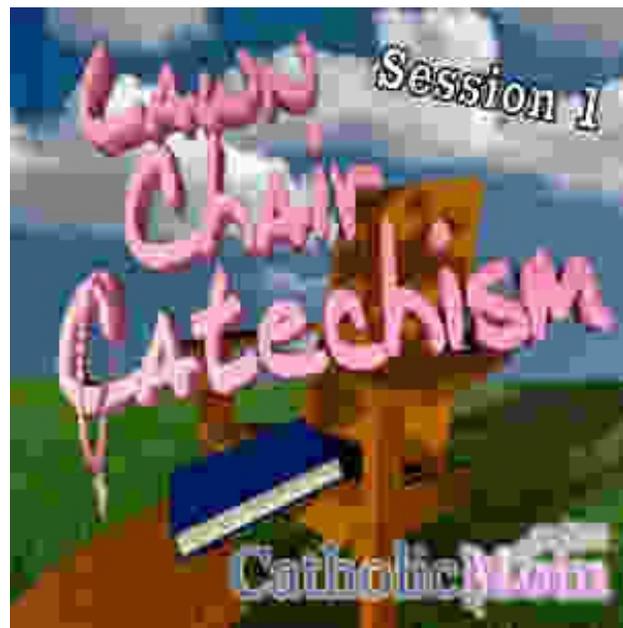
My hope? That men start being men again, and women start embracing their womanhood. Don't be afraid of the feminist regime! If a woman is rude to you for helping her with a heavy bag, or holding a door for her, then brush it off and keep trying, because hopefully you'll come across someone like me who will be delighted to meet a man simultaneously strong and gentle enough to help a woman in need; to be chivalrous.

*I assure you this is a gross exaggeration, and just a little bit of jesting on my part.

This contribution is available at <http://everything-is-grace.blogspot.co.uk/2013/05/chivalry-is-dead.html>
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Forming Intentional Disciples - Week 1 - My personal relationship with God [at Jennifer Fitz]



Week 1, and you get to pick what you write, so I'm answering this question:

How would you describe your lived relationship with God to this point in your life?

It was strange to me when I read about how so many Catholics do not have a notion of God as a Person (technically: Persons) with whom one can have a relationship.

I was raised barely Catholic — made my first communion, then spent most of my youth popping in at Palm Sunday and Easter for our annual two-week This Time We're Going to Start Going Back to Church Every Sunday kick. But I always had a notion of God as someone you talk to, listen to — I wouldn't have called it "having a relationship", because I was just a kid. You don't use those words when you're a kid. But that's what it was.

→ Even during my ardently agnostic/pantheistic kick during young adulthood, I still considered God **someone**. I might have claimed He was this Force Blah Blah Blah, but in practice, yes, a Person. You don't chat with a Force.

The big thing that pushed me back towards the Church was the alarming discovery that I had somehow gotten so far away from God that I couldn't feel His presence anymore — I was visiting one of the historic mission churches around San Antonio, and was deeply disturbed to drop into an active parish — sanctuary lamp lit — and feel **nothing**. It was so dead wrong I knew I was in trouble.

And the rest is details. I asked God to help me*, and He did. Here I am.

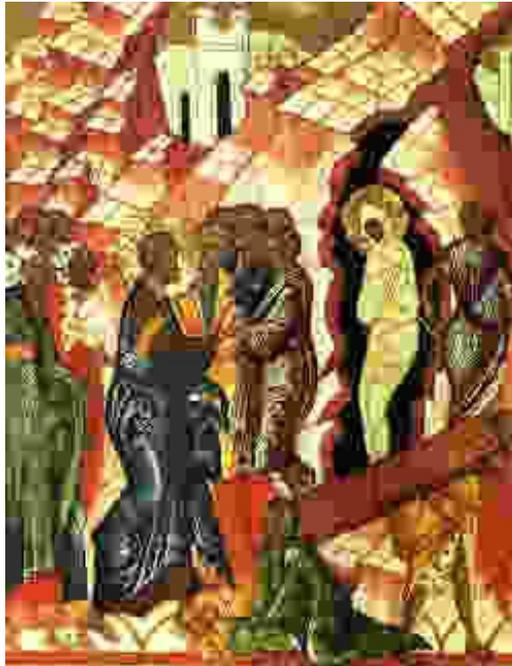
[Find more answers over at CatholicMom.com.](#) *As always, feel free to share your own answers, or a link thereto, in this combox.*

*By “ask”, I mean: Desperately pleaded. Tears. Lamenting. Wailing? Maybe kinda, yeah. Not on the San Antonio trip, but a little bit later, riding down 81/77 in southwest VA. In the privacy of my own vehicle, thank you. I’m not a public-weeper if I can help it.

This contribution is available at <http://jenniferfitz.wordpress.com/2013/05/29/forming-intentional-disciples-week-1-my-personal-relationship-with-god/>
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Four Conversions [at V for Victory!]



Raising of Lazarus, 15th century Russian icon. The raising of Lazarus, dead four days, stinking and bound up in burial bands, symbolizes the raising of a soul dead in sin to the life of grace.

"...I will have mercy on whom I will, and I will be merciful to whom it shall please me." Exodus 33:19

Some miracles of mercy that have not quite passed out of living memory:

For Mary's Inheritance, A Parricide and a Blasphemer

On December 19, 1942, 19-year-old Claude Newman of Bovina, Mississippi lay in wait for his grandmother's estranged, abusive husband, Sid Cook at Cook's home. When Cook entered, Claude shot him to death, took his money and fled. He was eventually caught, tried and convicted, and sentenced to die in Mississippi's electric chair.

One night, while awaiting execution, Claude noticed what he thought was a trinket hanging around the neck of another prisoner in his cell block. When Claude asked him what it was, the other prisoner became angry and embarrassed and threw it on the ground at Claude's feet. Claude picked it up and looked it over. It was a Miraculous Medal. Unable to read or write, and almost totally ignorant about the Christian faith, he did not understand what the medal was or know whose image it bore. Nevertheless, he felt attracted by it, and decided to put it on.

It would not be long before Claude's ignorance would begin to be cured. He was startled out of his sleep by a touch on his wrist, and saw a woman of surpassing beauty standing there. He was frightened and confused, but she said to him: "If you would like me to be your Mother, and you would like to be my child, send for a priest of the Catholic Church." Then she vanished, and Claude screamed for a Catholic priest.

The next morning, Fr. Robert O'Leary was called to visit Claude. Claude told him his incredible story, and then, along with the four other men in his cell block, asked for instruction in the Catholic faith. The other prisoners helped Claude with his studies, because he was illiterate; his story attracted some religious sisters to the jail, and led to religious instruction for more prisoners. Soon it became clear that among Claude's instructors in the Faith was Our Lady herself, who continued to visit him and teach him, in advance of his catechism lessons, doctrines that he could not have learned on his own. Fr. O'Leary became convinced that Our Lady was indeed visiting Claude when she reminded him, through Claude, of a secret vow he had made to her while he was lying in a ditch in Holland in 1940, and which she was still waiting for him to keep.

One particular prisoner at the jail was not among those who joined Claude in taking religious instructions. His name was James Hughs, and he was also a convicted murderer awaiting execution. "This man was the filthiest, most immoral person I had ever come across," said Fr. O'Leary. "His hatred for God and for everything spiritual defied description." He had been brought up Catholic, but now absolutely refused the ministrations of a priest. And he hated Claude with a fierce intensity. But God had not yet given up on James Hughs.

Finally, the catechism lessons were complete, and Claude Newman received the Sacrament of Baptism on January 16, 1944. He was scheduled to be executed at five minutes past midnight on January 20, 1944. Fifteen minutes before he was scheduled to die, he was granted a two-week reprieve by the governor. Claude was completely heartbroken. "What have I done wrong these past weeks," he cried, "that God would refuse me my going home?" Fr. O'Leary suggested to Claude that he offer up every moment of his separation from his heavenly Mother for the conversion of James Hughs. Claude agreed to this and made the offering with the priest's assistance.

Claude's separation from his heavenly Mother finally ended on February 4, 1944, when Mississippi's executioner sent a fatal current of electricity through his body. To the wonder of

those present, he had gone to his death like a bridegroom to his wedding, and took his seat on the electric chair as though it were a throne of gladness.

This scene of rejoicing seemed unlikely to be repeated when, three months later, James Hughs was scheduled to meet his end. He persisted in his hatred of God up until the date set for his execution, and could not be persuaded to so much as kneel down and say an Our Father. Fr. O'Leary was present at this execution as he had been at Claude Newman's, since state law required a clergyman to witness executions; but he had hidden himself from sight, because Hughs had threatened to blaspheme God if he caught sight of a clergyman. When he was strapped into the chair and asked if he had any last words, Hughs began to blaspheme anyway. Then suddenly, he stopped. He fixed his gaze on a corner of the room, his face the picture of horror, and screamed in terror. He begged for a priest. Fr. O'Leary emerged from his hiding place, the room was cleared, and Hughs made his last confession.

When the witnesses were readmitted into the execution chamber, the sheriff asked Hughs what had made him change his mind about seeing a priest. Hughs said that Claude, the black man whom he had hated so much, was, at that moment, standing over in the corner with the Blessed Mother standing behind him, a hand on each of his shoulders. "And Claude said to me, 'I offered my death in union with Christ on the Cross for your salvation. She has obtained for you this gift of seeing your place in Hell if you do not repent.' I have been shown my place in Hell, and that's why I screamed." Hughs then went peacefully to his execution, freed from sin and fortified by the Last Sacraments.

Out of the Blue: Public Enemy No. 1

"Dutch" Schultz, notorious mobster, bootlegger, extortionist and racketeer, was born Arthur Flegenheim in 1901 to German Jewish immigrants. His mother tried to raise him up in the Jewish faith, but before the age of 20 he was already seriously involved in organized crime. During the Prohibition era, he made a fortune from the sale and distribution of illegal liquor; after prohibition, he continued to prosper in the numbers racket and extortion.

The Dutchman was known for his brutality and his ruthlessness; nor was he above turning his own hand to murder. On one occasion, at a meeting with another gangster and with his lawyer, who was then defending him on tax evasion charges, Schultz accused the other gangster of skimming \$70,000 off their extortion racket. An alcohol-fueled argument ensued, during which the other man admitted to skimming \$20,000, to which he considered himself entitled. Schultz pulled out his pistol, stuck it in the man's mouth, and pulled the trigger. "It was as simple and undramatic as that," said the lawyer, Dixie Davis -- "just one quick motion of the hand. Dutch Schultz did that

murder just as casually as if he were picking his teeth." Schultz then apologized to the lawyer for having killed someone in front of him.

Dutch Schultz finally went too far even for the other mobsters when he tried to order the assassination of Thomas Dewey, the U.S. Attorney who was prosecuting him for tax evasion. He had gone to the Mafia Commission for permission to take out Dewey, who was hurting his criminal enterprises; but, fearing the law enforcement backlash that would result from such a hit, the Commission turned him down. When Schultz failed to accept this decision gracefully, the Commission put out a contract on him in order to prevent a hit on Dewey.

And so it was that on October 23, 1935, the Dutchman, along with three other mobsters, was gunned down at the Palace Chop House in Newark, New Jersey. Schultz did not die immediately, but dragged himself back to his table and asked for an ambulance. He was transported to the hospital and underwent emergency surgery.

Schultz is said to have previously investigated the claims of the Catholic faith during one of his tax evasion trials. He is said to have decided to convert, motivated by the belief that Jesus Christ had kept him out of prison, and also by a desire to ingratiate himself to Italian mobster Charles "Lucky" Luciano. Whatever the case may have been, Schultz, who only hours earlier had been engaged in planning crimes -- perhaps even the murder of a U.S. Attorney -- summoned a Catholic priest, apparently out of the blue, and expressed his desire to die a Catholic. He received the Sacrament of Baptism and the last rites from Fr. Cornelius McInerney and died in the bosom of the Church on the evening of October 24, 1935 at the age of 34. He is buried at Gate of Heaven Catholic cemetery in Hawthorne, New York.

The Commandant of Auschwitz

Without a doubt, this is the most offensive of all these conversion stories, from a human point of view. Human pusillanimity tempts us to think that here, God's Mercy clashes with His Justice. All of these stories are about men who were destroyers of life; but this story is about a destroyer of *peoples*, a man with the blood of millions on his conscience, who murdered on an industrial scale. And it begins with the kindness of jailers and the ringing of monastery bells.

Rudolf Höss was born in 1900 in Baden-Baden to parents who gave him a strict -- perhaps even straitjacketed -- Catholic upbringing. When he was a teenager, he became convinced that his priest had violated the Sacramental seal by repeating to his father something he had accused

himself of in confession; he soon stopped going to confession altogether and ultimately fell away from the Faith. After serving with distinction in World War I, he became involved in political extremism and found his way into the Nazi party in 1922. He joined the ranks of the SS at the invitation of Heinrich Himmler and was assigned, first to Dachau, then to Sachsenhausen, and finally was appointed commandant at Auschwitz in April of 1940. There he lived in a villa with his wife and children and presided over the implementation of the Final Solution, of which Auschwitz was chosen as the locus. Through study and experimentation, and sustained by his fanatical devotion to the Nazi ideology, Höss turned his camp into a powerhouse of genocide, dealing out death at the rate of thousands of human beings per hour. By the time he was replaced as commandant in December of 1943, he had presided over the deaths of about 3 million people. Between May and July of 1944, Höss returned to the camp and added to this grim total by supervising the liquidation of nearly half a million Hungarian Jews.

Höss evaded capture for nearly a year after Germany's defeat, until he was finally taken by British troops. He testified at the Nuremberg trials, and was turned over to the Polish government to be tried by its Supreme National Tribunal. On April 2, 1947, he was found guilty and sentenced to death. He waived his right to appeal for clemency.

While in the custody of the Poles, Höss had been treated with kindness and decency, expressions of living faith that filled him with deep shame. Then, while he waited in solitary confinement for the carrying out of his sentence, the finger of God on Höss' forehead: the sound of bells ringing from the local Carmelite monastery. There is power in the ringing of bells, blessed and baptized and consecrated to the service of Catholic worship; it is no wonder the world in our day has declared war on church bells. How hell is despoiled by the ringing of Church bells. Rudolf Höss, the Monster of Auschwitz, the Commandant of Death, guilty of the blood of millions, awaiting his own death, heard Church bells, and called for a Catholic priest.

At first Höss' request was not heeded, so he repeated it in writing. A priest was finally found who could speak German: Fr. Wladislaw Lohn, S.J., the Jesuit Provincial of Cracow. Twenty-seven of his priests had suffered in Auschwitz; twelve had died. Fr. Lohn is said to have approached the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy at the very convent in which St. Faustina lived to ask them for their prayers before undertaking his delicate and difficult mission to the great tormentor of Poland and of his own Jesuit brethren.

Fr. Lohn met with Rudolf Höss on April 10, 1947 and spent several hours with him. At the end of this lengthy interview, Höss repented of his apostasy, made a formal profession of faith, made his

confession and received absolution. The next day, Fr. Lohn returned and gave Höss Holy Communion, which he received on his knees, weeping. On April 12th, Höss sent the following statement to the state prosecutor:

My conscience compels me to make the following declaration. In the solitude of my prison cell I have come to the bitter recognition that I have sinned gravely against humanity. As Commandant of Auschwitz I was responsible for carrying out part of the cruel plans of the 'Third Reich' for human destruction. In so doing I have inflicted terrible wounds on humanity. I caused unspeakable suffering for the Polish people in particular. I am to pay for this with my life. May the Lord God forgive one day what I have done.

On April 16, 1947, Rudolf Höss was taken to Auschwitz and hanged by the neck from a gallows specially erected there for the purpose. He died for his unspeakable crimes, having been first snatched from the jaws of hell, all because of the kindness of his jailers and the ringing of church bells.

How great and unfathomable are the mercies of God.

This contribution is available at <http://v-forvictory.blogspot.com/2013/05/four-conversions.html>
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THE WORLD IS CHARGED WITH THE GRANDEUR OF GOD [at MONKS AND MERMAIDS (A Benedictine Blog)]

A Crisis of Beauty

There is a crisis of beauty within my culture. That is a very kind way to say that much of the world around me, at least the civilizational part, is ugly. It is not an ugliness born of poverty (though poverty is very ugly around here) – unless we understand that there is a poverty within the human spirit that begets ugliness. My thoughts on my environment are not just my opinion. In the late 1940's, John Gunther, author of *Inside USA*, dubbed Knoxville (the hub of our metro area) the “ugliest city” in America. The city has worked hard to overcome the moniker.

Such a designation only makes our city the “ugliest of the ugly,” for the truth is, it looks like most of America. American towns have been driven by utility. There is no central, cultural notion of what a building should look like. The cozy villages of Europe were the products of a cultural consensus. American architectural landscape is best described with words like “sprawling,” and “franchise.”

The small town I live in, built in the 1940's to house the “Manhattan Project,” America's effort to build the first nuclear weapon, bears some of the marks of its wartime heritage, but is mostly just a collection of successful and unsuccessful franchised America. The unsuccessful ones tend to leave their “bones” behind (empty buildings). There's a former Pizza Hut with its uniquely shaped windows that is now, I think, a medical clinic. It was a jewelry store for a while. At least the roof is no longer red.

Of course, I also live very near one of the most wonderful National Parks in America: the Great Smokey Mountains, part of a mountain chain that is perhaps the oldest in the world. Much of it is unspoiled – a treasure-trove of natural beauty.

It is tragic to associate human activity with ugliness. In our part of the world, those who champion beauty are also committed foes of development and the expansion of the human habitat. They have a point.

Beauty is a reflection of the Divine Nature. From the greatest expanse of stars to the most microscopic parts of creation, beauty is woven into all that exists. Human beings are beautiful as well – inherently so. It is for this reason that our modern penchant for the mundane, banal and empty is so striking.

I was recently interviewed by someone collecting opinions from area leaders about their take on our local needs. I was asked about “crisis” areas. I surprised myself when the first words out of my mouth were, “We have a crisis of beauty.” Surely I think something else is more important. But I'm not sure that I do. Our lack of beauty is both symptom and the lack of a cure. For the lack of beauty can only be healed by the presence of beauty. My region of the nation was also recently dubbed as the most “Bible-centered” city in America. This combination of civic distinctions is tragically ironic.

One of the instincts of Orthodoxy is that of beauty. Orthodox Churches are not accidentally beautiful. They vary across the world, but their beauty, even when simple, is as intentional as any aspect of the Liturgy. The doctrine of icons – their making and veneration – is a liturgical incarnation of the doctrine of beauty. Icons are not art – they are representations of beauty in the Truth of its Existence.

We are now in the season of Great Lent. It is a serious season – a time of fasting and of intense prayer. But it is not a season in which the Church is stripped bare and nakedness allowed to reign (I reflect on such tendencies in a number of Western Churches). Oddly, my Lenten vestments may be the most beautiful set that I own. They are dark (black) and intense. But on the night of Pascha, a rich hymn of beauty will be sung. We sang it (as a sort of farewell and remembrance of our goal) last Sunday during Forgiveness Vespers as we began the journey of Lent. It is a song of Pascha: Pascha of beauty, the Pascha of the Lord, a Pascha worthy of all honor has dawned for us. Pascha! Let us embrace each other joyously. O Pascha, ransom from affliction! For today as from a bridal chamber Christ has shown forth from the tomb and filled the women with joy saying: Proclaim the glad tidings to the apostles.

This is the day of resurrection. Let us be illumined by the feast. Let us embrace each other. Let us call “Brothers” even those that hate us, and forgive all by the resurrection, and so let us cry: Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life! Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life!

A Pascha of beauty begins in the soul. It is there above all that I find the crisis of beauty. Lord, have mercy.

<http://glory2godforallthings.com/2013/03/21/a-crisis-of-beauty/><http://glory2godforallthings.com/2012/07/13/beauty-and-the-face-of-god/><http://glory2godforallthings.com/2013/05/18/to-behold-the-beauty-of-the-lord/><http://glory2godforallthings.com/2013/05/20/beauty-and-the-face-of-god-2/><http://glory2godforallthings.com/2013/05/25/scattered-thoughts-and-the-one-god/><http://glory2godforallthings.com/2013/01/22/the-beauty-of-truth-a..>

Let us give Pope Benedict XVI the last word on Beauty in its relationship with Truth.

The Pope Theologian Says: The Proof of God Is Beauty

The beauty of art and of music. The wonders of sanctity. The splendor of creation. This is how Benedict XVI defends the truth of Christianity, in a question-and-answer session with the priests of Brixen



1. "All great works of art are an epiphany of God"

Q: Holy Father, my name is Willibald Hopfgartner, and I am a Franciscan. In your address in Regensburg, you emphasized the substantial connection between the divine Spirit and human reason. On the other hand, you have also always emphasized the importance of art and beauty. So then, together with conceptual dialogue about God in theology, should there not always be a new presentation of the aesthetic experience of the faith within the Church, through proclamation and the liturgy?

A: Yes, I think that the two things go together: reason, precision, honesty in the reflection on truth, and beauty. A form of reason that in any way wanted to strip itself of beauty would be depleted, it would be blind. Only when the two are united do they form the whole, and this union is important precisely for the faith. Faith must constantly confront the challenges of the mindset of this age, so that it may not seem a sort of irrational mythology that we keep alive, but may truly be an answer to the great questions; so that it may not be merely a habit, but the truth, as Tertullian once said.

In his first letter, St. Peter wrote the phrase that the medieval theologians took as the legitimization, almost as the mandate for their theological work: "Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope" – an apologia for the "logos" of hope, meaning a transformation of the "logos," the reason for hope, into an apologia, an answer addressed to men. He was clearly convinced of the fact that faith is "logos," that it is a form of reason, a light issuing from the creating Light, and not a hodgepodge resulting from our own thought. This is why it is universal, and for this reason it can be communicated to all.

But this creating "Logos" is not a merely technical "logos." It is broader than this, it is a "logos" that is love, and therefore to be expressed in beauty and goodness. And in reality, for me art and the saints are the greatest apologia for our faith.

The arguments presented by reason are absolutely important and indispensable, but there always remains some disagreement somewhere. If, instead, we look at the saints, this great luminous arc that God has set across history, we see that here there is truly a power of goodness that lasts over the millennia, here there is truly light from light.

And in the same way, if we contemplate the created beauties of the faith, these simply are, I would say, the living proof of faith. Take this beautiful cathedral: it is a living proclamation! It speaks to us on its own, and beginning with the beauty of the cathedral we are able to proclaim in a visible way God, Christ and all of his mysteries: here these have taken shape, and are gazing back at us. All of the great works of art, the cathedrals – the Gothic cathedrals, and the splendid Baroque churches – all of them are a luminous sign of God, and therefore truly a manifestation, an epiphany of God.

Christianity involves precisely this epiphany: that God has become a veiled Epiphany, he appears and shines. We have just listened to the sound of the organ in all its splendor, and I think that the great music born within the Church is an audible and perceptible rendering of the truth of our faith: from Gregorian chant to the music of the cathedrals to Palestrina and his era, to Bach and then to Mozart and Bruckner, and so on... Listening to all of these great works – the Passions by Bach, his Mass in B minor, and the great spiritual compositions of 16th century polyphony, of the Viennese school, of all of this music, even by minor composers – suddenly we feel: it is true! Wherever things like these are created, there is Truth.

Without an intuition capable of discovering the true creative center of the world, this beauty cannot be created. For this reason, I think that we must always act in such a way that these two things go together, we must present them together. When, in our own time, we discuss the reasonableness of the faith, we are discussing precisely the fact that reason does not end where experimental discoveries end, it does not end in positivism; the theory of evolution sees the truth, but sees only half of it: it does not see that behind this is the Spirit of creation. We are fighting for the expansion of reason, and therefore for a form of reason that, exactly to the point, is open to beauty as well, and does not have to leave it aside as something completely different and irrational.

Christian art is a rational form of art – we think of Gothic art, great music, or the Baroque art right here – but this is the artistic expression of a much broader form of reason, in which the heart and reason come together. This is the point. This, I think, is in some way the proof of the truth of Christianity: the heart and reason come together, beauty and truth touch. And to the extent that we are able to live in the beauty of truth, so much more will faith again be able to be creative, in our own time as well, and to express itself in a convincing artistic form.

This contribution is available at <http://fatherdavidbirdosb.blogspot.com/2013/05/the-world-is-charged-with-grandeur-of.html>

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Pondering Spiritual Things: A Word That Has A Spiritual Reality [at Journey to Wisdom]

[As I was reading the May 20th office of Readings for today](#)

, I was really struck by the concluding prayer:

“Grant, we pray, almighty God. that always pondering spiritual things, we may carry out in both word and deed that which is pleasing to you.”

If you have a heart for spiritual things how do you hear the word “mother”? Because when I read that

[Pope Francis told 800 superiors of women’s orders](#)

that they should be spiritual mothers, not spinsters I was excited! When I read the actual quote in the Moynihan Letters, I was over-the-moon!

[Chastity for the Kingdom of Heaven shows how affection has its place in mature freedom and becomes a sign of the future world, to make God’s primacy shine forever. But please \[make it\] a fertile chastity, which generates spiritual children in the Church. The consecrated are mothers: they must not be ‘old maids’!](#)

Unfortunately that article was a bit critical of our Holy Father’s use of the words “mothers” and “old maids”. Moynihan quoted Melinda Henneberger of the Washington Post, a writer who often tries to defend the Church, yet, who felt that the comment was insulting to these women who had given up families to serve the Church. She felt that it perpetuated a negative: Seeing women’s roles in the church as exclusively "maternal".

Really?? And this from a women supposedly knowledgeable enough about our faith to defend the Church in print. Even the author of the article wondered if the phrase was unfortunate because it will be misunderstood and misused.

How else will we fight “careerism” in the Church if we go on allowing a banal culture to narrow spiritual realities to superficial ones? Careerism will be all that is left for individuals to grasp onto in order to form some semblance of identity, inside and outside of the Church, if we allow this to continue. How will we continue to stand and fight the the dictatorship of relativism if we are offended by the ontological realities of our identities as male or female made in the image and likeness of God? We will deserve the transgendered culture that

we are

getting if we ourselves, as Catholics, give in to the idea that “maternity” or “paternity” are narrow definitions of a material actions or roles and not the core of how we image the Father as male and female; signs of a future world. A world where our masculinity and femininity are fulfilled, not eliminated!

I for one found the Pope’s words to be thrilling! Spiritual words to be pondered, and allowed to gestate! What do the spiritual realities of maternity and paternity suggest to you when you ponder them apart from the narrow confines of our relativistic world? And how do you think we should communicate them?

This contribution is available at <http://journeytowisdom-ocbs.blogspot.com/2013/05/pondering-spiritual-things-word-that.html>

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Spiritual Practices: Value of Family Prayer [at From the Pulpit of My Life]

I learned to pray in my childhood. One morning when I was in kindergarten our teacher, Mrs. Kershke, asked if anyone knew a prayer. Hands waved vigorously as many classmates of mine volunteered. I was vexed that I could not volunteer, because I did not know a prayer. At least I didn't think I knew one. Mrs. Kershke called on Billy and he recited the "Hail Mary" prayer. Something about that prayer was familiar to me, but I certainly didn't know it by heart. That day, upon returning home from school, I let it be known that I wanted to know a prayer. In fact, I was upset with my parents for not having taught me sooner. So my education in prayer and praying began.

At first I wanted to know the words to a prayer. For a young child learning the words and the accepted physical posture of folded hands, bowed head, and perhaps kneeling is the start for becoming prayerful. I applaud my father for his way of teaching by example. He was, in fact, a prayerful person, although he was laid back about it. I could actually sense God's presence in the atmosphere of our home when my Dad prayed. He was silent. His eyes were closed. I saw the rosary beads moving through his fingers as he lay on the sofa after coming home from work. I knew that something was going on, something good and holy, even if I could not articulate it.

Our family ritual before bed time included story-telling or reading stories, singing songs, and finally prayer. One prayer I remember learning was "Hail Holy Queen," the English translation of "Salve Regina."

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy; hail, our life, our sweetness, and our hope! To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve; to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears. Turn, then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us; and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary!

Source: *A Catechism of Christian Doctrine*, revised edition of the Baltimore Catechism, No.2, copyright, 1941, Archdiocese of Chicago School Board.

My father was good about explaining the meaning of the words to the prayers we learned in response to specific questions posed by me or by my brother and sister. So, for example, in the "Hail Holy Queen" above, when I asked him, "What is a vale of tears?" he said it meant the sorrows and struggles of life on Earth that will end when we are with God in heaven. Likewise, the phrase, "after this our exile"

meant

the same thing. I marvel at how well my father incorporated little lessons about faith into our

nightly prayer sessions.

Recently our Holy Father, Pope Francis talked about family prayer. He said,

During this month of May, I would like to recall the importance and the beauty of praying the Holy Rosary, contemplating the mysteries of Jesus, reflecting ... on the central moments of his life, so that, as for Mary and St. Joseph, He may be the centre of our thoughts, of our concerns, and of our actions. It would be beautiful if ... during this month of May, we would recite together in our families, with our friends, and in our parishes, the Holy Rosary or some prayer to Jesus and the Virgin Mary. Praying together is a precious moment for making our family life and our friendship more steadfast! Let us learn to pray more in our families and as a family!”

I learned to pray within my family. During a recent homily my pastor suggested that it is usually the mother who passes on the gift of prayer to her children, but that was not the case with me. The role of my father in shaping me as a person who prays was central.



Dad's rosary beads were like these.

This contribution is available at <http://fromthepulpitofmylife.blogspot.com/2013/05/spiritual-practices-value-of-family.html>
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The fruits of complacency on marriage [at Kitchen table chats with a Catholic Matriarch]

My

[latest article on Zenit](#)

was published yesterday. It ended up being a sort of "part II" to last

[month's article](#)

. Last month I wrote about how the cultural forces seeking to redefine marriage are also redefining the relationship of parent and child. This month, I wrote about the advances in assisted reproductive technology that are doing much the same thing.

We currently find ourselves in a battle to preserve and protect the institution of marriage as a union of one man and one woman that brings forth the gift of life from that union. I was privileged to attend the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast yesterday morning. Both Dr. Helen Alvare, law professor at George Mason University, and the Most Reverend Michael Sheridan, Bishop of Colorado Springs, focused on the defense of marriage in their addresses to the assembly. Their words were both insightful and informative. (Their remarks will be televised tomorrow morning at 10:30am ET on EWTN)

We all need to be engaged in the defense of marriage. The fact that we have progressed to the point that our culture now excludes children from the purpose of marriage and defines it as an entity that is independent of the gender and even the number of adult participants is the result of our failure to defend marriage from earlier assaults.

From the time of Christ, there has been an attempt to pervert marriage from its original intent. The Jews questioned Jesus about divorce and his response left no question that the institution of marriage as God ordained was an unbreakable bond. The Anglicans separated procreation from marriage in 1930 when they accepted contraception within marriage. When the purpose of marriage became focused on adult pleasure then divorce seemed logical when the pleasure was gone. If marriage lacked permanence, then why bother with it? Cohabitation became the norm. And if marriage is only about the affection of adults, then why does the gender of these adults matter? And if the complementarity of the adults is not important, then the number of adults in the marriage is irrelevant as well. Do not think that the twisting of marriage will stop with same-sex relationships. Polyamory is the next permutation on the horizon.

We are here because of our complacency. Pope Paul VI promulgated

in 1968. It was a hard teaching during the time of a cultural sexual revolution. We did not want to offend or appear judgmental or seem backwards so we did not speak up on the immorality of contraception. When I say, "we", I mean Catholic clergy and laity alike. Our Catholic friends got divorced and when they remarried outside of the Church, we attended their weddings and celebrated with nary a thought to the sin of adultery being committed. We did not recognize or acknowledge that when our friends lived together before getting married they were making a mockery of the institution of marriage. And now, because we have been so cavalier with the institution of marriage, we are facing its destruction. These are the fruits of our complacency.

The pastor at our parish has instituted a policy that cohabitating couples cannot be married with all the frills and flourishes of a big wedding. No wedding gown. No special music. No procession of bridesmaids. No Nuptial Mass. They may have a simple ceremony, attended by friends where they exchange vows. I am sure he has taken heat for this stand. But imagine if more priests had respected the sacrament of matrimony as much as my pastor does. We might have done a much better job of preserving the sanctity of marriage.

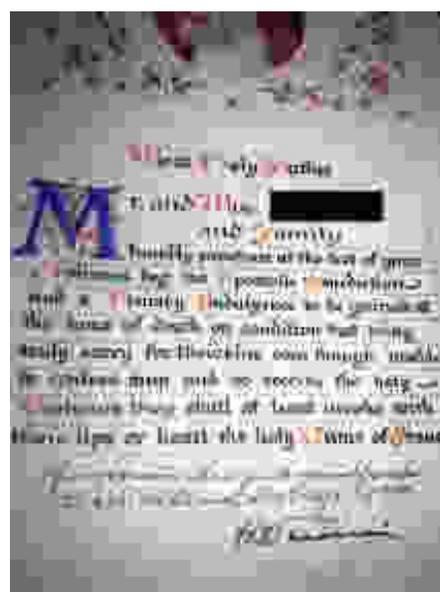
Likewise, I know of parents who told their daughters that if they choose to cohabit, they will not provide a big wedding and reception. The celebration is supposed to mark the inauguration of a sacramental life together. If they choose to treat a wedding as a mere formality or an excuse for a party instead of the holy sacrament it is, then they forfeit all the trappings of a traditional wedding. How many mothers and fathers today are willing to look their children in the eye and deny them their dream wedding in defense of the institution of marriage? I am immersed in the planning of my daughter's upcoming wedding and I know how painful such a decision would be. I am very grateful that my daughter and her fiance have not made me make that choice.

But it is exactly these kinds of choices that are all the more urgently needed now. We have to defend marriage from the assaults of same-sex relationships and from polyamory as well as from the more subtle but equally damaging affronts that trivialize children as a primary purpose of marriage. Contraception, abortion, divorce, and cohabitation are also attacks on marriage. Complacency on any of these issues is no longer an option.

This contribution is available at <http://catholic-mom.blogspot.com/2013/05/the-fruits-of-complacency-on-marriage.html>

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Free from All attachment to Sin: Gaining an Indulgence [at A Catholic Life]



"To abstain from sinful actions is not sufficient for the fulfillment of God's law. The very desire of what is forbidden is evil." - St. John Baptist de la Salle

As we are aware, one of the key

[requirements to receiving a plenary indulgence](#)

is being "free from all attachment to sin." What exactly does this mean? How can we be free from all attachment to sin? A question has arisen from a reader of this blog that deserves an explanation:

One of the requirements for a plenary indulgence is "free from all attachment to sin." What do you think is meant by this? What if a person considers a certain sin to be appealing, or is easily tempted by it? Would this be an attachment to sin? What if a person has not adequately atoned for his sins? Would this be an attachment to sin?

I wish to direct you to the following words taken directly from

[Enchiridion of Indulgences -- Norms and Grants](#)

, authorized English Edition, translated by Fr. William T. Barry, C.S.S.R., Catholic Book Publishing Co., New York, New York, from the Second Revised Edition of the Enchiridion of Indulgences issued by the Sacred Apostolic Penitentiary, 1968 and originally published by Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City, 1968.

The author uses the plenary indulgence associated with the Way of the Cross as an example:

To gain a plenary indulgence, however, several additional factors must also be present. All together, they are the following:

1. *The person must be a Catholic, not excommunicated, and in the state of grace*, that is, free from mortal sin that has not been confessed and forgiven in the Sacrament of Penance.
2. *The recipient must go to Confession, receive Holy Communion, and say at least one Our Father and one Hail Mary for the intentions of the Sovereign Pontiff.* These can all be done several days before or after performing the prescribed "work," in this case, making the Way of the Cross. But it is more fitting that the Communion and the prayers for the Pope's intentions be on the same day that the "work" is performed. A single Confession suffices for gaining several plenary indulgences, but sacramental Communion must be received and prayer for the intention of the Sovereign Pontiff must be recited for the gaining of each plenary indulgence.
3. ***The recipient must be free from all attachment to sin, even venial sin. Although a person might still sin, as we all do, or even be inclined to an habitual sin, such as using God's name in vain, yet so long as the attachment to the sin or the desire to commit it is absent from the person's soul, he or she would be considered "free from attachment to sin." (If this disposition is in any way less than perfect or if any of the prescribed three conditions are not fulfilled, the indulgence will be only partial.)***
4. *Only one plenary indulgence may be gained per day.* But one can obtain the plenary indulgence "for the moment of death;" even if another plenary indulgence had been acquired on the same day.
5. *The person must perform the prescribed work*, in this case, make the Way of the Cross -- *with at least the general intention of gaining indulgences.* In making the Way of the Cross, the following norms apply:
 1. The pious exercise must be made before stations of the Way of the Cross legitimately erected.
 2. For the erection of the Way of the Cross, fourteen crosses are required, to which it is customary to add fourteen pictures or images, which represent the stations of Jerusalem.
 3. Although according to the more common practice the pious exercise consists of fourteen pious readings to which some vocal prayers are added, yet nothing more is required than a pious meditation on the Passion and Death of the Lord, which need not be a particular consideration of the individual mysteries of the stations.
 4. A movement from one station to the next is required, but if the pious exercise is made publicly and if it is not possible for all taking part to go in an orderly way from station to station, it suffices if at least the one conducting the exercise goes from station to station, the others remaining in their places.
 5. Those who are "impeded" can gain the same indulgence if they spend at least a half hour in pious reading and meditation on the Passion and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

shared this sentiments:

Being free from mortal sin is not only a requirement for gaining a plenary indulgence, but also a requirement for gaining a partial indulgence, and a prerequisite to receiving the Eucharist. To free one's self from a state of mortal sin, one must celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. If one commits mortal sin regularly, it is likely that he is attached to this sin, so even after celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation and receiving the Eucharist, he can only gain a partial indulgence.

Remaining free from mortal sin is a normal state for a Christian. The more mature Christian can also achieve the higher state of being free from all attachment to sin. This is usually the deciding factor as to whether an indulgence is plenary or partial. The individual may have the intent of gaining a plenary indulgence, but any attachment to sin will cause the indulgence to be only partial. This should not deter one from seeking a plenary indulgence and a state of being free from all attachment to sin. Once one is truly free from all attachment to sin, it become easier to remain so.

Being free from all attachment to sin is not only a requirement for gaining a plenary indulgence, it should be a goal of every Christian. Consciously renouncing all attachment to sin is required to make a good Confession. It is also required in preparing one's self to receive the Eucharist. After receiving the Eucharist or Absolution, one may fall back into attachment to sin, sometimes almost immediately, but that should not discourage one's efforts. Frequent Communion and Confession are the two most effective aids in becoming free from all attachment to sin.

The ultimate goal of a Christian is to not only be free from all attachment to sin, but to be free of all sin. This is an impossible goal to achieve on Earth, but nonetheless, it is the goal. The goal of achieving freedom from all attachment to sin is achievable on Earth, although it required a great deal of effort. It should be noted that being free from all sin and being free from all attachment to sin are two very different things. One can sin without being attached to that sin.

To be attached to a sin is to be comfortable in that sin; to return to it again and again without much resistance to the temptation to commit it. It is an addiction, where the desire to commit the sin is stronger than the desire to serve God. In essences, it is serving God with reservation and not with total abandonment.

Attachment to sin can be an obvious addiction, such as to alcohol, or to pornography, but it can also be subtle, such as being pridefully pious, saying prayers instead of praying them, or ignoring the promptings of the Holy Spirit. One must be careful though not to fall into scrupulosity, which itself is a sin that one can become attached to.

One can be attached to sin without being conscious of it, making it even harder gain a plenary

indulgence. One must delve deep down into his soul and honestly evaluate his sinful nature to discover in what way he habitually resists the will of God.

Ridding yourself from all attachment to sin is necessary in gaining a plenary indulgence, but it is also the only way to grow in your Christian faith. Regularly gaining an indulgence is admirable, but what is more important is to grow in faith, which is a side effect of regularly gaining an indulgence.

And thus we see attachment to sin is likely quite common in our society. But as affirmed above, we should trust in God and seek out indulgences regardless. At the least, our indulgence will be partial and for someone attached to sin, partial indulgences will help them atone for sin and increase in virtue. On a similar note, please see

The Hermeneutic of Continuity's

post on

[Plenary Indulgences: Not Impossible](#)

This contribution is available at <http://acatholiclife.blogspot.com/2013/05/free-from-all-attachment-to-sin-gaining.html>

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Embracing the Sacred Wounds of Love [at Beauty is Lived]

Cry aloud to the Lord!
O daughter of Zion!
Let tears stream down like a torrent
day and night!
Give yourself no rest,
your eyes no respite!
Arise, cry out in the night,
at the beginning of the watches!
Pour out your heart like water
before the presence of the Lord!

(Lamentations 2:18-19)

There is a certain paradox of our human existence whereby one of our deepest human longings, that of intimacy, is only achieved by giving way to one of our greatest and apparently contra-natural fears, allowing ourselves to be vulnerable. Intimacy and vulnerability are two edges of a single sword, and without lowering the shield of fear, without letting our defenses down and allowing the subjective gaze of another peer behind our carefully constructed masks and veils, we can never truly achieve the intimacy that is at the heart of true and abiding love.

The word vulnerable comes from the Latin word for “wound,” and this is only fitting. To allow ourselves to become vulnerable is to invite another to pierce us with a sacred wound, to penetrate the depths of our most tender heart, and in so doing we expose ourselves as naked and bleeding creatures. Behind our carefully constructed facades and stony masks we have fears, dreams, shames, longings, and a frail brokenness that we dare not let another see.

The fear of vulnerability is that we do not know the nature of the wound that will strike us. That which penetrates our heart can be the love which forms a healing bond, bringing together our many broken pieces and holding them in a tender embrace, allowing us to experience life in vivid color and waking joy. But it is also true that we may entrust our hearts to one who will only cause us pain, that we might entrust to another our most precious gift only to find it shattered in their hands. This is vulnerability’s risk, and we may be tempted to question whether the reward is worth it.

Perhaps the question should be asked another way: can a life deprived of intimacy ever be considered as truly lived? As human beings, we are born lovers, we are created for the tender embrace of intimacy, and thus our spirits are infused with a remarkable resiliency. There is no experience of love that does not strengthen us, does not expound upon our humanity, does not fill the gaps of our heart with the beauty of a life truly lived.

Yet by opening ourselves up to this experience of love and intimacy, we cannot escape the experience of sorrow and pain. Love can cauterize but it can also scar, and even with the distance of time those scars can linger like haunting reminders of pains endured. It is the choices we make in the presence of these spectral fears that decide the beauty of our lives.

There is another path of intimacy which when walked gives us the strength and healing to embrace the path of love that from our depths we all long to take. This other path is the path of prayer. It is in the intimacy of prayer, the experience of vulnerability before the divine, that we enter into the arms of the God who is Love and who invites us to “pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord.” It is in the silence of prayer, gazing into the eyes of God, the lover so intimate that he knows us better than we know ourselves, and before whom we have no choice but to be naked, that our mourning is turned into dancing (Ps 30:11) and our sorrow into joy (Jn 16:20).

The true hope of the Christian belief in resurrection is that the Christ who rose from the dead and ascended into heaven never discarded his scars. We have a God who himself has suffered the wounds of love, who invited others to know his truest, deepest self, who became vulnerable before them, and who ultimately bore the wounds of that love. Now seated at the right hand of the Father, our Christ receives our prayers as a wounded God, and it is by allowing ourselves to enter into his wounds that our own become truly sacred.

So when the pain of intimacy tempts us to be vulnerable no more, we do well to turn to the intimacy of prayer, to bring our pains before the suffering God, to “cry aloud to the Lord” and to “let tears stream down like a torrent day and night.” In the intimacy of prayer we will discover that we do not cry alone. Just as the tears of Christ raised Lazarus from death, so too will they loose us from the bonds of fear and allow us to experience the beauty of a life lived in the intimacy of true love.

This contribution is available at <http://goodbeautifultrue.com/2013/05/16/embracing-the-sacred-wounds-of-love/>
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Pope Francis and the 1962 Latin Mass [at + Stella Maris +]

Some of the comments following the election of Pope Francis have been made in ignorance of the Church's teachings, "normal" practice and Vatican "protocol". The idea that Pope Francis would somehow "remove" Pope Benedict's

Summorum Pontificum

(on the Extraordinary Rite etc) is simply ridiculous. In

[this report](#)

from the

New Liturgical Movement

blog we gain some insight into the Pope's mind. He is a unifying Pope, not a Pope of disunity or disturbance in the Church. I sometimes wonder if some of the fears we have seen expressed since his election betray a lack of faith in the Holy Spirit and Our Lord's promise to be with us until the end of the ages. Pope Benedict argued that BOTH forms of the rite (ordinary and extraordinary) should inform each other. I know that some "traditionalists" (I dislike using the term but it is used in this limited sense by some) have not really accepted this; they want the old rite to remain untouched. This was not Pope Benedict's intention, nor was it his intention that the *Missa Normativa* (the correct name for the ordinary rite) should remain untouched or descend further into unwarranted innovations or liturgical disobedience. Rather BOTH rites are protected by each other and certain "adaptations" or "styles" can already be seen moving from one to the other. A stultification in the manner of celebrating the Old Rite needs to be avoided. A too mannered way of celebrating the Latin Rite can be just as much a distraction and display of the priest's ego as some styles of celebration are in the Ordinary Rite. One of the things I have learned in coming to the Old Rite is that the priest is the servant of the Rite which means that a certain humility is required. Pope Francis' use of the word "triumphalism" is well-advised. The extremes he does not like - I would suggest - are linked to a certain style of priestly living which sometimes appears snobby or sneering. Allowing for human weaknesses and non-sinful eccentricities, what we, in Yorkshire, refer to as "poncing about" needs to be avoided.

The Liturgy, "new" or "old" is NOT vehicle for displaying one's "churchmanship" (for want of another term) or the distinctiveness of one's character or even piety. Self-consciousness in celebrating the Liturgy is always spotted by those who are genuinely Catholic and it is, in the end, a "turn off". Pope Francis' obvious humility and his emphasis on the priest (and bishop) as servant is applicable to every aspect of priestly life, including the Liturgy.

[mass.html](#)

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Memoir Monday ~ Always Hope: The Soldier in the Snapshot [at Campfires and Cleats]



Seventy years ~ passed

black, white, crinkled, curled

He is rail thin,

wrapped in grey and metal helmetted.

Smiling, smiling.

Duty bound

And honor bound, this enlisted man
Who crossed the vast blue Pacific
Who left his life for five long years

Did he think this was the last to be snapped of him?

Or was he hopeful and assured of his return?

His country's victory?

Did he know it would be cherished so?

That it would grace for infinite hours
the cracked wood table

on Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn?

That his Mother's trembling hands would not put it down?

That she would gingerly place it on the

Christmas tree she insisted would grace the corner of this kitchen until July when he was granted leave?

That it would be gazed upon by her worried eyes?

Loving eyes?

Burnt out buildings, decaying huts, palm fronds,

The quiet embattled beauty of this Pacific country

graces the backdrop.



"My Manila," he'd say

He forever wished to go back

To see with non-war eyes the people

No, no longer seeing their gratitude to the Americans,

to the Army Infantry with which he fought,

That he wished not to see any longer....

No, he wished to witness their strength, their pride

Their independence.

For that is why he joined the fight.

And it haunted him always.....:

This unfairness and suppression.

This brutal, irrational

need for dominance, power.

These reasons the world erupted in war in his 20s.

.... when America was still so young itself.

My Dad is this soldier

and I gaze on this same photo that gave hope to

the-Grandma-I-never-met.

For she left this Earth three months exactly

before I entered

and two decades after she first held the photo.

And he could never speak of her or think of her

without teary eyes

He bore wounds, yes.

For the scars of the victors run deep

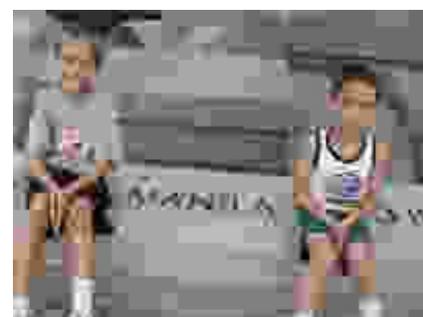
And stay forever.

Memorial Day approaches.

Let us never forget its true meaning.



And my boys, sixty years later, sitting on the ridge of the World War II Memorial in DC honoring the soldiers who saw battle in the Pacific Theater:



if you're interested in dusting off something from the archives.

I am not opening a new linky this week

because I really would like the links to stay here all in one spot.

This way, readers can conveniently scroll down there

and click to the inspiring posts of blogger friends who've joined in!

Please enjoy their stories.

To bloggers who are generously linking posts~

I am most honored and grateful that you are joining the hop.

I only ask that you grab the Memoir Monday button

for your sidebar or your post.

Or that you mention my blog in your post



Have a lovely day, friends and thank you for visiting!

This contribution is available at <http://campfiresandcleats.blogspot.com/2013/05/memoir-monday-always-hope-soldier-in.html>

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Our Imperfect Family Rosary [at 8 Kids And A Business]

[Also posted at Catholic Insight, catholicinsight.com](#)



When I was growing up, my immature self believed that the family rosary was something that had to be endured. Through no fault of my parents, the nightly ritual was anything but idyllic. My siblings and I were called into our parents' bedroom where we knelt facing the crucifix. My older brother and I would sneak jabs and pokes at each other and then my mother would scold and separate us. I would often rush through the responses hoping that would speed things up but of course that never worked. My parents would add the Litany of the Saints and other intercessory prayers that made prayer time feel like an eternity to a young child. As I got older, I would make the excuse that I had too much homework or had to study for a test and so I couldn't take time out to pray.

Before we had children, my husband and I would occasionally pray the rosary together. It wasn't part of our routine but instead was an afterthought if we were not too tired. We didn't pray together very often.

When our oldest children got to the age where they could repeat a Hail Mary, we attempted to start a very modified family rosary but the lovely, serene vision I pictured in my mind was different from the reality around me. The kids were either too tired or too distracted. My husband I were always tired. Some evenings, prayer would dissolve into frustrated scolding and crying. Other evenings we almost reached that blissful state that artists capture on canvas.

Up until nine years ago, our family rosary was sporadic, but then something changed. I'm not sure what happened and I can't pinpoint the exact time when family prayer became a priority, but by God's grace, my husband and I realized that we had to make a better effort to pray in our home. The challenge at the time was tailoring the rosary prayers to fit all our children; everyone from a toddler, a preschooler, young children as well as junior and high school students.

We are less strict than my parents were and the atmosphere is more relaxed than when I was growing up. We sit in the living room instead of kneeling and keep our prayers to a reasonable length of time. In the beginning we started with one decade and a few add-ons such as the Guardian Angel prayer and the Prayer to St. Michael the Archangel. Over time, we added more decades and included a prayer to St. Joseph and to the Holy Spirit. At one time, my husband read excerpts from the book, *Catholicism for Dummies* (Fr. John Trigilio and Fr. Kenneth Brighenti, Wiley Publishing Inc.). He's also read to us about the lives of different saints. Our prayer time has evolved to three decades of the rosary alternating between the first, second and third mysteries one week and the third, fourth and fifth mysteries the next. We include the Angelus along with other prayers incorporated over the years. During special times in the liturgical calendar, such as in June which is the month devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we pray the designated Litany. We all have our favourite saints whom we invoke during our personalized litany and every once in a while someone will throw in an obscure saint just to impress the rest of us.

Why only three decades? There are many beautiful prayers and litanies in our Catholic faith and we want our children to pray them too. On the other hand, we don't want any of the children complaining that prayers take too long; however, there are times when we pray the whole rosary and not include anything else.

Our prayer time is not perfect. Some evenings we forgo our gathering and tell the kids to pray on their own. Older children with part-time jobs or evening classes, and young adults with full-time jobs are not always home. Sometimes there's grouchiness, distraction, laughing, joking. There's the excuse of too much homework, rushing to meet friends, or not feeling well. We are a large family and our prayer life, like our family life, is authentically, blessedly, imperfectly human. This too is poverty since without God's grace we wouldn't even be able to attempt our family rosary.

In the book, *Grace in Every Season*, (Servant Publications, 1992) *Servant of God*, Catherine Doherty, writes a reflection for every day of the year. In her entry for December 30, Catherine writes a lovely story of Our Lady visiting her children. Mary carries a basket as she goes from home to home. In some homes, she leaves very sad with nothing added to her basket. In other places, especially the homes with lively families, she stays for a long time and when she leaves, her basket is bulging. At the end of the day, she returns to her Son and shows Him the contents of her basket – hearts. Beating, happy, Christ-centered hearts. The hearts of domestic churches. These are the hearts of families that pray together.



When our Blessed Mother comes to my home, I pray that she

finds a reason to stay for a very long time. I hope her basket is so heavy and overflowing that she has to drag it. When she shows the contents of her basket to Jesus, I pray they both laugh with joy because my family's hearts beat in unison with the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

The perfect rosary, like the perfect family, doesn't exist. Our Lord and our Blessed Mother delight in families who, in love and faith, persevere in gathering together to pray the beautiful prayers. What could be more perfect than that?

Deo Gratias

Original oil on canvas, 'Prayer' by Avril Bryand, Ireland.

This contribution is available at <http://8kidsandabusiness.wordpress.com/2013/05/21/our-imperfect-family-rosary/>

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Commentary on "My Virginity Mistake." [at Arleen Spenceley]

In a column Sunday on Salon.com, Jessica Ciencin Henriquez - a fabulous writer, as far as I can tell - called her virginity at marriage a mistake. Wedding night sex was not what the church (nor the purity ring she wore) promised it would be.

Neither was her marriage.

Six months into it, Jessica wrote, "the idea of separating seemed more appealing than feigning headaches for the rest of my life." She saved sex for marriage, "hoping it would ensure a successful marriage. Instead," she wrote, "it led to my divorce."

But did it?

I agree with what Jessica implies: the church camp where people preached premarital abstinence at her probably can be blamed in part for the sour start of what would be a short-term marriage.

But I disagree with what else she implies: That saving sex for marriage is a problem.

Excerpts of Jessica's essay follow

in italics

, followed by my commentary:

But that ring! Silver and engraved with entwined hearts – everyone I knew was wearing one and I'd finally been given the opportunity to get my hands on it. And it wasn't just the ring. This was a movement with T-shirts and hats and the added bonus of superiority over kids in school who couldn't keep their clothes on, those sinners.

This points to an important, unfortunate truth. Churches long have promoted premarital abstinence by talking about everything except for sex: the perils of unwed parenthood, the stigma associated with sexually transmitted infections, and how much "better" you are for not having sex than the kids who do. This is fear mongering, a lot of shame-based "why not," and not a lot of genuine "why."

That

is a problem.

The morning of my wedding day, I threw up. Everyone assumed that I was nervous about having sex. I wasn't.

That everybody assumed Jessica barfed because she was anxious about having sex is indicative of a lie our culture tells us: that "the big moment" is what happens in bed on your wedding night, and not on the altar at your wedding.

That

is a problem.

When I look back on my wedding day, I remember a passionate kiss at the altar. But after rewatching video footage, I see it was little more than a peck on the corner of my mouth and a long hug. Two years of halting wandering hands as they grazed under blue jeans, and the second we have the permission from God, we hug. These are what red flags look like; my rearview mirror is lined with them.

When a church (or a school or a parent) says "wear this ring" and "sign this pledge" and then stops talking about relationships, girls and boys become women and men who basically only know not to have sex. Otherwise, their concepts of marriage and sex are shaped by their friends or media.

That

is a problem.

This was not lovemaking. There was no bond, no sanctity – this was not the amazing sex I was promised from the pulpit. This was disappointment three to four times a week.

To all people who preach "amazing sex" from pulpits: Please define amazing. The amazing part is not the sex. The amazing part is what's implied by the fact that you saved it - your patience, your participation in the destruction of self absorption, your willingness to communicate outside (and eventually in) the bedroom. When you don't define amazing, the assumption is "pleasurable sex will be intuitive and effortless, beginning with our wedding night" when, for most couples, that is so not true.

That

is a problem.

These problems plus premarital abstinence do not equal exemption from the consequences of these problems. They equal virgins at marriage who experience the consequences of these problems: not knowing the purpose of marriage or sex, more concern with preparedness for the wedding night than with preparedness for marriage, concepts of relationships and sex shaped by the media, and unrealistic expectations.

It is these consequences (among others, of course) that result in divorce, regardless of whether you've saved sex for marriage.

Click

[here](#)

to read Jessica's essay in full.

This contribution is available at <http://www.arleenspenceley.com/2013/05/commentary-on-my-virginity-mistake.html>
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St. Therese and the Little Straws: Surviving Aridity in Prayer [at Little Steps Along The Way]



Little Straws to Throw Upon the Embers
Image via Microsoft Clip Art May 2013

"In times of aridity when I am incapable of praying, of practicing virtue, I seek little opportunities, mere trifles, to give pleasure to Jesus; for instance a smile, a pleasant word when inclined to be silent and to show weariness. If I find no opportunities, I at least tell Him again and again that I love Him; that is not difficult and it keeps alive the fire in my heart. Even though this fire of love might seem to me extinct I would still throw little straws upon the embers and I am certain it would rekindle."

From "Thoughts of Saint Therese by Tan Publisher: XVI Letter to Her Sister Celine"

When we are going through the times that it feels impossible to pray, when it is tortuous to sit in quiet with ourselves and the Lord, it is a very un-holy and un-saintly feeling. Sometimes there is a feeling of being very far away from God, and what sorrow that causes when the soul longs to be closely embraced by the One she loves! And sometimes even the love seems to be absent, although we want it to be there. How miserable and alone we can feel and most especially during prayer times when we most want to feel love for God and from God.

St. Therese writes that at times she felt as though the "...fire of love might seem to me extinct..." What consolation to know that even the saints experienced this aridity, that we not alone, and that there is hope for us yet! St. Therese writes of throwing "little straws upon the embers" with the certainty of rekindling that fire in her heart, that love of Jesus that doesn't seem to be burning, but she has faith it is there. We may not believe that fire still exists smoldering within us, but it is a fire that was planted at our baptism.

Like St. Therese, we can "throw little straws upon the embers" when we don't feel the warmth emanating at the moment. Our little straws can be very simple, just as St. Therese's were simple. A smile when we are feeling depressed or saddened, a kind word to one we would rather snap out or ignore, short aspirations that speak of our love and trust in the Lord - "Jesus, I trust in You!" or whatever has spoken to our heart in the past or at the moment.

Most importantly, when we would like to run and hide from our prayer time, to watch a TV show instead of embrace the misery of time alone with God, or to write a blog post in order to avoid approaching what feels like the barren desert, we must push on and pick up that little straw to throw upon the fire, too. We give our time to Him in prayer even when it is miserable. Why? Because it is how we choose to love Him, it is how we choose to fan the flames that we can no longer feel. We trust Him; we love Him. And we are not alone in suffering through aridity in prayer, even saints have gone before us along this path that can be quite painful. We believe; we trust. The straw will ignite and the glow will warm our souls once more.

This contribution is available at <http://www.littlestepsalongtheway.com/2013/05/st-therese-and-little-straws-surviving.html>

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Bonhoeffer [at Veritatem facientes in caritate. Proclaiming the truth in love. Ephesians 4: 15.]

Born in 1906 and descendent from a brilliant and influential family, Dietrich Bonhoeffer chose to enter the service of the Lord as a Lutheran minister and theologian.

He studied in Germany and United States and was a pastor and rector of the seminary at Finkenwalde.

As a significant contributor to the Confessing Church during the Nazi regime and oppression of churches, he worked secretly with the plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler.

He was eventually captured and martyred in a Nazi prison.

He remains for people of all Christian denominations a shining example of radical discipleship and a teacher of vibrant faith.

One of his contributions to Christian spirituality was a unique perspective on intercessory prayer and the Lord's challenge to love one's enemies.

He writes, "In prayer we go to our enemies, to stand at their side.

We are with them, near them, for them before God.

We are doing for them...what they cannot do for themselves."

Jesus commands: “Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you.”

(Matthew 5:44)

This can be one of the hardest Christian demands, for our human instinct is to retaliate or at least to hold onto the hurt and respond in a passive aggressive way.

Jesus wants us to not only tolerate but actually

love

those who have hurt us, love meaning to lay down one’s life for the other as Jesus did for us.

We are expected to display a radically different kind of attitude than the world around us.

We are called to pray for those who persecute others.

The prayer aspect of Jesus command is a great act of charity wherein, as Bonhoeffer explains, we stand near to our enemy, or anyone else we may be praying for, and bring them closer to God who will lead and bless them.

What is more, we stand in for what the person cannot do for themselves – either because of weakness of faith, hardness of heart, blindness of spirit, stubbornness of will – and we bring the person in touch with the Lord.

It is as if we had one hand holding on to the outstretched hand of Jesus and the other hand holding onto the person for whom we are praying, and we introduced the person in need to Jesus, with the excitement of sharing the treasure of our friend and savior Jesus with another.

Though they may not even know we are praying for them, we are at their side and they are close to God who loves them.

In our moments of woundedness and suffering at the hands of others, we cannot change their behavior.

We CAN be responsible for our own behavior and not sink to lashing out or seeking vengeance.

We CAN be loving and prayerful.

We CAN be open to reconciliation and stand next to our enemies in prayer in order to bring them before God.

In our world today there are enemies of truth, enemies of freedom, enemies of the Church – as well as the people in our individual lives who make life tough to handle.

Stand with them every day in prayer and humbly ask God to soften their hearts and bring peace to their inner turmoil.

Be near to them and make up for what they cannot do for themselves.

Perhaps you will find peace and conversion for them and for you.

Perhaps you may save their soul.

Bonhoeffer's unique twist on intercession is meaningful to Christians and all people of good will.

It is only the tip of a spiritual iceberg awaiting anyone who wishes to read Bonhoeffer's works.

Trusting in the reward of his martyrdom, may he pray for us to be radical disciples as he was in his time.

This contribution is available at <http://proclaimthetruthinlove.blogspot.com/2013/06/bonhoeffer.html>
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7QT (Vol. 42): OMG is not OK [at Working to be Worthy]

-1-

Last weekend, I watched

Parks and Recreation

for the first time. It was funny with likable characters. It was also extremely profane. The few expletives were bleeped out, but it seemed that God's name was used in vain roughly every minute. This made me uncomfortable... because I was enjoying the show and trying to just ignore the blasphemy.

-2-

I hear God's name profaned a lot, of course. "Everyone" talks that way. It's on the radio, in books, in movies, even in conversations at church. Societal acceptance of sin doesn't make it less sinful, though. After

Parks and Recreation

, I asked my husband what he thought about us consuming media that treats blasphemy like a non-issue. The next day he came to the same conclusion I had: we cannot be lukewarm about this.



-3-

My husband noted that he'd always considered four-letter words worse than blasphemy (even while having no problem with

[most expletives](#)

) growing up, because that's how society reacts. Yet, the Ten Commandments say nothing about "bad words" while explicitly forbidding taking God's name in vain.

-4-

This is hard, especially for him. He's an aspiring screenwriter, has frequently watched movies to socialize, and owns a lot of movies. After sorting through our movies last night, he lost almost 50 (to my seven) and has 16 (to my one) that he needs to re-watch to determine suitability. We're losing at least half of our movie collection. We're losing most of

Psych

, too. We own seasons 1-5 on DVD, so I plan to re-watch those and keep track of what (if any) episodes are good.

Psych

is my favorite TV show, but between blasphemy and advocating for sex outside of marriage, I'm not sure there will be much to keep.

-5-

You might be surprised at some of the movies that didn't make the cut.

The Incredibles. Iron Giant. Matilda.

Even

Babe

, which is rated G. Using God's name in vain is so pervasive and accepted, no one gives a second thought to including it in family movies. Guarding against sin is something we have to do for ourselves. In the near future, we'll check our music and books, too. I think this will be easier, since I read mostly fantasy and Christian romance and he reads mostly non-fiction.

-6-

We have kept a few with blasphemy. Documentaries, those telling true stories (e.g.,

Good Night and Good Luck

) or describing aspects of our society (e.g.,

Requiem for a Dream

) are not using blasphemy as entertainment; they are depicting what actually happened. Even within this genre, we're only keeping the ones that we believe have an important message. Maybe we're just rationalizing sin by allowing even these in our home, but at this point, we think we are making the right decision.

-7-

We're expecting a fair amount of backlash. "You're over-reacting. This is pointless." They'll argue that we can't shield ourselves from everything and it's not like hearing it is the same as saying it. Laughing at racist jokes isn't the same as saying them, either, but it is wrong to give the appearance of supporting sin. And hearing it enough causes us to become complacent. We cannot turn a blind eye to that which offends God.

This contribution is available at <http://workingtobeworthy.blogspot.com/2013/05/omg-is-not-ok.html>
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Beauty [at Lord, Make Me a Saint]



I've been thinking a lot about beauty lately.

When I think of true beauty, I immediately think of Mother Theresa.

(technically, her name is now, Blessed Theresa of Calcutta)

Now, in the eyes of the world, she is not the definition of beauty.

But I believe her spirit shines through,

even today, many years after her death.

I came across this article this past weekend

I love my daughters and want them to become confident women,

confident in their abilities and gifts that each one has.

I want them to have a strong faith that they never let go of.

But

when I'm praying,

I've never prayed for them to be "Beautiful".

I have prayed for them to be loving, kind and generous.

I know someone in my life that is beautiful on the outside,
but on the inside, her personality and just the way she is,
well, it makes her actually hard for me to call her "beautiful".



I want my girls to know that models and movie stars are just regular people underneath
as these pictures clearly show:

and

That last link, I spent some time at looking at celebrities and
all they have gone through to live up to who we want them to be.

If we do not show our children the truth,

they will grow up having unrealistic goals of how they should be.

I know someone who has a teen that is struggling with an eating disorder.

This is painful for the whole family to go through.

It starts way back when our children are small

and told not to eat something, or when they see

us not eating, or choosing to not have dessert,

because it "will make us fat". We may think it's harmless,

but they are watching us, like hawks.

They are watching the magazines,

TV shows, movies, singers

and anything that the world loves.



If we don't
teach our
children to
follow
Christ,
the world
will teach
them not to.

If we love ourselves, no matter what we look like
and do not focus so much on looks,
but instead on virtues and morals,
then they will grow into *beautiful* adults.



"So God created mankind in His own image..."

Genesis 1:27



I've never done "dessert" much.

Mostly, because as a type 1 diabetic,

it's just more carbs and I eat my carbs at my meals.

But

I'm trying to change that a little and

make "dessert" a few times over a 2 week period.

(like 2 or 3)

I try ~~hard~~ to not put myself down about my looks

It's an inner struggle, but I do not want them to have those feelings.

I want them to see a confident woman in their mother.

I want them to see that the exercising and healthy choices

I make are just that,

healthy choices.

Aging is **beauty**.

What is inside can make the outside even more **beautiful** .

This contribution is available at <http://makemeasaint.blogspot.com/2013/05/beauty.html>
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Reflections on the Rosary - Part II (The Luminous Mysteries) [at Veritas Lux Mea]

The Rosary traditionally has consisted of three sets of Mysteries – the Joyful, the Sorrowful, and the Glorious Mysteries.

The Luminous Mysteries, or the Mysteries of Light, were first suggested by Blessed Pope John Paul II in his encyclical “[Rosarium Virginis Mariae](#)”, and were heartily taken up by the majority of Catholics. One reason for the Holy Father’s suggestion was that it was fitting to include meditations on the ministry of Christ, given that the traditional Rosary jumped from His Infancy to His Passion...and there is so much that can be gleaned from meditating on the ministry of Our Blessed Lord.

It was no mistake that the Pope suggested calling these the “Mysteries of Light” because they reveal the Lord Jesus Christ (who is the Light) and His Kingdom in a special way.

The First Luminous Mystery – the Baptism of Our Lord



In His Baptism, the Lord Jesus teaches us total resignation to the will of God. When Jesus came to be baptised, John the Baptist wanted to prevent it. John’s message was one of penance (or repentance) i.e. turning away from sin and self; and turning towards God. We know that Mary and Elisabeth were kinswomen (Lk 1:36); so it is very likely that Jesus and John the Baptist knew each other. This means that John would have known what kind of person Jesus was; which makes sense of his response to Jesus’ request for baptism: “I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?” (Matt 3:14). John’s message was about turning from sin, and he knew Jesus well enough to know that he, a sinner, had need to be baptised by the One whom he had never seen given to sin.

But Jesus’ response to John was “Suffer it to be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness” (Matt 3:15). This is an interesting response in light of the fact that John’s

message was about righteousness – and here is Jesus, the living example of true righteousness, which is total abandonment to doing the will of His Heavenly Father. The Father Himself attests to this when, after Jesus’ baptism, He declares “This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”.

As we meditate upon this first Mystery, we ask Our Lady to pray for us so that we can be Christ-like in being totally committed to doing the will of God. And when we imitate Him in this way, we are assured of God’s promise that He will be well-pleased with us, those whom He makes His beloved sons and daughters through the waters of baptism. Jesus tells us that when we do what God desires, His words to us will be:

“Well done, good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of your Lord” (Matt 25:23)

The Second Luminous Mystery – Our Lord turns water into wine



Many theologians regard the Lord’s Baptism as the start of His public ministry – and it is, to a degree. His Baptism was His commissioning by His Heavenly Father. But still His public ministry hadn’t yet begun, because He first had to undergo the forty day Temptation in the Wilderness.

So, what was the starting point of Jesus’ public ministry then? It was the performance of His first miracle at the wedding in Cana of Galilee – when He turned water into wine. It is no mistake that this miracle was performed at the request of His Blessed Mother. God, in His Divine Wisdom, saw it fit that the Lord Jesus would begin His public ministry with the commissioning of His Heavenly Father **and** the request of His Blessed Mother.

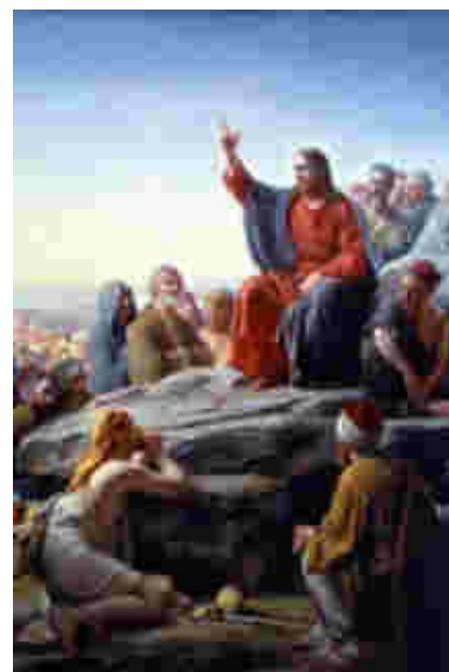
The narrative of the Lord turning water into wine (Jn 2:1-11) is an instructive one, because it shows us the nature of Mary’s role in the life of the Christian. Firstly, she sees the needs of her children, the children that God has given to her (Jn 19:27), and intercedes on their behalf. Secondly, she always points us to Jesus and tells us to “do whatever He says” (Jn 2:5). And thirdly, she reveals the glory of her Son so that people might believe in Him. Whilst it is true that Jesus performed this first sign to reveal His own glory (Jn 2:11), we must remember that He performed it at the request of His Blessed Mother. She knew that by this request, her relationship with her Son would be changed. Yet she requested it anyway – for the sake of others, and so that

Jesus' glory could be revealed.

As Mary points us to Jesus and tells us to follow Him, she does so by the example of her own willingness to say "Yes" to God in her Fiat. She is also our example in glorifying God, when we echo her words "My soul magnifies the Lord" (Lk 1:46).

As we imitate Our Lady, we can be assured that we, like her, will be conformed into the image of her Divine Son. Jesus' promises to change us, just as He changed water into wine.

The Third Luminous Mystery – the Proclamation of the Kingdom



After performing His first miracle, Jesus went out and started proclaiming the Gospel. His message was a call to repentance for the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand (Matt 4:17; Mk 1:14-15).

As already mentioned in the First Luminous Mystery, repentance is turning away from sin and self; and turning towards God. But Jesus doesn't just call us to repentance; He also gives us the means that we need to accomplish it. We cannot approach God in our own strength, for in our own strength we often stumble and fall. Rather, Christ calls us to embrace Him and His free gift of grace so that we might have our sins forgiven and be reconciled with our Heavenly Father.

It has often been said that Jesus promised the Kingdom but gave us the Church. But the truth is that the Church is the sacrament of the Kingdom: But what does the Church have to do with repentance and grace? It was to the Church that the Lord Jesus Christ gave the power to forgive sins (Jn 20:23; Matt 18:18). And it is through the Church that the Lord pours out His grace – specifically by the means of the Seven Sacraments.

As we meditate upon this Mystery, may we hear the voice of the Lord Jesus in the Holy Catholic Church calling us to a life of continual conversion and growth in holiness – because when we hear

the Church, we hear Jesus (Lk 10:16). And as we listen to the Church, and make ourselves available to the Sacraments, we will grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[For another reflection on the Third Luminous Mystery, click [here](#).]

The Fourth Luminous Mystery – the Transfiguration



The episodes in Christ's life that we meditate upon in the Luminous Mysteries are those where Christ revealed His glory. In this Fourth Luminous Mystery, we meditate upon that very visible display when His face shone like the sun and His clothes became dazzling white (Matt 17:2). As His three closest disciples gazed upon His unveiled glory, He was accompanied by the two great Old Testament Saints, Moses and Elijah. To the Jewish people, these men were the “icons” of the entire Old Testament Scriptures – Moses, the Law; and Elijah, the Prophets.

Peter, not knowing what to say, made the suggestion that three tents (or tabernacles) be erected – one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah (Mk 9:5-6). At this point, a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from heaven proclaimed “This is my Beloved Son; listen to Him!” (Mk 9:7). The disciples became so afraid that they fell to the ground; but Jesus came to them and touched them saying, “get up and do not be afraid”. When they looked up, they saw that Moses and Elijah had disappeared, and Jesus was standing alone before them.

One interpretation that the Church has given this passage is that the “disappearance” of Moses and Elijah was God's way of saying that the Law and the Prophets are fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ (e.g. Lk 24:27). There was no need to make tabernacles for Moses and Elijah, because all that they had spoken about was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ, when He made His tabernacle amongst men (see Jn 1:14 – where the word translated as “dwelt” or “lived” is in fact means “to tent or tabernacle”).

It is interesting that the words spoken by the Father to the disciples were “Listen to Him!”; because just a few days prior, Jesus had prophesied His Passion and they would not believe Him (see Matt 16:21-22; Mk 8:31-32). The disciples overheard Moses and Elijah speaking to the Lord about His Passion (Lk 9:31). Now, the Father is basically saying to them: “You are prepared to listen to Moses and Elijah. There is one greater than Moses and Elijah here. Listen to Him!”

In the Second Luminous Mystery, Jesus revealed His glory through His first miracle, and we hear His Mother's words "Do whatever He says". Now, Jesus reveals His physical glory, and we hear His Father's words "Listen to Him!"

If we listen to Jesus and do whatever He says, we can be sure that we will meet with persecution. After all, if the world persecuted Him, we can expect that it will persecute us. Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus about His Passion. Listening to Jesus means that we will somehow be called to share in His Passion, for He tells us that if we want to be His disciples, we must deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him (Matt 16:24). But that is not where the story ends. After His Passion, Jesus rose again in glory – and this is His promise to us – that if we suffer with Him, we will be glorified with Him (Rom 8:17).

The Fifth Luminous Mystery – the Institution of the Eucharist



In this Mystery, Christ reveals to us how He will remain with His Church until the end of the ages (Matt 28:20). Whilst the Fourth Luminous Mystery is about Christ unveiling His glory, this Fifth Mystery is about Christ continuing to dwell amongst His people with His glory veiled under the appearance of bread and wine.

The Luminous Mysteries really come to a climax in the Fifth Luminous Mystery, because the Eucharist is the source and summit of our faith. Ultimately, this Mystery is about faith.

If we believe that Jesus turned water into wine, as we have already seen in the Second Luminous Mystery, then it shouldn't be hard for us to believe that He can turn wine into His own Blood.

If it is by faith that we believe that the world was framed by the word of God (Heb 11:3), then it is by faith that we believe the words of Institution change the substance of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. If God says "Let there be light", then there is light. In the same way, if God says "This is my Body" – then the bread that He holds becomes, by the word of God, His very Body.

As we meditate upon this Mystery, we are called to increase our faith in our Eucharistic Lord, who gives His flesh for the life of the world (Jn 6:51). And for all those who worthily share in the communion of the Lord's Body and Blood, He assures that they will have eternal life (Jn 6:54) – because He is Life.

Obtaining the Promises through Jesus Christ

The Luminous Mysteries are about revelation – specifically the revelation of the glory of the Lord Jesus. That is why these Mysteries are called “Luminous” – because they are about giving light. Jesus said “I am the Light of the world” (Jn 8:12); but He also said that the Church is the light of the world (Matt 5:14). This is because His glory is not something that He keeps to Himself. His desire is to share His glory with His Bride and Body, the Church.

As we meditate upon these Luminous Mysteries, may we grow in our desire to share in Christ's glory, mindful of the promise that we too will shine as bright as the Son (Matt 13:43).

POST-SCRIPT:

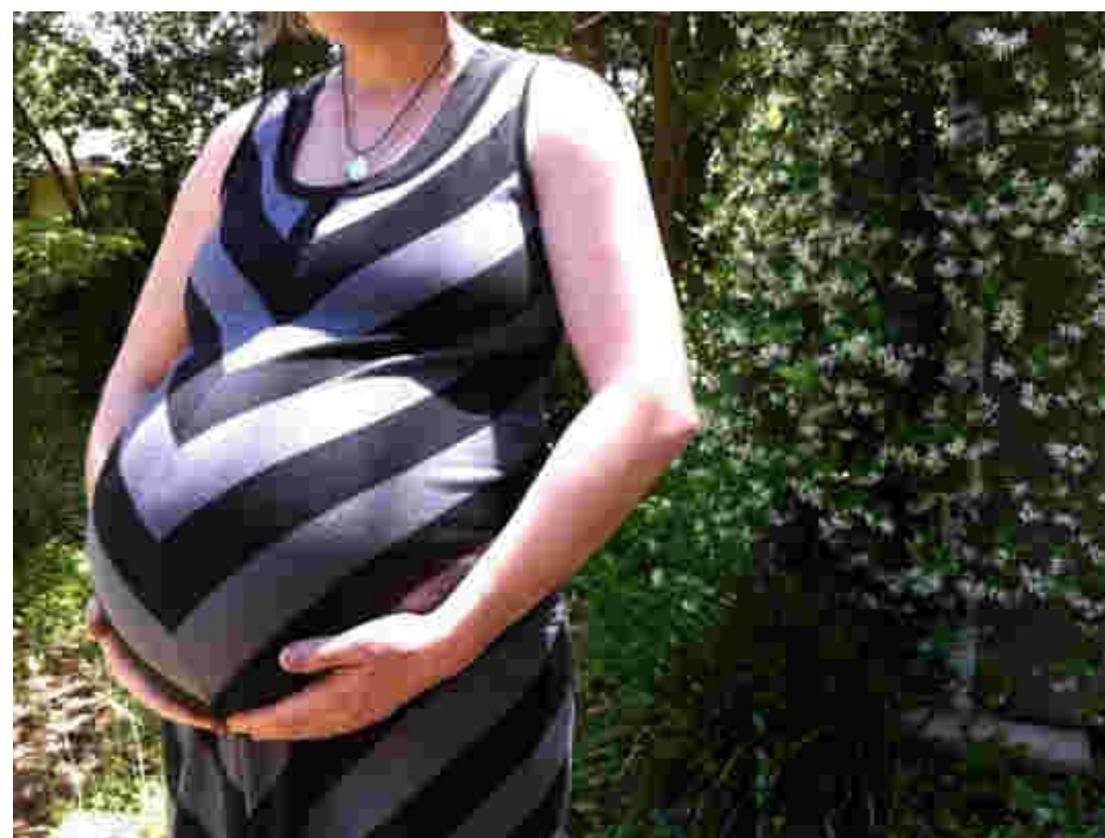
For related posts on this topic, click the links below: [Reflections on the Rosary - Introduction](#)
[Reflections on the Rosary - Part III \(The Sorrowful Mysteries\)](#)

Reflections on the Rosary – Part IV (Coming Soon)

This contribution is available at <http://justingridveritasluxmea.blogspot.com.au/2013/05/reflections-on-rosary-part-ii-luminous.html>
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A Picture of the Incarnation on My Kitchen Floor [at Carrots for Michaelmas]



During this pregnancy (my third) my mood swings have been unreal. One minute everything is rosy and the next I find myself sobbing for no reason. And if I wait too long to eat or don't get enough sleep, I am sure to be an insane hysterical basket case.

The worst meltdown occurred for really no reason at all at about halfway through the pregnancy. We put the kids to bed, then Daniel ran some errands while I made treats for a friend's baby shower. When he left, I was in my right mind. When he returned, he found me sobbing in the kitchen as I iced carrot cake cupcakes with cream cheese icing, my mascara running down my face.

"What's the matter?!" he asked as he walked over to put his arm around me.

"Nothing, really!" I sobbed. *"Except everything! I'm always tired and I'm always throwing up and and it's so hard! I love my baby, but I feel so physically miserable and I can't stop crying and I don't know why!"*

Being the wise man that he is, he knew I was in no state to hear reason and nothing he could say would stop the crazy that was spewing from my mouth. So he just listened while I exploded with pregnant hysteria until I wore myself out and I sat down on the kitchen floor.

He took a deep breath, sat down with me, put his arms around me, and we leaned against the dishwasher while I sobbed my little pregnant heart out for several minutes. **As the meltdown fizzled out and I stopped crying, I had an epiphany: my husband was an image of Christ right here on our hardwood floor.** Instead of talking me down or telling me I was being ridiculous, he got down into the middle of my pregnant crazy meltdown, sat there, and shared it with me.

His love was a reminder that God's great love prompted him to actually come down to us, share our humanity, and suffer in our stead. I know I am more than fortunate to be married to a man who lives out that love each day of our marriage.

This contribution is available at <http://carrotsformichaelmas.com/2013/05/13/a-picture-of-the-incarnation-on-my-kitchen-floor/>

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Catholic Inspired ~ Arts, Crafts, and Activities! [at Catholic Inspired ~ Arts, Crafts, and Activities!]

The feasts of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary often fall on the first Friday and Saturdays in June and this year is no different. So I wanted to share a few files that I pulled out of a dusty old folder which I had saved on my old computer. (Don't worry I "dusted" them off! ;-)



A devotion to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary was a BIG DEAL years ago. Now (at least in my area) these special days often seem to be over looked and even forgotten. I've heard of schools that take time off from teaching to have the kids go to Mass every First Friday. **That's sooo awesome!!** It's wonderful to see some schools do that! But if your kids are not lucky enough to go to a school that holds such a monumental sense of importance for First Friday or if you homeschool like me you need to be sure your kids understand the importance of going to Mass on First Friday, as well as, First Saturday.

Here are the promises made by Jesus and Mary:

About the Sacred Heart of Jesus

{9 First Fridays}

The authentic texts as found in the writings of St. Margaret Mary: (Jesus said)

1. I will give them all the graces necessary for their state of life.
2. I will give peace in their families.
3. I will console them in all their troubles.
4. I will be their refuge in life and especially in death.
5. I will abundantly bless all their undertakings.

6. Sinners shall find in my Heart the source and infinite ocean of mercy.
7. Tepid souls shall become fervent.
8. Fervent souls shall rise speedily to great perfection.
9. I will bless those places wherein the image of My Sacred Heart shall be exposed and venerated.
10. I will give to priests the power to touch the most hardened hearts.
11. Persons who propagate this devotion shall have their names eternally written in my Heart.
12. In the excess of the mercy of my Heart, I promise you that my all powerful love will grant to all those who will receive Communion on the First Fridays, for nine consecutive months, the grace of final repentance: they will not die in my displeasure, nor without receiving the sacraments; and my Heart will be their secure refuge in that last hour.

About the Immaculate Heart of Mary

{ 5 First Saturdays }

Our Lady of Fatima asked that, in reparation for sins committed against her Immaculate Heart, on the first Saturday of five consecutive months the Catholic:

1. Go to Confession (within 8 days before or after the first Saturday)
2. Receive Holy Communion
3. Recite five decades of the Rosary
4. Keep me company for fifteen minutes while meditating on the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary

She promised that, whoever would ever does this, would be given at the hour of his death, the graces necessary for salvation.

Isn't that AWESOME!!!! Wow! What a gift Jesus and Mary have offered us! Most people would do these things if it meant they would win the lotto and these promises are far better than winning money! So we need to teach a devotion of the Sacred Heart and the Immaculate Heart to our children!

But please explain to the kids that finishing the requirements that Jesus and Mary asked does not mean we can do whatever we want and still get into heaven. A person must still try very hard to be good. These promises are Jesus and Mary's extra help to those who complete the tasks. They are not a heavenly assurance.

An Activity to Get Kids Interested and Motivated

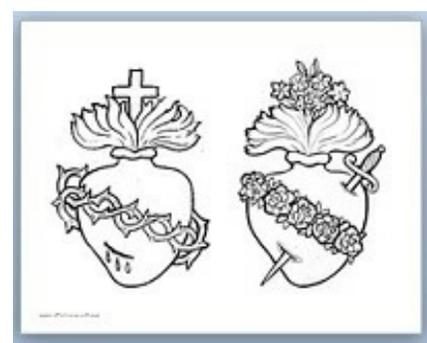
I know that getting kids motivated can be a little difficult. So I made a few things to help you.

First: Here is a printable of the promises: Read these promises to the kids and explain what they mean.



Second: Here are a few printables for the kids. With these printables the kids can create a chart to keep track of the the First Fridays and First Saturdays which they have finished the requirements. Choose the one(s) you like best for your situation:

You may also like to a simple coloring page



What to do:

After printing off the above pages (one set for each child) have the kids color the Sacred and Immaculate Hearts on the chart(s). They can also decorate them with whatever they want (stickers, glitter, or other fun items) Then as the months pass they can mark to months that they were successful at completing the requirements.



Or you can make these printables into a craft if you wish! Have the kids color a simple paper plate with "rays of light". Then color the hearts on the chart. Now cut out the hearts and glue them to the plate.



Then glue on the months into the rays around the hearts. As they finish the months the kids can mark, high-light, or decorate the ones that they have completed.



These charts and crafts will help them to remember to go to Mass and pray with a prepared heart and holy spirit. Hang them in a prominent spot so they can serve as a good reminder as the months pass.

After they have completed the requirements:

After they have finished the requirements for 5 First Saturdays and/or the 9 First Fridays then you may award them a certificate of completion:



You can have a big ceremony if you like!

But be sure invite Jesus and Mary to the party!!

God Bless!

~Jennifer



This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicinspired.com/2013/05/devotion-to-sacred-and-immaculate.html>
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Is the Saint engaging in eisegesis? [at Washed, Sanctified and Justified...]

Lutero said:

One can ask if there is any legitimacy to his method, or if the saint is simply engaging in eisegesis—that is, reading his theology into the text.

I am of the opinion that it is impossible for a Catholic to commit eisegesis. And it is impossible for a non-Catholic not to.

You don't believe me? Read this:

113 2. Read the Scripture within "the living Tradition of the whole Church". According to a saying of the Fathers, Sacred Scripture is written principally in the Church's heart rather than in documents and records, for the Church carries in her Tradition the living memorial of God's Word, and it is the Holy Spirit who gives her the spiritual interpretation of the Scripture ("... according to the spiritual meaning which the Spirit grants to the Church").

Unless we read the Scriptures according to the Traditions of the Catholic Church, we won't understand the Scriptures and will be in danger of preaching false doctrine.

Everyone seems to forget that Jesus Christ established Tradition. And the Apostles wrote the New Testament based upon those Traditions.

I know one thing. When I came back to the Church, I began by following many of the wonderful Converts to our faith from Protestantism. And they sometimes mentioned this idea of "reading into Scripture" as though it were a bad thing. So, I tried to become a blank slate and look to discover Catholicism in the Scriptures.

But I began to notice that the Saints did not use this methodology. St. Scott Hahn ;) led me to that conclusion when reading the Scripture, he said, "look at the assumptions". And the assumptions were all Catholic.

At that point, the door to understanding Scripture was opened wide.

And it is impossible for non-Catholics not to read their own beliefs into Scripture. Take, for instance, Sola Scriptura. Where is it in Scripture? It isn't there. But Protestants put it there.

That's just one example.

Sincerely,

De Maria

This contribution is available at <http://washedsanctifiedandjustified.blogspot.com/2013/05/is-saint-engaging-in-eisegeisis.html>
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Summary of [at Marian Apostolate of the Laity]



“St. Peter’s Dome” by Wolfgang Stuck

By Jayson M. Brunelle, M.Ed., CAGS

Article completed on May 19th, 2013; Pentecost Sunday

October 11, 2012, marks the 50th anniversary of the opening session of the Second Vatican Council. Blessed Pope John XXIII, born Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, was elected to the papacy in October of 1958, at the age of 77. Much to everyone’s surprise, Pope John, less than three months into what was expected by many to be a “transitional” and therefore uneventful papacy, shocked both the Curia and the entire Catholic world with his announcement of a solemn convocation of all the world’s bishops, to be held in the grand halls of St. Peter’s Basilica. Thus, the Second Vatican Council was conceived, a Council whose goal, mission and purpose was, essentially, to recover and reconcile the spirit of the earliest Christian communities and the writings of the early Church Fathers with the expectations, situations and genuine needs of contemporary, post-industrial, twentieth-century man. This purpose and/or mission of the Council was clearly in keeping with how the Church had always viewed itself, as “ever ancient, and ever new” (St. Augustine).

In addition to this two-fold goal of Vatican II, this Council was to be a truly “Ecumenical” Council, as the Church Fathers had come to recognize the radical importance of setting a new, positive example of genuine fraternal charity in the form of ecumenical outreach and dialogue by inviting Christians of different denominations, not in communion with Rome, as well as members of various other ancient faith traditions, to be present at the Council as invited observers.

Of the 16 documents that emerged from the Council, four documents, in particular, stand out among

the rest as “Constitutions,” which, essentially, are documents of the highest caliber, demanding full, unconditional assent of both intellect and will by all the faithful, without exception. The four Constitutions here spoken of are *Dei Verbum*, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Gaudium et Spes* and *Lumen Gentium*. This last mentioned document, *Lumen Gentium*, was solemnly promulgated on November 21, 1964, by Pope Paul VI, who continued, and ultimately brought to conclusion, the Ecumenical Council that his predecessor had begun.

This Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium*, has played a most significant role in defining the nature, mission and identity of the Catholic Church in contemporary times, and has had a monumental impact on theology in general, ecclesiology in particular, and additionally in the thought, preaching and writings of the four post-conciliar popes, Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul I, Blessed Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, all of whom were present at, and participated in the Council.

The essay that follows highlights some of the more salient themes that characterize the aforementioned document. For the sake of precision and accuracy, a summary of and occasional brief commentary on each of the eight chapters that comprise the document shall be presented in chronological order. Thus, the sections/chapters to be covered shall include (1) The Mystery of the Church; (2) On the People of God; (3) On the Hierarchical Structure of the Church and in Particular on the Episcopate; (4) The Laity; (5) The Universal Call to Holiness in the Church; (6) Religious; (7) The Eschatological Nature of the Pilgrim Church and its Union with the Church in Heaven; (8) The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God in the Mystery of Christ and the Church.

Introduction

The “Introduction” contains, as it were, the thesis of the document, as the Council Fathers explain that since “Christ is the Light of nations,” (which is the English translation of the Latin title, *Lumen Gentium*) the “sacred synod...eagerly desires...to bring the light of Christ to all men” (LG, 1). Therefore, “since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of... union with God and of the unity of the whole human race, it desires...to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission” (LG, 1). This, then, constitutes the purpose and nature of the document.

Chapter One

“The Mystery of the Church”

Chapter One, entitled, “The Mystery of the Church,” provides a summary of the very nature of the Church as both the visible and invisible reality through which all persons are called to participate in the Trinitarian, divine life of God through, with and in Christ Jesus. “Fallen in Adam, God the Father did not leave men to themselves, but ceaselessly offered helps to salvation, in view of Christ the Redeemer, ‘who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature’” (LG, 2). God “planned to assemble in the holy Church all those who would believe in Christ” (LG, 2). Thus, God’s plan was to reestablish all of creation in His Son, the Christ, through whom all

persons would be enabled to become adopted sons and daughters of the Father, brothers and sisters in Christ. This is accomplished chiefly through the Church's sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. Baptism grafts and unites the elect to Christ's Mystical Body, and enables them to participate in Christ's work of Redemption, perpetuated in the Sacred Liturgy. "As often as the sacrifice of the cross in which Christ our Passover was sacrificed (1 Cor 5:7) is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried on, and in the sacrament of the Eucharistic bread, the unity of all believers who form one body in Christ (cf. 1 Cor 10:17) is both expressed and brought about. All men are called to this union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, and toward whom our whole life strains" (LG, 3).

After Christ had accomplished his sublime work of redemption which, as stated above, is continued and renewed in an unbloody fashion each time the holy sacrifice of the Mass is celebrated, the Holy Spirit of God was sent on the day of Pentecost in order to continue and bring to fruition the Church's work of sanctification. "The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful, as in a temple (cf. 1 Cor 3:16). In them he prays on their behalf and bears witness to the fact that they are adopted sons" (LG, 4). Christ, in preaching the "good news" of the Gospel, established his kingdom on earth, which is the Church. Having endured his passion and death, the risen Christ sent his Spirit in accordance with his promise to the disciples, that they would be led into the fullness of the truth. "From this source the Church, equipped with the gifts of its Founder and faithfully guarding his precepts of charity, humility and self-sacrifice, receives the mission to proclaim and to spread among all peoples the kingdom of Christ and of God and to be on earth the initial budding forth of that kingdom" (LG, 5).

The nature of the kingdom of God, or the Church established by Christ, is conveyed and depicted by the Lord via the use of metaphors. For instance, "the Church is a sheepfold whose one and indispensable door is Christ (Jn 10:1-10). It is a flock of which God himself foretold he would be the shepherd (cf. Is 40:11; Ex 34:11), and whose sheep, although ruled by human shepherds, are nevertheless continuously led and nourished by Christ himself, the good shepherd and the prince of the shepherds (cf. Jn 10:11; 1 Pt 5:4), who gave his life for the sheep (cf. Jn 10:11-15)" (LG, 6). The Church is the Building of God, as Christ refers to himself as "the stone which the builders have rejected which has become the cornerstone" (Mt 21:42), and this edifice is built on the foundation of the apostles. Additionally, "the true vine is Christ who gives life and the power to bear abundant fruit to the branches, that is, to us..." (Jn 15:1-5).

While Christ uses a multiplicity of metaphors to convey the nature of the Church, as has been shown, *Lumen Gentium* points out the additional metaphors of the Church as "mother" (Gal 4:26), and the "spotless spouse of the spotless Lamb, whom Christ 'loved and for whom he delivered himself up that he might sanctify her' (Eph 5:26), whom he unites to himself by an unbreakable covenant, and whom, once purified, he willed to be cleansed and joined to himself, subject to him in love and fidelity (cf. Eph 5:24), and whom, finally, he filled with heavenly gifts for all eternity, in order that we may know the love of God and of Christ for us, a love which surpasses all knowledge" (cf. Eph 3:19) (LG, 6). While on earth, the Church "journeys in a foreign land" (cf. 2 Cor 5:6).

“By communicating his Spirit, Christ made his brothers...mystically the components of his own body....Through Baptism, we are formed in the likeness of Christ: ‘For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body’ (1 Cor 12:13). In this sacred rite a oneness with Christ’s death and resurrection is both symbolized and brought about: ‘For we were buried with him by means of Baptism into death,’ and if ‘we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we shall be so in the likeness of his resurrection also’” (Rm 6:4-5) (LG, 7). It is precisely in the partaking of the Eucharist that we are united with both Christ and with each other: “‘because the bread is one, we though many, are one body, all of us who partake of the one bread’” (1 Cor 10:17) (LG, 7). Thus, we are truly members of the one Mystical Body of Christ, with each individual having his own unique role, mission and charism. “From all this it follows that if one member endures anything, all the members co endure it, and if one member is honored, all the members together rejoice (cf. 1 Cor 12:26) (LG, 7).

Chapter one continues on to speak of the Holy Spirit as the principle of unification which binds Christ, the head, to his Mystical Body, the Church. Thus, the Spirit can be compared to the human soul, or the “life-principle” in man, which unites the diverse members and simultaneously acts as the animating principle.

The document proceeds to explain the intrinsic unity of (1) the earthly, hierarchical Church, “the community of faith, hope and charity, as an entity with visible delineation through which [Christ] communicates truth and grace to all” and (2) the invisible, Mystical Body of the Church that transcends both space and time. These two radically inter-connected realities “are not to be considered as two realities, nor are the visible assembly and the spiritual community, nor the earthly Church and the Church enriched with heavenly things; rather they form one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and human element” (LG, 8). The document uses the analogy of the Hypostasis in Christ, whereby Christ’s perfect humanity and his perfect divinity are truly, inseparably united in a hypostatic union in the one Divine Person of Christ. Thus, the Church, like Christ, is simultaneously human and divine, earthly and heavenly.

Chapter One concludes with the above articulated clarification, and summarizes the Church’s nature and essence thusly: “This is the one Church of Christ which in the Creed is professed as one, holy, catholic and apostolic, which our Savior, after his resurrection, commissioned Peter to shepherd (Jn 21:17), and him and the other apostles to extend and direct with authority (cf. Mt. 28:18), which he erected for all ages as ‘the pillar and mainstay of the truth’ (1 Tm 3:15). This Church constituted and organized in the world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the Successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him, although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure. These elements, as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling toward catholic unity” (LG, 8).

Chapter Two

“On the People of God”

Chapter Two of Lumen Gentium – “On the People of God” – begins with an explanation of the

communal nature of God's call to and work of holiness and salvation; specifically, how God chooses to sanctify and save us as a "people." We read that "God...does not make men holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or link between one another. Rather has it pleased him to bring men together as one people, a people who acknowledges him in truth and serves him in holiness" (LG, 9). Thus, God elected and brought together his chosen people, the Israelites, revealing both Himself and His will to them, and establishing covenant relationships with them. God's dealings with His chosen people, as recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures, or the Old Testament, were, however, a prelude, preparation and a figure of his ultimate self-revelation and New Covenant in Christ Jesus. This New Covenant, or New Testament, was and is established in the Blood of Christ, the price of our salvation. Thus, "for those who believe in Christ, who are reborn...through the word of the living God, not from the flesh but from water and the Holy Spirit, are finally established as 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people... who in times past were not a people, but are now the people of God'" (1 Pt 2:9-10) (LG, 9). Christ himself is the "head" of this "messianic" people, in whom the Holy Spirit dwells as in a temple, who are to abide by the new commandment to love as Christ loves. The end, or goal, is the kingdom of God, which Christ began on earth and which will be brought to perfection at the end of time, when Christ shall come again and return all of creation to the perfect glorification of the Father. Moreover, like the Israelites of old, who wandered in exile through the desert in search of their promised land, and were already called the Church of God; so too, the new Israel, "while in this present age goes in search of a future and abiding city, is called the Church of Christ" (LG, 9).

Christ, the High Priest of the new and eternal covenant, has established his people as "a kingdom and priests to God the Father" (cf. Rv 1:6; cf. 5:9-10). The document goes on to explain that "the baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, in order that through all those works which are those of the Christian man they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the power of him who has called them out of darkness into his marvelous light" (cf. 1 Pt 2:4-10) (LG, 10). Thus, the document makes clear the fact that as the Christian People of God, having been incorporated into the Mystical Body of Christ through Baptism, even the very least in rank amongst the laity have thereby been made participants and sharers in Christ's Priestly, Prophetic and Kingly office. And it is primarily through our participation in the Eucharistic Liturgy that we, the Priestly People, exercise our common, royal priesthood by offering ourselves through, with and in Christ to the perfect glorification of the Eternal Father as "living sacrifice[s], holy and pleasing to God" (cf. Rm 12:1) (LG, 10). While the document emphasizes the exalted Priestly status of all the Baptized, it does not neglect to distinguish between the different types of participation in the one Priesthood of Christ. While it is true that the ministerial priesthood of those who have received the sacrament of Orders is interrelated with the common, royal priesthood of all the Baptized, it is additionally true that these two types of participation differ in both essence and in degree. "The ministerial priest, by the sacred powers he enjoys, teaches and rules the priestly people; acting in the person of Christ, he makes present the Eucharistic sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people. But the faithful, in virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist. They likewise exercise that priesthood in receiving the sacraments, in prayer and thanksgiving, in the witness of a holy life, and by self-denial and active charity" (LG, 10). Elaborating on the role played by the

laity, the document goes on to state the following: “Taking part in the Eucharistic sacrifice, which is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life, they offer the divine victim to God, and offer themselves along with It. Thus both by reason of the offering and through Holy Communion all take part in this liturgical service, not indeed, all in the same way but each in that way which is proper to himself. Strengthened in Holy Communion by the Body of Christ, they then manifest in a concrete way that unity of the People of God which is suitably signified and wondrously brought about by this most august sacrament” (LG, 11). Surrounding and leading to the Holy Eucharistic Liturgy, the “source and summit” of all the Church’s activity and that heavenly banquet which truly unites heaven and earth, there exist each of the remaining sacraments of the Church, which collectively constitute the fullness of the means of sanctification and, ultimately, the divinization of man, who is called to become by grace what Christ is by nature.

Paragraph 12 of *Lumen Gentium* addresses the Prophetic role of the People of God. Speaking on the *Sensus fidelium*, which literally translated means, “sense of the faithful,” the document has this to say: “The holy People of God shares also in Christ’s prophetic office; it spreads abroad a living witness to him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise, the tribute of lips which give praise to his name (cf. Heb 13:15). The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One (cf. Jn 2:20, 27), cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole people’s supernatural discernment in matters of faith when ‘from the bishops down to the last of the lay faithful’ they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals. That discernment in matters of faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth. It is exercised under the guidance of the sacred teaching authority, in faithful and respectful obedience to which the People of God accepts that which is not just the word of men but truly the Word of God” (cf. Thes 2:13) (LG, 12). Unfortunately, this reality of the *Sensus fidelium* has, on not a few occasions, been mis-applied, misunderstood and misused by small factions of dissenters within the Church in an effort to effect changes in official Church teaching on fundamental issues of faith and morality which constitute the Sacred Deposit of Faith. Thus, it becomes essential to distinguish mere theological opinion, even if this latter is widely held, from those essential teachings of the faith that do, indeed, comprise the Sacred Deposit of Faith; truths which can never be “changed” or “altered” in any way due to the fact that they are not man-made but are, in fact, divinely revealed truths. The Magisterium has no authority to change or alter any of the truths of the faith; rather, its function as the official teaching body of the Church is to preserve, safeguard and articulate these truths which God Himself has revealed, He who can neither deceive nor be deceived.

In addition to the sacraments and the ministries within the Church by which God sanctifies His People, the Spirit additionally imparts certain special “charisms” “among the faithful of every rank” (LG, 12). The Church understands that the Spirit of God blows wherever the Spirit wills, and that “By these gifts he makes [the faithful] fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which contribute towards the renewal and building up of the Church” (LG, 12). Said charisms are to be submitted to the judgment and competence of the hierarchy, whose duty it is to “not...extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to that which is good” (cf. 1 Thes 5:12; 19-21) (LG, 12).

Paragraph 13 of the document addresses one of the single most misunderstood and controversial dogmas of the Church: “Outside the Church there is no salvation” (*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*). Throughout the Church’s tumultuous history, especially during periods marked by significant theological controversy and/or schism (such as the Protestant Reformation), the Church felt the need to reinforce this teaching in an even more forceful fashion. An unfortunate consequence of the apparent “exclusionary” and negative articulation of this truth has given rise to significant misunderstanding of precisely what was/is meant by this phrase. Before we examine what is stated in *Lumen Gentium*, we would do well to look at how the Catechism of the Catholic Church has reformulated this truth of the faith in a more “inclusive” and positive fashion: “How are we to understand this affirmation, often repeated by the Church Fathers? Reformulated positively, it means that all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is his Body” (CCC 846).

Based on the above reformulation as contained in the Catechism, we are in a better position to examine the issue from the perspective of the conciliar document, which sheds a great and necessary light on an essential tenet of the faith that could otherwise very easily be misunderstood. Paragraph 13 begins by underscoring the fundamental reality that “though there are many nations there is but one People of God, which takes its citizens from every race, making them citizens of a kingdom which is of a heavenly rather than of an earthly nature” (LG. 13). This passage is most important to keep in mind as we continue through the remainder of this section. Furthermore, the document re-affirms that “the Church, now sojourning on earth as an exile, is necessary for salvation. Christ, present to us in his body, which is the Church, is the one Mediator and the unique way of salvation. In explicit terms he himself affirmed the necessity of faith and Baptism (cf. Mk 16:16; Jn 3:5) and thereby affirmed also the necessity of the Church, for through Baptism as through a door men enter the Church. Whosoever, therefore, knowing that the Catholic Church was made necessary by Christ, would refuse to enter or to remain in it, could not be saved” (LG 14). From what has been stated, the Council is clear that it is precisely through membership in Christ’s Mystical Body that the “divinization” of human nature is made possible. Salvation simply cannot take place outside of Christ, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Thus, if any person of any faith tradition happens to receive, from God, the tremendous grace of salvation at the pivotal moment of death, it will necessarily have been through, with and in Christ and His Mystical Body, the Church, which cannot be separated from Christ, its head, regardless of the subjectively held theological opinions/beliefs of that individual throughout the course of his/her earthly existence.

It is at this point that the document begins to distinguish between the various “degrees” of membership in the Body of Christ. First, “they are fully incorporated in the society of the Church who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept her entire system and all the means of salvation given to her, and are united with her as part of her visible bodily structure and through her with Christ, who rules her through the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops” (LG, 14). It is, however, quite possible to be a member of this visible body without remaining in the “heart” of this body by not exercising that charity which each and every Christian is called to exercise. According to the document, such an individual “remains indeed in the bosom of the Church, but, as it were, only in a ‘bodily’ manner and not ‘in his heart’....If [such members] fail, moreover, to respond to...grace in

thought, word and deed, not only shall they not be saved but they will be the more severely judged” (LG, 14). Moreover, those seeking full unity with the Church and are in the process of being initiated into the Church are, for that reason, embraced fully by the Church, and are already considered to be united in a full communion.

Paragraph 15 of the document states the following: “The Church recognizes that in many ways she is linked with those who, being baptized, are honored with the name of Christian, though they do not profess the faith in its entirety or do not preserve unity of communion with the successor of Peter” (LG, 15). In this section, the document underscores the faith and zeal of Christians who accept the authority of Sacred Scripture as a norm for belief in the truths it contains, and adherence to the way of life that it presents. Additionally, the Sacred Synod points out that through a valid sacramental baptism, whereby water and the Trinitarian formula are used, such individuals are truly incorporated into the Mystical Body of Christ, and are thereby consecrated in Christ. In fact, the Church goes so far as to state that “in some real way they are joined with us in the Holy Spirit, for to them too He gives His gifts and graces whereby He is operative among them with His sanctifying power” (LG, 15).

Finally, the Church goes so far as to acknowledge a certain mysterious connectedness even with those who only acknowledge and worship the one true God, stating that “those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the people of God” (LG, 16). Of these, the Church recognizes first and foremost her Jewish brethren, for, “God does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues” (LG, 16), and therefore, this “Chosen People” of God, from whom the Redeemer of humanity entered into the realm of space and time, “remains most dear to God” (LG, 16). Additionally, the Church recognizes as members, to some greater or lesser extent, various other groups of individuals who, insofar as they adhere to what is true and, to the best of their ability, strive to live according to the dictates of their conscience, hold fast to the most fundamental and self-evident axiom of natural law, which is to “do good, and avoid evil,” and who are sincere in their quest for truth.

Due to the profound importance of this issue, it is the opinion of this author that the reader read for him or herself precisely what the Sacred Synod has to say in its own words: “But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst these there are the Mohammedans, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind. Nor is God far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, for it is He who gives to all men life and breath and all things, and as Saviour wills that all men be saved. Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life. Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel” (LG, 16).

Thus, in the estimation of this author, it would seem that, according to the most doctrinally

significant document that the Church has issued in modern times regarding its own nature, mission and identity, salvation is, indeed, available to every human person who, with true, authentic sincerity of heart, seeks the truth and strives to live a morally upright life in accord with the dictates of his or her conscience, even if, through no fault of their own, they have not come to an explicit knowledge of Christ and the Gospel. Additionally, it is the humble opinion of this author that the sheer profundity of the mystery of the Incarnation, whereby the Second Person of the Holy Trinity forever united a true human nature to His divine nature, thereby initiating the reconciliation of the whole of humanity with its Creator in His very own Divine Person, necessarily bestowed upon each human person a dignity so profound as to make available, to all persons who participate in this shared and now “exalted” human nature, the possibility of redemption. Granted, it will only and always be through the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church, that anyone and everyone deemed worthy of the great grace of eternal salvation, shall receive this free, unmerited gift that was purchased with the very Blood of Christ Jesus on the Cross of our salvation. Moreover, this much more inclusive interpretation of the dogmatic truth that “outside the Church, there is no salvation,” should not be viewed as being incompatible with the same dogmatic formulation. Rather, over the course of time, the Church has come to a deeper awareness of how it ought to understand itself in relation to both Christ, her Head, and the many and varied persons and groups of persons who, each in their own unique way, and to a greater or lesser extent, may, in some mysterious yet very real fashion, comprise varying degrees of membership in the one Mystical Body of Christ, the Church.

While this understanding of membership in the Mystical Body of Christ may bring great consolation to a great many, there are others who have voiced concern and/or criticism that such an understanding of “varying” degrees of membership in the Mystical Body, or the Church, effectively renders null and void the work of the missionary. For, the question might be posed, “If knowledge of Christ and the Gospel are not necessary for salvation, what, then, is the purpose of traveling to distant, foreign lands for the sake of evangelization? The Sacred Synod, however, anticipating such a reaction to the explanation provided in the Constitution, concludes this section with the following remarks: “As the Son was sent by the Father, so He too sent the Apostles, saying: “Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And behold I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world”. The Church has received this solemn mandate of Christ to proclaim the saving truth from the apostles and must carry it out to the very ends of the earth. Wherefore she makes the words of the Apostle her own: “Woe to me, if I do not preach the Gospel”, and continues unceasingly to send heralds of the Gospel until such time as the infant churches are fully established and can themselves continue the work of evangelizing. For the Church is compelled by the Holy Spirit to do her part that God’s plan may be fully realized, whereby He has constituted Christ as the source of salvation for the whole world. By the proclamation of the Gospel she prepares her hearers to receive and profess the faith. She gives them the dispositions necessary for baptism, snatches them from the slavery of error and of idols and incorporates them in Christ so that through charity they may grow up into full maturity in Christ. Through her work, whatever good is in the minds and hearts of men, whatever good lies latent in the religious practices and cultures of diverse peoples, is not only

saved from destruction but is also cleansed, raised up and perfected unto the glory of God, the confusion of the devil and the happiness of man. The obligation of spreading the faith is imposed on every disciple of Christ, according to his state.” (LG, 17).

Chapter Three

“On The Hierarchical Structure of the Church and in Particular on the Episcopate”

The third chapter of *Lumen Gentium* takes up the issue of the governance of the Church of Christ through the Episcopate. The first and second paragraphs of this chapter explain that this Council intends to continue in the tradition and teaching established in the First Vatican Council, and explains that just as Christ was sent forth by the Father, so too, the apostles, whose successors are the bishops, were sent forth by Christ to serve His Church as shepherds, with St. Peter and his successors as “permanent and visible source[s] and foundation[s] of unity of faith and communion” (LG, 18). In essence, “...all this teaching about the institution, the perpetuity, the meaning and reason for the sacred primacy of the Roman Pontiff and of his infallible Magisterium, this Sacred Council again proposes to be firmly believed by all the faithful. Continuing in that same undertaking, this Council is resolved to declare and proclaim before all men the doctrine concerning bishops, the successors of the apostles, who together with the successor of Peter, the Vicar of Christ, the visible Head of the whole Church, govern the house of the living God” (LG, 18).

Christ, having prayed to His Heavenly Father, chose twelve men to comprise His apostles, and, with Peter as their visible head, commissioned them to establish, sanctify, minister to and govern the Kingdom of God on earth, of which they and their rightful successors would serve as the foundation, with Christ Himself as the “supreme cornerstone.” This apostolic mandate and mission, moreover, was confirmed at Pentecost, in accord with the promise made them by the Lord: “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and in Samaria, and even to the very ends of the earth” (LG, 19).

Additionally, the theological reality of “apostolic succession” is here explained. The apostles, knowing that their divinely appointed mission of spreading and governing the Kingdom of God on earth through their teaching of the Gospel, the source of life for the Church, was to continue on well past their own death and even to the consummation of the world, appointed successors who would carry on and continue this apostolic, Episcopal tradition and ministry, with these latter being imbued with the very same Spirit and charism of the original twelve. Thus was born the “Episcopacy,” the college of bishops who, “as sharers in His power, they might make all peoples His disciples, and sanctify and govern them, and thus spread His Church, and by ministering to it under the guidance of the Lord, direct it all days even to the consummation of the world” (LG, 19). Thus, among the People of God, they would participate most fully in the One, Eternal, High Priesthood of Christ, with the validly elected successor of Peter, the “rock” upon which Christ built His Church, possessing primacy over and amongst this college.

Thus, “Bishops, therefore, with their helpers, the priests and deacons, have taken up the service of the community, presiding in place of God over the flock, whose shepherds they are, as teachers for doctrine, priests for sacred worship, and ministers for governing” (LG, 20). Further, “These pastors, chosen to shepherd the Lord’s flock of the elect, are servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God, to whom has been assigned the bearing of witness to the Gospel of the grace of God, and the ministration of the Spirit and of justice in glory” (LG, 21). In order to carry out such a tremendous task, a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit was bestowed upon the original Apostles, who, in their turn, passed on this power to their validly appointed successors through the imposition of hands, such that, “by Episcopal consecration the fullness of the sacrament of Orders is conferred, that fullness of power, namely, which both in the Church’s liturgical practice and in the language of the Fathers of the Church is called the high priesthood, the supreme power of the sacred ministry...” (LG, 21). In addition to the sacred power of sanctifying, the Episcopate, together with the whole college of bishops and in union with their head, the successor of Peter, has additionally received from Christ the powers of teaching and governing. Thus, the bishops, “in an eminent and visible way sustain the roles of Christ Himself as Teacher, Shepherd and High Priest, and...act in His person” (LG, 21). It should be noted that the sacrament of orders imparts “character”- an indelible mark – on the soul, which brings about an ontological, metaphysical change in the one receiving the sacrament, enabling him to act in “Persona Christi” (in the Person of Christ). Bishops receive the fullness of this participation in the High Priesthood of Christ, while priests and deacons additionally receive this “character” upon ordination, and participate, each in their own way, in the one, eternal High Priesthood of Christ, as assistants to their bishops.

Moreover, the Pope, as the Bishop of Rome and the Successor of Peter, in addition to participating in the fullness of the sacrament of orders, additionally receives the charism of infallibility when teaching “ex cathedra,” or “from the Chair,” on matters pertaining to faith or morality. While, up to this point, we have emphasized the role of the Episcopate, or the college of Bishops in the preaching, teaching, governing and sanctifying, it must be noted that, “the college or body of bishops has no authority unless it is understood together with the Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter as its head. The pope’s power of primacy over all, both pastors and faithful, remains whole and intact. In virtue of his office, that is as Vicar of Christ and pastor of the whole Church, the Roman Pontiff has full, supreme and universal power over the Church. And he is always free to exercise this power” (LG, 22).

Moreover, “although the individual bishops do not enjoy the prerogative of infallibility, they nevertheless proclaim Christ’s doctrine infallibly whenever, even though dispersed through the world, but still maintaining the bond of communion among themselves and with the successor of Peter, and authentically teaching matters of faith and morals, they are in agreement on one position as definitively to be held” (LG, 25). Speaking on the pre-eminent role of the charism of infallibility that is enjoyed by the successor of the Apostle Peter, the document states, in no uncertain terms, the following: “And this is the infallibility which the Roman Pontiff, the head of the college of bishops, enjoys in virtue of his office, when, as the supreme shepherd and teacher of all the faithful, who confirms his brethren in their faith, by a definitive act he proclaims a doctrine of faith or morals. And therefore his definitions, of themselves, and not from the consent of the

Church, are justly styled irreformable, since they are pronounced with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, promised to him in blessed Peter, and therefore they need no approval of others, nor do they allow an appeal to any other judgment. For then the Roman Pontiff is not pronouncing judgment as a private person, but as the supreme teacher of the universal Church, in whom the charism of infallibility of the Church itself is individually present, he is expounding or defending a doctrine of Catholic faith” (LG, 25).

While the members of the Episcopate, the bishops, possess the fullness of the Sacrament of Orders,”the divinely established ecclesiastical ministry is exercised on different levels by those who from antiquity have been called bishops, priests and deacons. Priests, although they do not possess the highest degree of the priesthood, and although they are dependent on the bishops in the exercise of their power, nevertheless they are united with the bishops in sacerdotal dignity. By the power of the sacrament of Orders, in the image of Christ the eternal high Priest, they are consecrated to preach the Gospel and shepherd the faithful and to celebrate divine worship, so that they are true priests of the New Testament” (LG, 28). As essential collaborators with their bishops, “They exercise their sacred function especially in the Eucharistic worship or the celebration of the Mass by which acting in the person of Christ and proclaiming His Mystery they unite the prayers of the faithful with the sacrifice of their Head and renew and apply in the sacrifice of the Mass until the coming of the Lord the only sacrifice of the New Testament namely that of Christ offering Himself once for all a spotless Victim to the Father” (LG, 28). Thus, through their role and function as cooperators with their bishops as members of the holy presbyterate, through which they, as Presbyters (priests), truly act in Persona Christi, and by which they are capable of offering the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ on the altar in a unbloody fashion, make it possible for the faithful to exercise the common, royal priesthood, that was bestowed upon all the faithful in their Baptism, having been baptized into the priestly, prophetic and kingly offices of Christ.

At the lowest level of the hierarchy are the deacons, whose proper ministry is one of service. We might say that just as the priest is an assistant to his bishop, the deacon, likewise, is an assistant to the priest. Speaking on their particular mission within the Church, the document has this to say: “It is the duty of the deacon, according as it shall have been assigned to him by competent authority, to administer baptism solemnly, to be custodian and dispenser of the Eucharist, to assist at and bless marriages in the name of the Church, to bring Viaticum to the dying, to read the Sacred Scripture to the faithful, to instruct and exhort the people, to preside over the worship and prayer of the faithful, to administer sacramentals, to officiate at funeral and burial services” (LG, 29) On a final note, it should be stated that when Lumen Gentium was first promulgated, the diaconate was simply a stepping stone in the process of a man’s ordination to the priesthood. In keeping with the goal of the council, however, it was established in this document that “in the near future” the diaconate could be reinstated as a permanent hierarchical rank within the Church, as it had been in the early Christian communities, provided such was the desire of the Roman Pontiff and the bishops united with him. Clearly, as is now the case, there are, indeed, numerous permanent deacons who carry out a legitimate ministry of service within the Latin Rite Church.

Chapter Four

“The Laity”

Who constitute the laity? The document provides the following answer: “The term laity is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in the state of religious life specially approved by the Church. These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.” Moreover, the document goes on to state that while different members of the one body are called to various ministries and are granted unique charisms particular to each member’s distinct calling and secular profession, all share the same dignity as adopted sons and daughters of the Father, though, with and in Christ. ““For just as in one body we have many members, yet all the members have not the same function, so we, the many, are one body in Christ, but severally members one of another’. Therefore, the chosen People of God is one: ‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism;’ sharing a common dignity as members from their regeneration in Christ, having the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection; possessing in common one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity” (LG, 32). What is more, the laity, on account of the distinctively “secular” roles they assume within society, are afforded a unique access to persons who would otherwise not be exposed to officially designated Ministers of the Word and the Sacraments; thus, said laity are in a privileged position to act as the “salt of the earth” by carrying the Good News, or the “Gospel” of Christ, into those worldly arenas that Sacred Ministers would likely not have access to. Thus, they are called to act as a leaven in the world, while they live “in” the world without being “of” the world.

The conciliar document continues on to underscore the tremendous significance of the lay vocation and apostolate: “The lay apostolate, however, is a participation in the salvific mission of the Church itself. Through their baptism and confirmation all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself. Moreover, by the sacraments, especially holy Eucharist, that charity toward God and man which is the soul of the apostolate is communicated and nourished. Now the laity is called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth. Thus every layman, in virtue of the very gifts bestowed upon him, is at the same time a witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church itself ‘according to the measure of Christ’s bestowal’” (LG, 33).

Finally, toward the end of this chapter concerning the role of the laity within the Church, the most significant and the most salient activity of the laity is addressed. Anyone who has taken a thorough and orthodox course on the Sacraments of the Church should know that the Holy Eucharist is, unequivocally, the central sacrament pre-figured in the first Passover. Additionally, they should know that each of the other six Sacraments, while imparting specific graces in and of themselves and while possessing their own specific purpose, nonetheless exist for the greater purpose of bringing the faithful to a full and complete participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. For example, while it is entirely true that the Sacrament of Penance exists for the purpose of forgiving the Christian faithful of their sins and imparting additional graces that will assist them in

overcoming that same sin in the future, ultimately, we may state that Penance exists for the sake of forgiving mortal sins that would otherwise prevent the Baptized from participating fully in the Sacred Banquet of the Holy Eucharist, as one cannot receive Holy Communion if he/she is in a state of mortal sin. Or take Baptism, for instance. While this absolutely essential Sacrament of initiation forgives the original sin inherited from Adam, which, more accurately, is a “deprivation” of sanctifying grace, or the lack of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in a person’s soul, ultimately, it may rightly be stated that one is Baptized for the sake of being capable of participating in the Celebration of the Holy Eucharist, which is nothing short of a foretaste of the heavenly banquet in which we, as Christians, have been called to participate. In short, the Eucharist is the central sacrament toward which each of the other Sacraments tends.

This having been said, we are in a better position to understand the tremendous significance of the following passage contained in *Lumen Gentium* in the Chapter on the Laity and their exalted vocation. The document states the following: “The supreme and eternal Priest, Christ Jesus, since he wills to continue his witness and service also through the laity, vivifies them in this Spirit and increasingly urges them on to every good and perfect work. For besides intimately linking them to His life and His mission, *He also gives them a sharing in His priestly function of offering spiritual worship for the glory of God and the salvation of men... For all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and...the hardships of life...become ‘spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.’ Together with the offering of the Lord’s body, they are most fittingly offered in the celebration of the Eucharist*” (LG, 34).

Many Catholic “Baby-Boomers,” who experienced, as children, what it was like to live as a Catholic prior to the Second Vatican Council, may well remember their parents continually exhorting them, whenever they had to endure some hardship or undertake some responsibility to which they had an aversion, to “offer it up.” These three simple words, which many Catholic children became quite sick of hearing from their parents, conveyed a most profound spiritual truth regarding the tremendous gift of our participation in the common, Royal Priesthood of Christ, which was bestowed upon us through our Baptism into the Mystical Body of Christ.

At the moment we received this most necessary and exalted Sacrament, we became participants in the Priestly, Prophetic and Kingly offices of Christ, the Eternal High Priest. Additionally, we became adopted sons and daughters of the Eternal Father, and brothers and sisters of Christ Jesus. Moreover, in the words of St. Paul, we became “members of the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church.” It was the Divine Will of the Eternal Father that the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, the Eternal Word of God, the Logos, or the pre-Incarnate Christ, empty and strip Himself of His divinity and assume a true human nature in the immaculate womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, thereby uniting and reconciling humanity and divinity in his one Divine Person, a union which the Church refers to as the hypostasis, or the hypostatic union of the two natures in the one Divine Person of Jesus Christ. Thus, the work of Redemption was begun. This work of Christ’s Redemption was brought to completion when Christ, from the altar of the Cross, as both Priest and Victim, offered Himself as the perfect, unblemished Sacrifice to the perfect glory of God the

Father and in atonement for the sins of all of humanity.

This profound reality of the Redemption of humanity by Christ on the Cross literally and historically took place approximately 2,000 years ago, on Calvary, once for all. Yet, God, in His infinite wisdom, decided that this perfect redemptive act would assume a trans-historical reality and significance, enabling this once, for all, singular sacrifice of the Son of God and the Son of Man to truly be made present, in an unbloody fashion, on all of the altars throughout the world, through the words, actions and intentions of all men ordained to participate in Christ's ministerial priesthood. Thus, Christ's work of Redemption is truly ongoing, as each day, from the rising of the sun to its setting, a perfect sacrifice is offered to the glory of God the Father and for the salvation of souls.

Further, we, the laity, through our Baptism into the Mystical Body of Christ, and as members of the Royal Priesthood of Christ (which is to be distinguished from the Ministerial Priesthood of Christ, which can only be conferred on a man whom the Church has accepted as a candidate for reception of the Sacrament of Orders), are truly called to exercise our priestly office through our participation in the Eucharistic Liturgy, offering ourselves, our prayers, works, joys, and especially our sufferings, through, with and in Christ, to the perfect glory of God the Father and for the salvation of souls, who run the risk of being eternally lost due to their sinfulness. This, then, is the exalted vocation of all of the laity, the Priestly People of God, and is, by no means whatsoever, to be taken lightly or for granted.

Chapter Five

“The Universal Call to Holiness”

Prior to the Council, there existed, within the Church, a certain consensus amongst priests, religious and laity alike, that the former two groups (priests and religious) had been specifically chosen and called by God to pursue and attain the lofty heights of holiness and “transforming union with Christ” while living apart from the world, in monasteries, cloisters, convents and rectories, while the laity were called, simply, to “work out their salvation,” whilst carrying out the duties and responsibilities of their “secular” vocation, while living “in” the world, with the hope of just barely making it into purgatory.

Thankfully, Chapter Five of *Lumen Gentium* put a definitive end to that mode of thought. This Chapter, entitled, “The Universal Call to Holiness,” explains, unequivocally, that all the Christian faithful, regardless of their particular vocation in life, are all called to that same “perfection” and holiness of life that Christ speaks of in the Gospels in general, and in the “Sermon on the Mount” in particular. As it turns out, even janitors, house-keepers and garbage-men, despite their secular and down-right dirty jobs, are called to the same heights of holiness that, prior to the Council, were thought to belong most properly and singularly to priests and religious. Explaining the dynamic theology behind this “new” approach to understanding such a “universal” call to holiness, Chapter Five of *Lumen Gentium* begins with the following words: “The Church...is believed to be indefectibly holy. Indeed Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is praised

as “uniquely holy,” loved the Church as His bride, delivering Himself up for her. He did this that He might sanctify her. He united her to Himself as His own body and brought it to perfection by the gift of the Holy Spirit for God’s glory. Therefore in the Church, everyone whether belonging to the hierarchy, or being cared for by it, is called to holiness, according to the saying of the Apostle: ‘For this is the will of God, your sanctification’” (LG, 39). Moreover, the document commends that unique example that is to be set by those religious who have freely, and for the sake of the Kingdom of God, embraced the Evangelical Counsels of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience; yet, simultaneously, the document clearly states that it is to the very same “holiness” and “sanctity” that all the Christian faithful, who have been baptized into the Mystical Body of Christ, are called, despite the diverse vocations of these faithful.

To emphasize and expound on the universality of Christ’s call to all of the faithful to this holiness, the document continues: “The Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and everyone of His disciples of every condition. He Himself stands as the author and consummator of this holiness of life: ‘Be you therefore perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect’. Indeed He sent the Holy Spirit upon all men that He might move them inwardly to love God with their whole heart and their whole soul, with all their mind and all their strength and that they might love each other as Christ loves them” (LG, 40). Continuing along this line of thinking, the document continues to state that “it is evident to everyone, that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity; by this holiness as such a more human manner of living is promoted in this earthly society. In order that the faithful may reach this perfection, they must use their strength accordingly as they have received it, as a gift from Christ. They must follow in His footsteps and conform themselves to His image seeking the will of the Father in all things. They must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbor. In this way, the holiness of the People of God will grow into an abundant harvest of good, as is admirably shown by the life of so many saints in Church history” (LG, 40). Finally, in section 41, the document recapitulates everything that had been previously stated, reinforcing the absolute universality of the call to holiness: “The classes and duties of life are many, but holiness is one—that sanctity which is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God, and who obey the voice of the Father and worship God the Father in spirit and in truth. These people follow the poor Christ, the humble and cross-bearing Christ in order to be worthy of being sharers in His glory. Every person must walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of living faith, which arouses hope and works through charity” (LG, 41).

Much of the remainder of this chapter is devoted to explaining how the this one, universal call to holiness, that is shared by all, is to be lived by persons of differing states of life, beginning with those who belong to the Episcopate, ending with un-married, single lay faithful, and addressing all of the various states in between, with a special emphasis on the poor and those suffering with illnesses: “May all those who are weighed down with poverty, infirmity and sickness, as well as those who must bear various hardships or who suffer persecution for justice sake—may they all know they are united with the suffering Christ in a special way for the salvation of the world” (LG, 41).

Chapter Six

“Religious”

In Chapter Six of the document, we find an explanation of that marvelous vocation of those persons who, for the sake of witnessing to the reality and absolute supremacy of the Kingdom of God, and in an effort to heed the Lord’s exhortation to strive for Christian perfection, leave all worldly comforts and earthly pursuits behind, and embrace the evangelical counsels of holy poverty, chastity for the Kingdom of heaven, and obedience. Thus, those persons called to embrace a vocation to the religious life strip themselves of everything that is not conducive to living a radically Christ-centered lifestyle, in imitation of our Lord, Who proposed this way of life to those who could accept it.

The document explains that a vocation to the religious state of life, from the vantage point of the hierarchy, should not be thought of as a state of life that is “in between” the lay state and the clerical state. Rather, individuals from both of these states – laity and clerics alike – may assume the religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Thus, many male religious societies are comprised of both non-ordained brothers and ordained brothers alike. The same, however, cannot be said of women’s’ religious societies, as women are not permitted to be ordained deacons, priests or bishops within the Catholic Church; thus, all women religious are always, necessarily, non-ordained sisters.

Unfortunately, within the United States and in various other nations throughout the world, certain groups of women religious who, in direct violation of their freely taken vow of “obedience” to Church authorities, are scandalously accusing the hierarchy of holding onto and perpetuating an “antiquated, oppressive and sexist” mentality in its decision to not permit woman to receive the sacrament of Holy Orders. These misguided women religious fail to understand that the Church has no right to change essential and fundamental teachings regarding the faith, and that the Church is simply following the example set by Christ Himself, who chose only men to be his apostles. Moreover, as we shall examine more closely in our review of Chapter Eight of this document, not even the Immaculate Virgin Mary – the Queen of heaven and earth, Virginal Spouse of the Holy Spirit, Immaculately Conceived, and the Mother of God – had been chosen to be among this exclusive group of men, to whom Christ entrusted the mission of going throughout the world and making disciples of all the nations. For, if anyone should have been a pope, a bishop, a priest, or, at the least, a deacon, it should have been the Blessed Virgin Mary. Yet, such was not her God-given vocation, and this she accepted in all humility. This should serve as the single most telling example for women religious, who mistakenly believe that the Church of Christ, to Whom they have freely vowed obedience, is practicing discrimination against them. To believe that the Church is in error with regard to a matter of the faith is to make a liar out of Christ, Who solemnly stated to Peter and his successors that whatever they held bound on earth would be held bound in heaven, and whatever they loosened on earth would be loosened in heaven. Is this not the same Church to whom Christ entrusted the “Power of the Keys?” Is this not the Church which continues to carry on the Sacred Tradition of Christ, its founder, a Tradition which truly is a living Tradition, precisely because it is the Holy Spirit of God Himself Who guides and sustains her? Let

us, then, step most cautiously when we find ourselves in disagreement with the Church of Christ; for despite the ever-shifting winds of political, social and religious opinion, the Church of Christ has been charged with the arduous task of proclaiming the unchanging truths of the faith both in season and out; in times of popularity and in times of apostasy; in times of peace and in times of war; for, Christ, the Eternal Word of God, remains the same: yesterday, today, and forever.

Getting back to the document, the end of section 44 well articulates and sums up the purpose of the religious vocation and the living of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience: “The profession of the evangelical counsels, then, appears as a sign which can and ought to attract all the members of the Church to an effective and prompt fulfillment of the duties of their Christian vocation. The people of God have no lasting city here below, but look forward to one that is to come. Since this is so, the religious state, whose purpose is to free its members from earthly cares, more fully manifests to all believers the presence of heavenly goods already possessed here below. Furthermore, it not only witnesses to the fact of a new and eternal life acquired by the redemption of Christ, but it foretells the future resurrection and the glory of the heavenly kingdom. Christ proposed to His disciples this form of life, which He, as the Son of God, accepted in entering this world to do the will of the Father. This same state of life is accurately exemplified and perpetually made present in the Church. The religious state clearly manifests that the Kingdom of God and its needs, in a very special way, are raised above all earthly considerations. Finally it clearly shows all men both the unsurpassed breadth of the strength of Christ the King and the infinite power of the Holy Spirit marvelously working in the Church” (LG, 44).

Chapter Seven

“The Eschatological Nature of the Pilgrim Church and its Union with the Church in Heaven”

Following the Constitution’s treatment and explanation of the vocation of the various men and women religious of the Catholic Church, who, by virtue of the living of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience, bear a radical witness to the supremacy of the heavenly kingdom which is to come and for which all Christians hope, it is most appropriate that the Council Fathers, at this point in the document, chose to segue into the topic of the eschatological nature of the Church Militant on earth, and its profound union with the Church Triumphant in heaven. Chapter 48 begins with the following: “The Church, to which we are all called in Christ Jesus, and in which we acquire sanctity through the grace of God, will attain its full perfection only in the glory of heaven, when there will come the time of the restoration of all things. At that time the human race as well as the entire world, which is intimately related to man and attains to its end through him, will be perfectly reestablished in Christ” (LG, 48). This notion of the “restoration” of humanity, and through humanity, the whole of creation, is elaborated upon in the following paragraph: “...the promised restoration which we are awaiting has already begun in Christ, is carried forward in the mission of the Holy Spirit and through Him continues in the Church in which we learn the meaning of our terrestrial life through our faith, while we perform with hope in the future the work committed to us in this world by the Father, and thus work out our salvation” (LG, 48). Thus, the document makes it clear that it is precisely within this context of a sincere and genuine hope and expectation of coming face-to-face with our Creator in that period of the new

heavens and the new earth, looking forward to the Second Glorious Coming of Christ, that we, as Christians, are to come to an understanding of our own wholly unique, God-given mission as pilgrims on this earth, and, within the context of this latter, earthly vocation, work out our salvation.

Additionally, the document continues on to state the following: “Already the final age of the world has come upon us and the renovation of the world is irrevocably decreed and is already anticipated in some kind of a real way; for the Church already on this earth is signed with a sanctity which is real although imperfect. However, until there shall be new heavens and a new earth in which justice dwells, the pilgrim Church in her sacraments and institutions, which pertain to this present time, has the appearance of this world which is passing and she herself dwells among creatures who groan and travail in pain until now and await the revelation of the sons of God.”

In the final Paragraph of Section 48, the document explains that, while it is true that, as members of the Body of Christ, we are, indeed, adopted sons and daughters of the Father, it is additionally true that while we are in the flesh, we are, as it were, exiled from the Lord. Yet, the Spirit, which grafts us to the Mystical Body, groans within us, urging us on to an ever more perfect union with Christ through works of Charity. Thus, while in the flesh, we strive to be found pleasing in the sight of the Lord, in order that, upon the completion of our earthly course of life, we may be found worthy to participate in the eternal wedding feast of the Lamb Who was slain, purchasing for Himself a people of every tongue and nation. Thus, having been found worthy at the moment of our particular judgment, in the presence of the tribunal of Christ, we may additionally, at the end of time, find ourselves among the sheep, who, at God’s right hand, shall glorify Him for all eternity, as opposed to being numbered among the goats at the Lord’s left hand, that shall be cast into the everlasting lake of fire, where there shall be much wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Having been found worthy of Eternal Life through, with and in Christ, we shall then know with great clarity that “the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that will be revealed in us.” Moreover, as true members of the Body of Christ, we shall participate in the very Triune life of God Himself, having been divinized as members of our Lord’s Body.

Speaking of the Church Militant, the Church Triumphant and the Church Suffering as one Church, comprising the one Body of Christ, paragraph 49 has this to say: “Until the Lord shall come in His majesty, and all the angels with Him and death being destroyed, all things are subject to Him, some of His disciples are exiles on earth, some having died are purified, and others are in glory beholding “clearly God Himself triune and one, as He is”; but all in various ways and degrees are in communion in the same charity of God and neighbor and all sing the same hymn of glory to our God. For all who are in Christ, having His Spirit, form one Church and cleave together in Him. Therefore the union of the wayfarers with the brethren who have gone to sleep in the peace of Christ is not in the least weakened or interrupted, but on the contrary, according to the perpetual faith of the Church, is strengthened by communication of spiritual goods. For by reason of the fact that those in heaven are more closely united with Christ, they establish the whole Church more

firmly in holiness, lend nobility to the worship which the Church offers to God here on earth and in many ways contribute to its greater edification. For after they have been received into their heavenly home and are present to the Lord, through Him and with Him and in Him they do not cease to intercede with the Father for us, showing forth the merits which they won on earth through the one Mediator between God and man, serving God in all things and filling up in their flesh those things which are lacking of the sufferings of Christ for His Body which is the Church. Thus by their brotherly interest our weakness is greatly strengthened” (LG, 49).

Lastly, Chapter 50 eloquently explains that it is precisely through participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass that the pilgrim Church on earth, or the Church Militant, is most closely and perfectly united with the Heavenly Court, or the Church Triumphant: “Our union with the Church in heaven is put into effect in its noblest manner especially in the sacred Liturgy, wherein the power of the Holy Spirit acts upon us through sacramental signs. Then, with combined rejoicing we celebrate together the praise of the divine majesty; then all those from every tribe and tongue and people and nation who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ and gathered together into one Church, with one song of praise magnify the one and triune God. Celebrating the Eucharistic sacrifice therefore, we are most closely united to the Church in heaven in communion with and venerating the memory first of all of the glorious ever-Virgin Mary, of Blessed Joseph and the blessed apostles and martyrs and of all the saints” (LG, 50).

Chapter Eight

“The Blessed Virgin Mary Mother of God in the Mystery of Christ and the Church”

Any official document regarding the Church of Christ issued by the official Magisterium of the same Church of Christ will invariably explore, if only in a cursory fashion, the wholly unique and exalted role of the Blessed Virgin Mary; for Mary, while herself being a member of the Body of Christ and the People of God, who was, herself, the recipient of untold graces, in view of the salvific work of redemption wrought by Christ, was and is also the Spiritual Mother and Model of the Church of Christ – the image, or type, of what the Bride of Christ will be, at the end of time, after having undergone her profound and necessary purification, when the Church, like Mary, will be without spot or wrinkle. Indeed, Mary so profoundly personifies the Church that whatsoever may be predicated of Mary may also and necessarily be predicated of the Church and vice-versa.

Thus, it is most fitting that the final chapter of *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, should be devoted to Mary, the Mother and Model of the Church, who, as has been so eloquently pointed out by the early Church Fathers and reiterated in this document, is to Christ what Eve was to Adam. There is a tremendous richness in the analogies between Adam’s relationship and shared mission with Eve, and Christ, the new Adam’s relationship and shared mission with Mary, the new Eve. For instance, in addition to what has been stated above, it can be said that just as Eve participated with Adam, by providing him with the fruit, which served as the instrument of the fall of humanity from God’s grace and friendship, in like fashion, Mary, the new Eve, participated with Christ, the new Adam, by providing Him with His body, which served as the instrument of the redemption of humanity back to God’s grace and friendship.

Speaking on Mary's participation in the economy of salvation, Paragraph 56 of *Lumen Gentium* states that "The Father of mercies willed that the incarnation should be preceded by the acceptance of her who was predestined to be the mother of His Son, so that just as a woman contributed to death, so also a woman should contribute to life" (LG, 56). Again, speaking on the analogies drawn by the early Church Fathers, the document states, at the end of Paragraph 56, "For, as St. Irenaeus says, she 'being obedient, became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race.' Hence, not a few of the early Fathers gladly assert in their preaching: 'The knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience; what the virgin Eve bound through her unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosened by her faith.' Comparing Mary with Eve, they call her 'the Mother of the living,' and still more often they say, 'death through Eve, life through Mary'" (LG, 56).

It is most interesting to note that *almost all of the theology needed to support a solemn, dogmatic definition of Mary as "Co-redemptrix, Mediatrix and Advocate," is present, almost entirely, in this final chapter of Lumen Gentium.* Beginning in paragraph 58, the Council Fathers begin to explain the concept of Co-redemption: "...the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the Cross, where she stood, in keeping with the divine plan, grieving exceedingly with her only begotten Son, uniting herself with a maternal heart with His sacrifice, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this Victim which she herself had brought forth" (LG, 58). Further, Paragraph 61 provides still greater insight into this collaboration which Mary was called to, by Divine Providence, with her Son, in the work of Redemption: "Predestined from eternity by that decree of divine providence which determined the incarnation of the Word to be the Mother of God, the Blessed Virgin was on this earth the virgin Mother of the Redeemer, and above all others and in a singular way the generous associate...of the Lord. She...was united with Him by compassion [which literally means, "to suffer with"] as He died on the Cross. In this singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Saviour in giving back supernatural life to souls. Wherefore she is our mother in the order of grace" (LG, 61). Thus, any person who should state that the doctrine of Mary's Co-redemption is not in accord with official Church teaching is unequivocally in error, based solely on what is stated in Chapter 8 of *Lumen Gentium*.

Moreover, Mary's role as Mediatrix is not only articulated theologically, but the very term itself is used in Paragraph 62, which reads, "This maternity of Mary in the order of Grace began with the consent which she gave in faith at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the Cross, and lasts until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this salvific duty, but by her constant intercession continued to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation. By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led into the happiness of their true home. Therefore, the Blessed Virgin is invoked by the Church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, and Mediatrix. This, however, is to be so understood that it neither takes away from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficaciousness of Christ the one Mediator" (LG, 62).

Thus, it logically follows that she who participated in a most intense, singular and profound fashion with Christ, her Son, in the meriting of grace – divine life – for souls, would additionally participate in the distribution of said grace. Thus, it is the official teaching of the Church that nothing whatsoever of the vast treasury of God’s divine grace that is bestowed upon humanity comes to us except through the willed intercession of Mary, and that just as Christ is the sole Mediator between the Father and humanity, Mary is the sole Mediatrix between humanity and Christ. Should any person reading this essay doubt the veracity of what I have just written above, please visit <http://www.ewtn.com/faith/teachings/marya4a.htm>. There can be found a collection of 20 papal and magisterial quotations by various popes and councils which unequivocally confirm and fully support the absolute truth of the theological explanations and assertions provided herein.

It must be made absolutely clear, however, that Mary’s participation in Christ’s salvific act is entirely subordinate to and dependent upon the perfect work of Redemption wrought by Christ. Yet, God, in His infinite goodness, mercy and providence, has so ordained it that all of the adopted children of the Father, through their baptism into the Mystical Body of Christ, are made sharers in the priestly office of Christ, and can, therefore, offer their prayers, works and suffering as a spiritual sacrifice to the Father, through, with and in Christ. This, then, constitutes the very heart of the Universal Call to Holiness spoken of earlier, whereby the entire baptized are called to participation in Christ’s ongoing work of redemption, which is renewed daily, throughout the world, in the Sacrifice of the Mass. And Mary, by virtue of her Immaculate Conception, her sinlessness, her divine maternity, her perpetual virginity, and her glorious Assumption, body and soul, into heaven, is the Co-redemptrix among co-redeemers; the exemplar, who most perfectly and profoundly participates in the ongoing work of redemption, particularly as the Mother of Christ.

Ideally, those who have taken the time to read this not-so-abbreviated abbreviated version and occasional interpretation of *Lumen Gentium* should now read the document itself, which, in truth, is not much lengthier than this essay. It is my earnest hope and prayer that everyone who has taken the time to read this essay will additionally read the original document; for, in doing so, the reader shall avail him/herself of the riches of the Second Vatican Council in general, and the Apostolic Constitution on the Church, in particular.

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Denominations [at Convert Journal]



I [was](#) a life-long member of 1 Protestant denomination and believed it taught the truth (I know that remains their sincere intention). When we moved, I looked not for the nearest Protestant church but for the nearest church of my denomination. Many Protestants who grew-up in one specific denomination are that way.

Many other Protestants are comfortable changing denominations when they move. They will [typically look for](#) a church that is close, at which they “feel” comfortable and that does not preach too contrary to their personal beliefs. This frankly is odd, as Protestant theology varies significantly. On the other hand, the uniquely Protestant doctrine of [sola scriptura](#) (invented in the 16th century) ultimately allows each person to determine their own beliefs.

Of this latter group of “denominational hoppers,” one Christian community rarely considered is the Catholic Church. Few can articulate *why* that is beyond vague misconceptions, but it is often rejected out-of-hand. I know that [I did](#).

In fact, the Catholic Church is not a Christian denomination but is the Christian Church itself. Scripture is clear that Jesus founded [1 Church](#) and history [easily shows](#) that to be the Catholic Church. Men such as the [reformers](#) (over a millennium after Christ) or modern day preachers opening storefront churches can not create something equivalent to the Church directly founded by our Lord.

To be steeped in history is to cease being Protestant.

Cardinal John Henry Newman (convert)

What is common with our brothers and sisters in various Christian communities (which Catholics call *separated* Christian communities) is membership in the invisible part of the Church through valid Christian baptism. This is the *Mystical Body of Christ*, where Christians are members of the body headed by our Lord. On earth, we are also known as the *Church Militant* reflecting our struggle against the worldly and toward holiness. The *Church Militant* is part of the [Communion of Saints](#), which also contains those being cleansed for Heaven (in [Purgatory](#); the *Church Suffering*) and those who are now in Heaven (the *Church Triumphant*). In this way, ALL Christians are united (even if they do not know this, it is still true).

Where we get into trouble is with the *visible* part of the Church. The only purpose of which is to make saints (that is, to help as many people as possible get to Heaven). All Christian communities [intend this](#), not just the Catholic Church. However, [truth](#) matters.

Jesus then said to those Jews who believed in him, “If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Read these verses carefully. To “remain in my word” you must understand **what** the Word means. How can you remain in something correctly if you misunderstand it? I am not being rhetorical here. Stop for a minute and think about this. This entire passage hinges on it.

Remaining in His Word will make you His disciple and you will know the truth. Knowing the Word (correctly) is knowing the truth. Through actual truth you are set free. Being His disciple spreads truth and sets others free. His Word (*when properly understood*) = truth.

What if another good person of a different (Protestant) denomination has come to know God’s Word differently than you? He or she is absolutely convinced, as are you, that they are correct. They faithfully live their life by their differing understanding of the Word. Does it matter? Of course it does – to believe otherwise is the heresy of indifferentism. Further, “versions of truth” cover a very wide spectrum of mutually exclusive beliefs. If there are multiple versions, then there is no truth at all – only relativism. We are then not remaining in God’s Word but our own. His misunderstood Word ≠ truth.

Jesus instituted 1 visible Church, under Peter, to protect the truth He revealed to mankind. To be effective in [her mission](#) of saving souls, *that* truth, *the* truth, the *only* truth, must be steadfastly kept and faithfully taught. Only the Church protected until the end of time as promised by our Lord can do this with certainty. Other Christian communities outside of full communion with Christ’s *universal* Church do so to varying degrees. While never their intent – the full truth never-the-less is not present, what is taught may suffer from error and some teaching, to be blunt, is flat-out false.

Jesus said to him, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Jesus alone is the way and the truth and the life. Do you know His truth or another version of it?

This contribution is available at <http://www.convertjournal.com/2013/05/denominations/>
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If you give a 3-year-old a cookie...

If you take two preschool-aged boys on a day trip to Colonial Williamsburg, they're going to see horse-drawn carriages.

If they see the carriages, they're going to ask for a ride.

If you find out that rides cost \$20 per person, you'll be looking for something to distract your sons from the horses.

If you distract them with beanbag tosses and trees to climb and water rushing through a drain, they'll throw and climb and get excited about every new discovery.

If they've been throwing and climbing and exploring, the only thing that will slow them down is suggesting they watch a sword-fighting demonstration.

If they're going to see a sword-fighting demonstration, they are going to want to stand in the front where everyone can see them.

If your sons have to wait for a few minutes, they're going to realize how thirsty they are.

If the boys are thirsty and the family just saved \$80 not riding in a horse-drawn carriage, their father will buy some bottled water.

If their father buys water, he's going to get a couple cookies, too, and give them to his sons.



If you give a 3-year-old a cookie and he's missed his nap, he's going to lie down on the dusty brick sidewalk to eat it.

If he lies down on the sidewalk, he may just let that cookie brush across the sidewalk once, twice, or...well, a lot.

If he lets that cookie rub against the sidewalk and keeps eating it and the crowd needs something to entertain them while they wait for the show to begin, you are suddenly going to realize everyone is staring your way.

If an amused man in costume calls over to you, "He's dragging his cookie across the ground! And then he takes another bite!" you are going to realize you should have been watching your son instead of admiring the Colonial architecture and feel a bit...put on the spot.



If you feel put on the spot, you are going to have to think of a good way to respond, so you will laugh and say, "Well, it isn't the first time he's eaten dirt, and it won't be his last."

If that's the best you can do, the costumed man is probably going to respond with, "I guess it's extra crunchy that way," and you will just smile and sort of wish you could blend into that dusty,

cookie-crumbs-covered sidewalk.

If you wanted to spend the day blending into a sidewalk, though, you wouldn't have taken your two active, curious preschoolers to Colonial Williamsburg.



And if you're going to take your sons to Williamsburg, they're going to want a carriage ride to go with it.

Or at least a cookie.



What are your favorite child-friendly day trips from Baltimore? Do you have any planned for this summer?

5/2/2013 1:19:40 PM

By [Rita Buettner](#)

This contribution is available at <http://catholicreview.org/blogs/open-window/2013/05/02/if-you-give-a-3-year-old-a-cookie>

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God in the Shadows [at The Contemplative Catholic Convert]

Really needed to hear this right now. I just wish knowing the truth would translate into not feeling the pain of rejection, or perceived rejection. It helps to remember Jesus understands, because he suffered more rejection than I ever will. Yet he still chose love...I've got a long way to go.

And consider too, Jesus continues to suffer rejection. Every day. Even by His children who choose, every day, to go their own way, to do what is right in their own eyes.

Jesus suffers rejection all the time. Yet He continues to hold out His hand in love and great patience toward you and me -- who in our own ways reject Him often.

Yes, Jesus understands our hurts and He hurts with us. How great is His wondrous love.

Leah was a woman of great courage who made the best of her situation, sad as it was. Although we may be hurting from rejection, the one consolation is that the One who really counts will never push us away as He has been pushed away. Makes me want to run and console Him immediately.

Now THAT'S an interesting thought . . . us consoling Him. But I think valid. Thanks, I might use that idea in the future.

Now THAT'S an interesting thought . . . us consoling Him. But I think valid. Thanks, I might use that idea in the future.

Thank you Rich. As usual you offer a unique insight into an often ignored Biblical figure.

Your article and Leah's story is a powerful way to remind us that "nothing (apart from sin) happens in our life unless God wills it so".

Thanks, Michael. As you know, it's nice to be able to say something that helps encourage others.

Wonderful post, Rich.

"Because I wanted to." That's usually how it is with sin. God has chosen to bring good out of evil. It is His way, as you show us with Leah's plight and the gift God makes to her in her sons and our salvation history.

Thanks, Joann. I think her story is the reason this is my favorite essay of all I've ever written.

Hope. Sometimes it is all we have.
Great article. Thank you!

Colleen, thanks for commenting and your encouragement.

Thank you, Rich! I've heard so much teaching about Rachel, but never much about Leah. This makes her jump out of the pages of Scripture and become real to me. --- Rosemary

You're welcome, Rosemary. I am glad you got something worthwhile from the essay.

This contribution is available at http://thecontemplativecatholicconvert.blogspot.com/2013/05/god-in-shadows_4.html

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Sacred Heart of Jesus [at Journey unto the Lord]

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

The month of June is dedicated to the Sacred Heart by Holy Mother Church.

We the Christians are the true Israel which springs from Christ, for we are carved out of His heart as from a rock. – St. Justin Martyr (d. 165)

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. – Matthew 11:29

There is in the Sacred Heart the symbol and express image of the infinite love of Jesus Christ which moves us to love in return. – Pope Leo XIII

The heart has always been seen as the “center” or essence a person (“the heart of the matter,” “you are my heart,” “take it to heart,” etc.) and the wellspring of our emotional lives and love (“you break my heart,” “my heart sings,” etc.) Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is devotion to Jesus Christ Himself, but in the particular ways of meditating on His interior life and on His threefold love – His divine love, His burning love that fed His human will, and His sensible love that affects His interior life. Pope Pius XII of blessed memory writes on this topic in his 1956 encyclical, *Haurietis Aquas* (On Devotion To The Sacred Heart). Below are a few excerpts which help explain the devotion:

54. ...the Heart of the Incarnate Word is deservedly and rightly considered the chief sign and

symbol of that threefold love with which the divine Redeemer unceasingly loves His eternal Father and all mankind.

55. It is a symbol of that divine love which He shares with the Father and the Holy Spirit but which He, the Word made flesh, alone manifests through a weak and perishable body, since “in Him dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily.”

56. It is, besides, the symbol of that burning love which, infused into His soul, enriches the human will of Christ and enlightens and governs its acts by the most perfect knowledge derived both from the beatific vision and that which is directly infused.

57. And finally – and this in a more natural and direct way – it is the symbol also of sensible love, since the body of Jesus Christ, formed by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, possesses full powers of feelings and perception, in fact, more so than any other human body.

58. Since, therefore, Sacred Scripture and the official teaching of the Catholic faith instruct us that all things find their complete harmony and order in the most holy soul of Jesus Christ and that He has manifestly directed His threefold love for the securing of our redemption, it unquestionably follows that we can contemplate and honor the Heart of the divine Redeemer as a symbolic image of His love and a witness of our redemption and, at the same time, as a sort of mystical ladder by which we mount to the embrace of “God our Savior.”

59. Hence His words, actions, commands, miracles, and especially those works which manifest more clearly His love for us – such as the divine institution of the Eucharist, His most bitter sufferings and death, the loving gift of His holy Mother to us, the founding of the Church for us, and finally, the sending of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and upon us – all these, we say, ought to be looked upon as proofs of His threefold love.

60. Likewise we ought to meditate most lovingly on the beating of His Sacred Heart by which He seemed, as it were, to measure the time of His sojourn on earth until that final moment when, as the Evangelists testify, “crying out with a loud voice ‘It is finished’ and bowing His Head, He yielded up the ghost.” Then it was that His heart ceased to beat and His sensible love was interrupted until the time when, triumphing over death, He rose from the tomb.

61. But after His glorified body had been re-united to the soul of the divine Redeemer, conqueror of death, His most Sacred Heart never ceased, and never will cease, to beat with calm and imperturbable pulsations. Likewise, it will never cease to symbolize the threefold love with which He is bound to His heavenly Father and the entire human race, of which He has every claim to be the mystical Head.

The Two Elements of Devotion to the Sacred Heart:

Consecration and Reparation

We consecrate ourselves to the Sacred Heart by acknowledging Him as Creator and Redeemer and as having full rights over us as King of Kings, by repenting, and by resolving to serve Him.

We make reparation for the indifference and ingratitude with which He is treated and for leaving Him abandoned by humanity.

To carry out these general goals of consecration and reparation, there are quite specific devotions authorized by the Church.

History of the Devotion

From the earliest days of the Church, “Christ’s open side and the mystery of blood and water were meditated upon, and the Church was beheld issuing from the side of Jesus as Eve came forth from the side of Adam. It is in the eleventh and twelfth centuries that we find the first unmistakable indications of devotion to the Sacred Heart. Through the wound in the side, the wounded Heart was gradually reached, and the wound in the Heart symbolized the wound of love.” (Catholic Encyclopedia)

General devotion to the Sacred Heart, the birthplace of the Church and the font of Love, were

popular in Benedictine and Cistercian monasteries, especially in response to the devotion of St. Gertrude the Great (b. 1256), but specific devotions became even more popularized when St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690), a Visitation nun, had a personal revelation involving a series of visions of Christ as she prayed before the Blessed Sacrament. She wrote, "He disclosed to me the marvels of his Love and the inexplicable secrets of his Sacred Heart." Christ emphasized to her His love and His woundedness caused by Man's indifference to this love.

He promised that, in response to those who consecrate themselves and make reparations to His Sacred Heart:

He will give them all the graces necessary in their state of life.

He will establish peace in their homes.

He will comfort them in all their afflictions.

He will be their secure refuge during life, and above all, in death.

He will bestow abundant blessings upon all their undertakings.

Sinners will find in His Heart the source and infinite ocean of mercy.

Lukewarm souls shall become fervent.

Fervent souls shall quickly mount to high perfection.

He will bless every place in which an image of His Heart is exposed and honored.

He will give to priests the gift of touching the most hardened hearts.

Those who shall promote this devotion shall have their names written in His Heart.

In the excessive mercy of His Heart, His all-powerful love will grant to all those who receive Holy Communion on the First Fridays in nine consecutive months the grace of final perseverance; they shall not die in His disgrace, nor without receiving their sacraments. His divine Heart shall be their safe refuge in this last moment.

The devotions attached to these promises are:

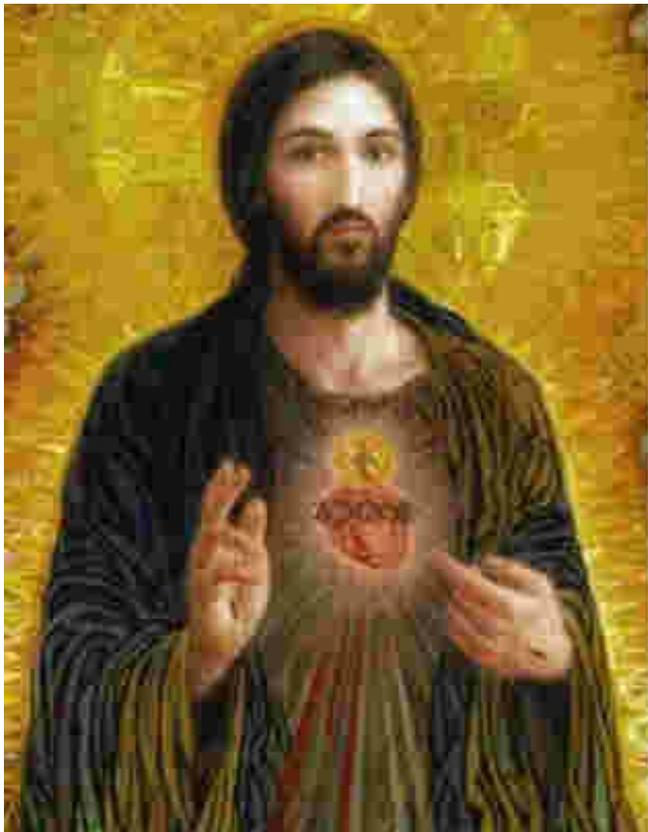
Receiving Communion frequently

First Fridays: going to Confession and receiving the Eucharist on the first Friday of each month for nine consecutive months. Many parishes will offer public First Friday devotions; if they do, you must perform First Fridays publicly. If it isn't so offered in your parish, you can do this privately, going to Confession, receiving the Eucharist, and offering your prayers for the intention of the Holy Father.

Holy Hour: Eucharistic Adoration for one hour on Thursdays. ("Could you not watch one hour with me?") Holy Hour can be made alone or as part of a group with formal prayers.

Or by celebrating the feast of the Sacred Heart.

On Friday June 7th the Church celebrates the feast of the Sacred Heart. May this summer find you resting in the heart of Jesus and may your faith be ever stronger. Pax.



This contribution is available at <http://www.deaconpolo.com/2013/05/sacred-heart-of-jesus.html>
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A Love Story on Memorial Day [at Minnesota Mom]



Twenty years ago, I was finishing up a degree in Secondary Education and was asked to interview someone of retirement age. I picked two of my favorite people in the world: my mom and dad, who were then 66.

In light of my father's recent diagnosis, and in honor of his service to this country, I am republishing this story from (not so) long ago. I remember it like it was yesterday, you know? Cherish your time with the ones you love.

The day was bright, the early morning sun falling with its customary late September crispness as I drove the 45 miles to my hometown. It was Sunday, and I arrived to find my father standing at the sink. Apron on, he had his hands in a bowl of apples just gathered from the trees out back. "Your mother's resting," he told me.

He sat down with me at the table to be interviewed for a paper I was writing. "My life is an open book," he said. "What chapter do you want?"

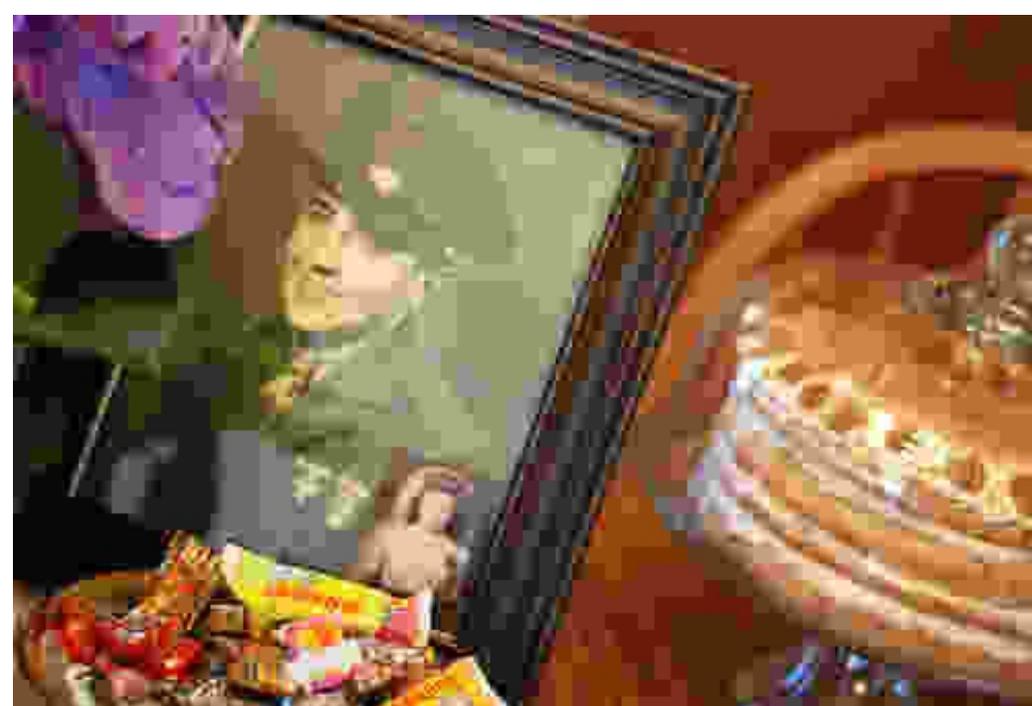
* * * * *

My father was born 66* years ago on March 28, 1925. He was born neither far from nor long after my mother in a small town in northern Minnesota. His parents were farmers and the infamous “Dustbowl Days” were no kinder to them than to anyone. His dad lost the farm, twice.

Yet, “we always had enough food on the table,” my father acknowledged. “Dad seen to that. They were very trying times, but we were united as a family. We were closer together in the Depression Days than if you grew up with a lot of money, it seems like.”

His education began at the age of six. With one hand holding close his books and the other on his lunch, (most likely a couple of pancakes rolled with sugar, a peanut butter sandwich or—on a good day—a bit of pork), my father would make his way to the one-room country schoolhouse the children jokingly referred to as “Brushwood College.” He spent eight years there and then transferred to the parochial school in town. He left, two years shy of a diploma, on December 7, 1941.

“I got real gung-ho to go into the Marines,” he said, “And I was only seventeen years’ old then. I conned my mother and dad to sign the papers so I could go in and be a big-shot Marine—a big hero.”



My father spent a total of 33 months overseas. He seldom speaks about his World War II experience, giving in only to persistent children who have papers to write. Even then he speaks more matter-of-factly than emotionally. He saw “a lot of combat.” He “grew up in a hurry.” Still, I know he spent many, many sleepless nights in the foxhole, alone with his rosary and his fear, and I have seen the creased black-and-white photograph that he retrieved from the body of an “enemy.”

The boy who went off to war returned a man. He brought with him some painful memories, yes, but also a budding hope for the future in his heart and a set of photos in his pocket. (My mother didn't know that her sister had been sending Dad my mother's pictures; however, both her sister and her mother had been determined to have him in the family.)

A year and a half later, on January 29, 1947, my father George and my mother Rita were married.



After about 45 minutes of being interviewed, my father grew restless, shifting in his chair and checking his watch. “How much longer?” he asked. “I gotta get my pie made.” My mother certainly didn't marry a stereotype. Her husband is a man who spends as much time in the kitchen as he does beneath the hood of his daughter's car—and who is as comfortable washing the floor as he is watching a football game on TV.

"We're nearly finished," I told him. Up until this time, the interview had been a sort of review—an interesting history lesson. Yet I knew that for every story my father told there was a moral, and I wondered what the voice of 66-years' worth of experience might whisper to the person who had gained it.

"What is old age?" I asked him. "Does old age come with being retired?"

"Far from it!" he said. "Old age is when you sit in a rocking chair looking out the window all day. That's when your old age comes." He spoke about keeping active--be it through a good hobby, or doing some farming--but above all, keeping active. "Otherwise old age will set in fast."

"Do you feel 66?"

"Oh, yeah. I get little aches and pains that I never had before. It was 'go go' before, you know? Heck, the Lord's been good to me. I don't get sick very often. Your ma and I, we lead a pretty quiet life."

"Do you think about death?"

"Oh, any time the Lord wants to take me I'm ready."

"Are you afraid?"

My father's voice drops low, and more than his answer--more than his conviction--I hear his faith. "No. Absolutely not. We're all going to die--it's just when the Lord calls us. And if you're ready to meet Him, what's there to be worried about?"



It was about that time that my mother emerged from the back bedroom. She smiled, a bit sheepish at having had to nap. "Are you ready," I asked. "Oh sure," came the response. She poured a cup of coffee and took a pair of scissors and the coupons from the Sunday paper with her to the table. That way at least her hands could be working on something while she was being held a captive of my interview. My mother has never been one to sit idle.

My thoughts were still on what my father had just said, and that was the subject I wanted most to return to.

"Ma, what is old age?"

She looked at me. "Do you want the truth? I haven't had time to think about it. Really and truly. And I haven't had time to think that I'm growing old, because I haven't finished--I haven't near finished what has to be done." Her eyes were on the coupons before her--scanning, choosing, methodically clipping--and I felt that her words were being chosen in the same easy yet deliberate fashion.

"A person is old when they feel old," she continued. "When they don't feel they can accomplish

anything more. When their sight is gone, and when they can't think, and they can't go and be and do for others..." She thought for a moment. "When they're not able to be the person they've been all along."

"Do you feel like you're 66?"

"Well, I don't know how old anybody's supposed to feel at what age. Chronologically I don't feel like I am what I am, except on certain days..." Again she paused. "You have to keep your hands in something and keep at something. As it is now we gotta just go and go and go."

My mother has always gone and gone and gone. She finished high school at the age of 16. From there she went straight on to business college in Minneapolis, graduating in May of '41. At 22 she married my father and at 26 began a family (after several years of trying). Her family was still growing 16 years later when she had me; she was just one month shy of 42.

She has done volunteer work at hospitals and retirement homes, and has worked with the area Hospice program. I wondered if her experience with Hospice had changed her outlook on death.

"I've never been scared of death," she said. She showed me the obituary of a woman in their community who had just passed away, a woman she had known and worked with. "You know, it kind of makes you envious. Her pilgrimage is done and I'm proud to have been a part of her life."

I asked my mother why she thought so many people were afraid of death. "If people don't have faith and they don't know there's a Lord waiting for them--if they're not headed in the right direction--they think this is the end. And it's not."

* * * * *

After these interviews I was struck by how my parents' convictions so closely paralleled one

another. The years of their life together represent not only a union in marriage but a union in faith. Their faith has always seen them through--from the Depression to World War II to raising four teenagers during the sixties. ("My hair turned gray!" said my mother.) Their reward is in their family--their six children, their 22 grandchildren, their 14 great-grandchildren--and their reward will be in death.



"You must remember," said my mother, "that we have won the battle. 'Greatest is He that is in you than he that is in the world.' And he that is in the world is forever trying to make us despair. And there's just no way! I mean, I've looked at the last page...and we're the winners!"

This contribution is available at <http://patentsgirl.blogspot.com/2013/05/a-love-story-on-memorial-day.html>
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Is Pope Francis an imposter? [at Blog of a Country Priest]

@Cathy

Sorry if this is a bit long but you are not substantiating your opinion with any facts.

You keep saying it's contrary to scripture but you fail to state what exactly is contradictory! So what is she saying that is so patently against scripture and doctrine, faith and morals??

I'm aware that Satan can impersonate – he tried this at Medjugorje with those visionaries.

In fact, most of the visions claimed around the world each year are not approved by the CC. That, btw does not make them false, but simply not approved by the Church.

So MDM *might* be getting messages from the dark side but is she in fact? This is the whole point. I think not given the correlations with other longstanding apparitions and locutions.

Mark Miravalle's opinion piece is exactly that. His opinion.

He has no authority to make pronouncements on this or other alleged divine messages. i.e you don't have to accept any of what he says.

Nevertheless the link you provided STILL does not address my main point. Precisely what dimension of scripture or Catholic doctrine is being contradicted by MDM? Miravelle does not define any contradiction.

Of Fr. Rene's summary points one would have to conclude that:

- 1) There is no apparent lack of conformity with faith and morals (as I have been saying all along). IF there are, then again, please clearly point these out.
- 2) The MDM messages are interior locutions rather than visual apparitions. As such, they are of a form which is consistent with the mystical tradition of the Church.
- 3) Do the messages bring about (or intend to bring about), greater conversion; spiritual peace; spiritual joy; new or renewed faith, trust, and charity; and greater fidelity to and union with the Church?

I would say that is exactly what they are doing. If they don't then you would have to say that Fatima, Garabandal, Akita and La Salette are also wrongly approved by the Church because they contain frightening visions of Hell, the Warning and the Chastisement. Ditto the Divine Mercy and Medjugorje stuff. A personal apprehension at some of the messages again, does not make them

invalid.

I don't know whether all the Australian bishops have read the entirety of her messages.

What I do know is that the Brisbane bishop has said he has only read some of them and yet feels he is able to make a very general but authoritative judgement about them.

He also fails to indicate how MDM contradicts Church doctrine or scripture but says it is false and corrosive without providing any evidence except a point about millenarianism. See: (<http://adriansharp.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/abp-coleridge-ordinariate-and-maria-divine-mercy.pdf>).

On the point of millenarianism, the question must be asked....is this an incontrovertible article of faith?

You see, eating meat on Fridays was once a mortal sin – an article of faith – but now all of a sudden is not. How can this be? Either it is a mortal sin and a doctrine of the Church or it is not. If this was wrong and can be changed, so presumably could the CC view about millenarianism.

Re: Points 1-7 : I don't see what points you're making here.

1. Spirit of falsity.

That is the main question of course. Are they false? You think so. I do not.

2. Morbid curiosity.

That some people are morbid about the MDM stuff? Maybe, but that does not make them invalid. This is in fact common with all, even approved apparitions.

That MDM has not submitted to church investigation? She has not been asked to as far as we know.

3. Confusion, anxiety, and deep depression....

What exactly are you saying is confusing about these messages? I find a high degree of internal consistency throughout with themes of penance, conversion, serious sin and lack of regard for God and impending punishment some of these. Along with the indescribable joy of the New Jerusalem. The messages are remarkably consistent in fact both internally and externally with previous ones.

4. Obstinacy. One of the surest signs of a diabolical spirit.

5. Constant indiscretion and a restless spirit.

Not sure at all why you included these two. What obstinacy? And does she seem arrogant in her writings? I can't see this. Extremist? Malicious? Does she neglect her children?

In fact, she constantly refers to her own feelings of unworthiness and struggle to fulfil what is

allegedly asked of her by Jesus and Mary. It seems quite the contrary. She can hardly be accused of indiscretion given her anonymity.

6. Spirit of pride and vanity.

She allegedly has been told to spread these messages as quickly and widely as possible. Isn't this exactly what ALL visionaries/locutors are supposed to do with their messages – otherwise what is their point? It is not to keep them to oneself. More so in this case, she indicates that the urgency to spread them is now great.

7. False humility.

Again, not sure why you refer to this. Refer to 5.

8. Despair, lack of confidence, and discouragement.

A number of times, MDM states that those in a state of grace or working towards this (as we all indeed should be) should be joyful about these messages not morbid. Those who ignore and hate God are the ones who should be alarmed. Fair point I would have thought and entirely consistent with scripture and doctrine.

Moreover, she has already proved correct about a number of predictions made which have eventuated.

The only real sticking point I find is her assertions about the pope. I have read elsewhere that there is growing unease amongst both laity and clergy in Rome regarding Francis but no more than that.

It is difficult to accept but if you know Revelation, one of the popes WILL prove to be the false prophet. Is it this one? I don't know.

BTW, she hasn't been disobedient to anyone.

She has said she must not reveal herself at this point and no-one has demanded she do so for examination anyway so this is a non-issue.

This contribution is available at <http://www.acountrypriest.com/is-pope-francis-an-imposter/>
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I gave birth to Patrick at 7 pm on a Sunday evening and at 2 am, a nurse entered my room to tell me I needed to use the toilet. I was basking in the miracle of birthing a child into this world and because I was feeling rather "I am woman, hear me roarish", I refused her request.

"Honey, it's been awhile since you've urinated, you need to get out of bed and try to go on the toilet," she encouraged me.

"No, no I don't, what I really need to do is take a bath," I replied.

She shook her head.

"You can't have a bath unless you use the toilet," she said.

"But I don't have to

go

to the toilet," I responded, this time more aggressively.

"How 'bout this? You use the toilet and I'll let you take a bath all by yourself. Deal?"

I thought about her proposition and realized my desire for a bath trumped my reluctance to obey this pesky nurse.

"Deal," I grinned.

I threw back my covers, swooned briefly at my sleeping babe and husband, and stood.

Repositioning myself from a supine position to an erect one caused my bodily flood gates to open and--horror of all horrors--I peed, all over myself and all over the floor.

"Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry! I didn't realize I had to go! I'm so embarrassed! Please forgive me," I begged.

I grabbed a towel from my bed and tried to wipe up urine while I rushed to the toilet, leaking fluid the entire way. The nurse giggled at me, partly because I was so horrified and partly because I had been so adamant about not having to go.

"It's OK, honey, it's OK. I'm gonna clean it up, no harm done," she tried to assure me.

"I couldn't feel my bladder. I couldn't feel how full it was," I explained.

The nurse giggled again.

"Yeah, I know. Happens after childbirth. You had a big old baby sitting on your bladder for 9 months and when he came out, you couldn't feel it was full. It's OK, honey. I promise."

I sat on the toilet, mortified, and watched the kind woman disinfect the room. When she finished cleaning, she let me have my bath as promised and every time after that, when some nurse told me to pee, I did it--promptly and without argument.

I thought of that nurse recently because her willingness to clean up my mess--which could have been avoided had I not been so stubborn--was a great example to me. I'm ashamed to admit this, but in my early days of my mothering, I maintained the notion that the constant disposal of dirty diapers was somehow beneath me. I had a graduate degree and 18 years of education and professional experience and all of that had prepared me for....emptying diaper genies and managing waste removal?

Didn't I have other more important, more exotic things to do?

When did my sole talent dissolve into procuring and disposing of waste products?

I'm afraid my list of resentments wasn't limited to wiping people's bottoms, either. I was convinced my skill set for laundering and cleaning and cooking was much less important than the my calling to, you know,

save the world

. Forget about those children of mine, real people

needed

me.

(Wasn't I a peach?)

But what about the nurse who cheerfully cleaned up the urine I sprayed all over the hospital room floor?

She didn't think it beneath her to wipe my bottom. And thank God, because I needed her help.

[Betty Duffy](#)

writes of a similar light bulb experience she had right after giving birth to her sixth child. She states:

It struck me in the hospital, what a dangerous world we would live in if more people felt that cleaning those who can't clean themselves is "beneath their talents." Consider that my OB doc, a highly skilled professional, spent about thirty minutes post delivery...uh... cleaning things up, and that later it was the nurses who helped me to the bathroom, following that, the housekeeper who, for a living, mops the floors and collects the trash and towels of women who've just given birth—there are many, many people on many different pay scales, making a living wiping people's bottoms.

Duffy is right. It

is

dangerous to think physically caring for those who can't care for themselves is "beneath our talents". We need hospital workers and doctors and nurses and the others like them--people willing to wipe people's bottoms for a living.

And more importantly, we need mothers convicted about the importance of wiping their own children's bottoms. Even if we can't see the immediate value in the work, our lack of vision can't negate it's importance. Our children need us. The service we provide to them out of love is inestimable.

I'd like to say that after 10 years of parenting, I no longer think my skills and talents could be best used in other areas. I'd like to claim I clean up puke and strip vomit bed sheets and scrub toilets filled with yuck with a smile on my face. While I do admit that I no longer engage in the "isn't there more than this?" debate with myself, I still possess a very real human tendency to think I'm better than certain tasks related to motherhood.

I'm still guilty of refusing to serve in ignoble ways.

The truth is, a great amount of pride still lurks in the crevices of my mom-being.

But I also have hope.

In November, I will give birth to a sixth baby, another small person who will offer me a million opportunities to embrace all the difficult aspects of motherhood--especially the dirty ones.

I hope I do it better this time and maybe with a bit more humility.

“How can it be a large career to tell other people's children about the Rule of Three, and a small career to tell one's own children about the universe? How can it be broad to be the same thing to everyone, and narrow to be everything to someone? No. A woman's function is laborious, but because it is gigantic, not because it is minute. I will pity Mrs. Jones for the hugeness of her task; I will never pity her for its smallness.”

GK Chesterton

This contribution is available at <http://www.colleenduggan.net/2013/05/the-buisness-of-wiping-bottoms-thoughts.html>
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Sunday, 19 May 2013

Five Years Catholic

By the time this post goes up, I should be in Prague, happily hanging out with the Wegener sisters.

Five years ago, on Pentecost (11 May), I was received into the Catholic Church. To commemorate this happy occasion, I wrote a poem:

*Theandric acts and sacramental seals
have beacons me; the locus of right vision
unshaken in the world's great woes and weals,
still strength in times of rapture and misprision.*

*Pellucid words brought from the deepest days,
freighted with wealth and in anointment spoken,
memorial and presence, gift and praise,
give substance to the sign, the Body broken.*

*Five years ago my skin could feel the calling
indelibly engraved upon my soul,
the hope that after many times of falling
and fruitless searches I might be made whole.*

The bishop's act was human and divine:

through it the Word acceded to the Sign.

This contribution is available at <http://turgonian.blogspot.nl/2013/05/five-years-catholic.html>
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Unique and Beautiful You [at Footprints On My Heart]

You are beautiful. You are loved.

You are unrepeatable, unique, valuable.

You are sacred in God's eyes.

You are sacred.

*You.**

For practically my entire life, I have struggled with self-esteem. I thought in order to be myself I had to be somebody else. I thought that by adapting their styles, their beliefs, their level of maturity, their personality, their behavior, etc. into *my* lifestyle, I would figure out who I am and what I am supposed to be. I spent much of my time comparing myself to people, especially my siblings, and wasting away the hours of the day daydreaming and longing to be somebody else.

I longed to be somebody else because I thought they were *beautiful*.

I longed to be beautiful. Happy. Cherished.

Beloved.

It wasn't until I was about 16 years old that I began to realize that I am my own person. I don't

have to, or really need to, be somebody else. I began to look at my family differently and notice the unique personalities, similarities and differences of each member. They all had one thing in common, but what struck me was how **uniquely** they each went about being it: **beautiful**.

I was a 17 year old Senior in high school. It was a strange year for me: homeschooled my entire life and now I was being more immediately prepared to venture out on

my own path

. I had to discern the difference between what I thought I was supposed to do (namely, follow directly in the footsteps of any one of my older siblings) and what God's will truly was for me. I wanted to take a year off from academics and serve on

[NET Ministries](#)

as my brother had done several years before. I applied and went to an interview weekend at Franciscan University. While there, I prayed and prayed, but was confused by the thoughts in my heart. I

thought

that this is what God was calling me to do. I

thought

that this would be the perfect way to grow up, to witness to my brother (who had since fallen away from the Faith). I

thought

that this was God's plan for me

because

one of my siblings had done it before. And I would have pushed myself through it had NET not sent me a letter asking me to wait. I was not called to travel with them, at least not that year.

I knew this meant I would be attending the Community College in our area that Fall. If ever there was something I dreaded, this was it. I did not *want* to go to college. I did not feel I was *ready* for college. I did not think I was *responsible* enough for college. But going to college and being in a classroom for the first time in my life sounded like a more productive and richer

experience to this 17 year old than getting a full-time job flipping burgers. So I went.

And praised be Jesus Christ! He knew. **God always has a plan.**

That first semester of college, I learned about the Montessori Method for the first time. It immediately resonated with me as something I would be comfortable with and enjoy coming from a homeschool background. I was eager to learn more about the method.

This is when I began to realize and accept that God has his own unique and beautiful plan for me and he probably wasn't calling me to follow *precisely* in my older sisters' footsteps. None of my siblings had ever done anything with the Montessori Method, much less knew what it was.

Exploring this was a unique adventure that none of my siblings had previously traveled. It was all me... and God.

A year later I had a job at a real Montessori School.

I. Loved. It.

Still do, in fact.

I've now been working there a year and have enjoyed every moment (even the less pleasant times). God knew. All along, from the time before I was created, God was writing my story and making me a unique and beautiful individual, unrepeatable, and **precious in His eyes.**

Beautiful.

Cherished.

Beloved.

It wasn't until just recently that I began to accept God's love for me as me. God isn't calling me to be my sister, my Mom, or my best friend. God isn't calling me to be that blogger or the other blogger. God isn't calling me to be that person in the pew in front of me who looks so beautiful and holy. **He is calling me to learn from them and love them**, but he isn't calling me to be them. He is calling me to be me: ultimately, a *Saint*.

When in high school, I asked a friend (who is now a priest) for some advice regarding prayer, spiritual growth, and vocational discernment. His response:

"Pray, pray, and more pray. Also be a good woman. Don't grow up too fast, but enjoy life as God brings it to you. If you work on being the holiest and most virtuous woman of God you can be, your vocation will become pretty clear."

Now in college, under the guidance of a spiritual director, I understand his words in a new and brighter light. God is not calling me to be anxious, concerned, and worried about yesterday, today, or tomorrow. If I am so sure that only in God will my soul be at rest, that only on his path will I be happiest -- what reason do I have to worry? what further proof do I need that his will is my delight?

God is calling me.

He is. I know it. I have a vocation; I need not worry about the details. If I focus on being the holiest and most virtuous woman of God I can be, all will be well. There is peace and joy in doing the Father's will.

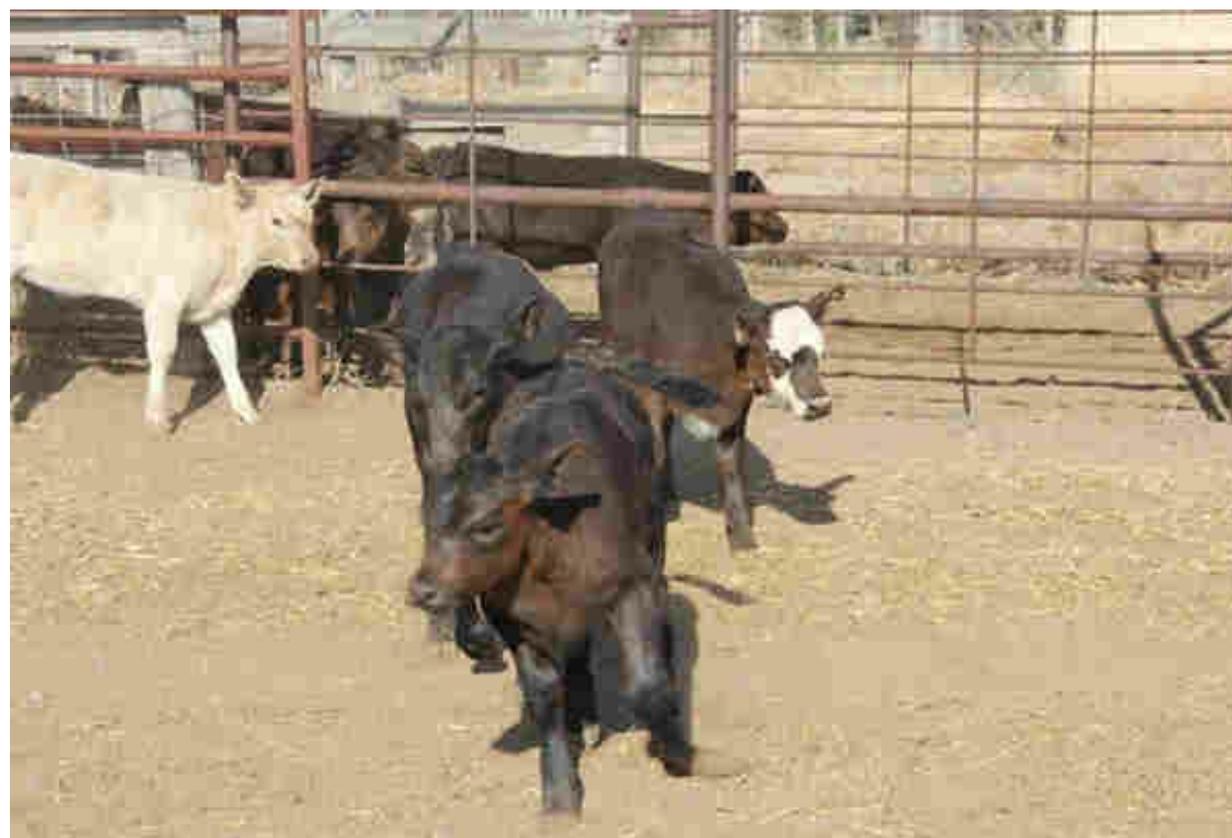
God has a story written for me. Frequently, I wish I could be the editor. Despite all the spelling and grammatical errors I contribute, I trust that the manuscript will be revised and polished (through the Sacraments, especially Confession) and ready to print.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever; His love won't be any different from one day to the next.

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Branding at the Ranch 2013... [at The Fisk Files]

Life on the ranch is cyclical. In the fall, we wean and ship. In the winter (and throughout the year at this point), we feed. In the spring, we calve. And, in the early summer, we brand.



With the current climate/weather/lack of rain, our branding days have decreased drastically. We only have about a quarter of the typical amount of calves to brand this year. So, we accomplished it all in one Friday and Saturday.

A branding goes a little something like this:

First, we gather a lot of help. Whether it's neighbors, family, friends or at times those looking to experience life on the ranch for a day, we get the crew established a few weeks out. This time we had about twenty people total (that includes those of us just watching)! About a week out, whoever is cooking plans the breakfast and lunch. This year, I had Friday to plan for, and we had

breakfast biscuits around 5:30 am and then Italian meatballs, pasta, salad, bread and blueberry cheesecake for lunch. In that same week, work is done here to get the cattle moved from their pastures to land closer to the pens to make gathering on the day-of a bit easier.

On the day-of, the help gathers early to have breakfast and saddle the horses (before or right at sunrise). Then, the crew leaves on horseback to begin gathering the cows and calves and moving them toward the pens. Once gathered, the calves are separated from their mamas and the branding supplies are readied. As the branding irons heat up, two people mount their horses and take their turn as the "draggers."

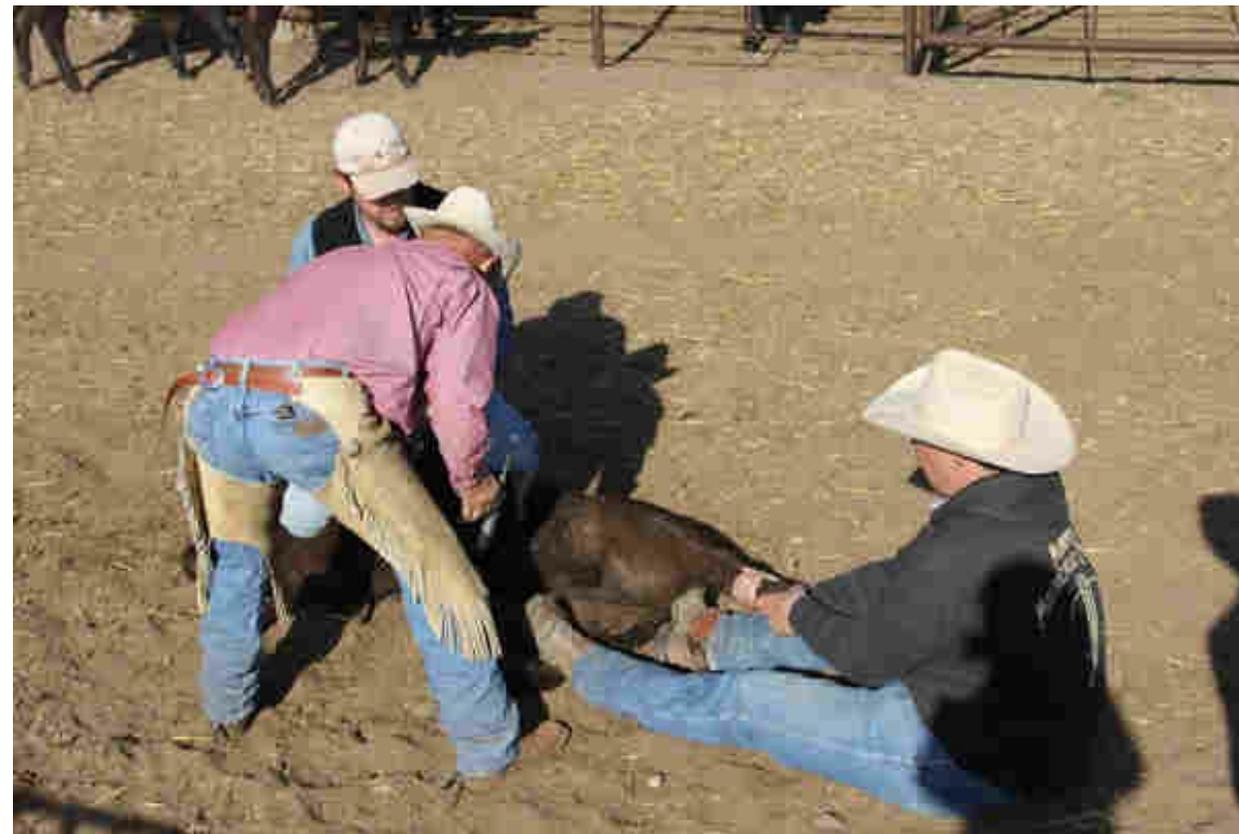


Their job is to rope and drag the calves to the "flankers" who get the calf on the ground and ready to brand.



Once on the ground, the calves are branded, ear marked, given vaccinations, and cut (if they are bull calves and we don't want to keep them for bulls).





Done. One calf down, and the process is repeated as the crew takes turns with different jobs until

the job is complete!

Often, the cattle are not close enough together to brand all in one set of pens, so the gear is loaded up after one set is complete, and the process begins again at a different location.



We also typically have some spectators:







These men and women are the real deal. They don't wear hats and spurs as fashion accessories. Their gear serves a purpose. They work hard, day in and out, to not only provide for their families, but for a nation dependent upon agriculture.



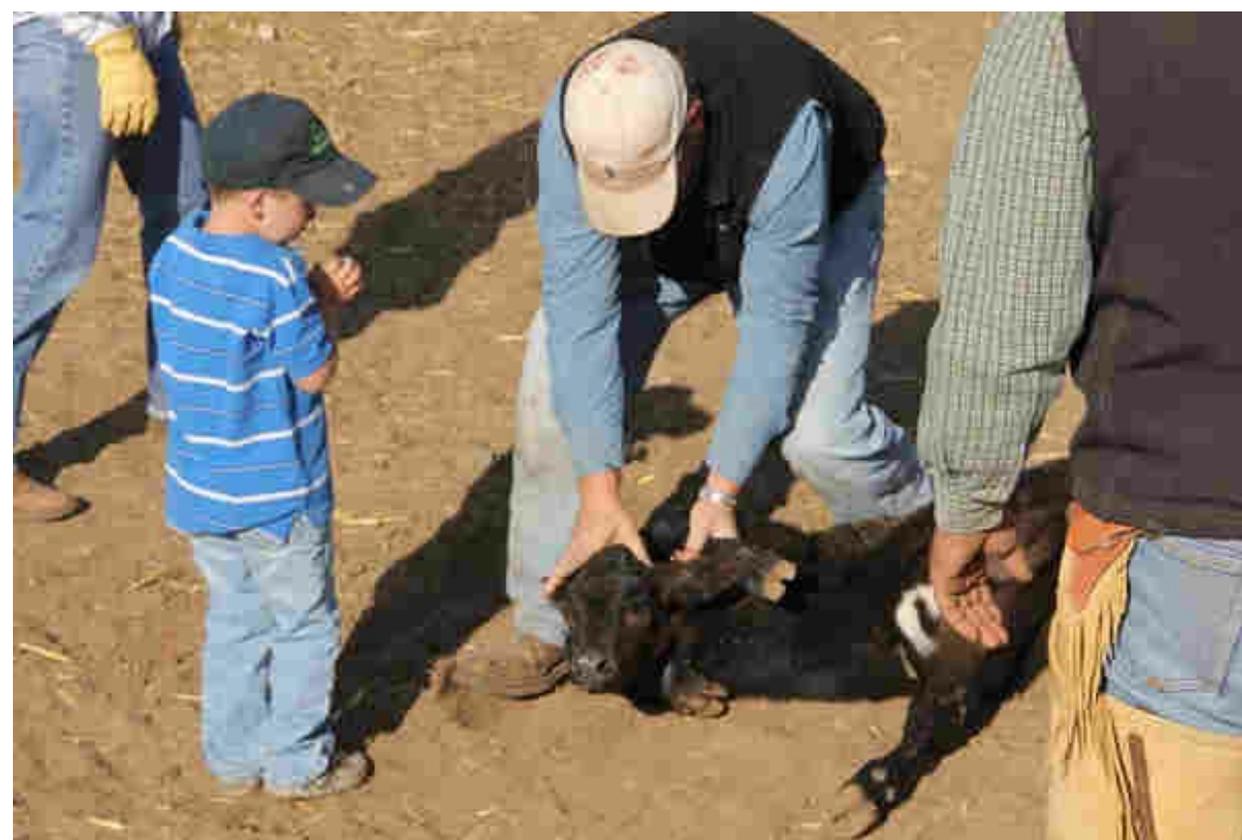






I'm proud to be a part of that. And, the little guys await their turn to carry on the tradition..







For us, it isn't a weekend affair. It is our life.



And, I love it.

On Shortcomings and Strengths [at Postcards from the UK]

There is a priest I know who has lots of shortcomings. Most people will roll their eyes or share an understood smirk when his name is mentioned. He is an extremely intelligent and learned man. This intelligence and knowledge can make him hard to relate to personally and it definite makes it hard for kids to relate to him. He can be a little condescending and snotty because of it as well BUT...

After he finished his homily last Sunday, I turned to Mark and said- "He sure is good at giving homilies." He educates, provoke more thought and applies the Gospel to everyday life- all in an appropriate time frame!

Now for the light bulb moment.



I would be a lot happier and kinder person if I let go of what people AREN'T and focus on what they ARE.

Honestly, this thought struck me like a lightning bolt. Think of all the people in your life and how often you dwell and harp on who they aren't, their weaknesses rather than their strengths. Think about all the disappointment, stress, anger and sadness that has resulted- ON BOTH SIDES! Husbands, wives, kids, friends. The list goes on and on. Even co-workers, bosses and anyone you interact with. Why couldn't they just...? Doesn't she know that...? If only they would...!

Everyone has a good side, has assets and strengths. These are the flip side of the coin to their weaknesses. Often it is their strengths that dictate their weakness and the very thing you love about them begets the very thing that makes you crazy.

I'll share one more priest story because I think we expect SO much more of them. They are men of God but they are MEN, after all- flesh and bones, different personalities, shortcomings and all.

Years ago I went to Mass with my grandmother. I was very pregnant with Anne and had a three-year-old and 18-month-old in tow. Child A bumped into Child B who then let out a cry. Pause here for quick aside:

I always take small children out of Mass when they make noise. Always. I do think you need to give them a chance and as they get older the time IN church will finally begin to eclipse the time spent OUT of church.

Back to the story. Before I could even scoop Child B up and whisk them out, I was blocked by an usher waving a note in my face. I was surprised and embarrassed so I took the note and quickly exited. When I composed myself I looked at the small square of paper which read: The 4 pm Mass is a non-disturbance Mass. It went on for a few lines but after the first line, my heart started racing and I swear I saw stars! I was furious! Non-disturbance Mass? All Masses should be non-disturbance! A man was standing near me and could tell how upset I was so he asked if I was okay. Of course, hormones were not on my side being seven months pregnant. I can remember having a hard time even catching my breath. I showed him the note. He kind of shrugged and said- Yeah, well that was the alternative to what Father Brown used to do. He would stop the Mass and stare down any offending family until they slunk out of the church in shame. Long story short, I ended up confronting Father Brown after Mass, in my hormonal state. The exchange amounted to him saying that he believed that children shouldn't come to Mass until they could sit still and be quiet while I shrieked back that I had a different opinion and I believed Jesus did as well. I wish I could accurately describe the iciness of his manner, his steel blue eyes which showed not an ounce of warmth. I thought it was not possible for this man to have any compassion in his heart and I hated him. Honestly, I hated him and knew it was a sin to feel this way. I halfheartedly prayed about it occasionally.

Fast forward a few years. I was at Mass at another church and ran into a friend. Somehow, Father Brown's name came up and I relayed the story to her. She was on an email list that received a daily scriptural message from him. Did I want to sign up? Hmmm? Just retelling the story made me angry again. On the other hand I had prayed that I wouldn't feel so awful towards him. Maybe this was what I needed. For the next few years, until just recently actually, I read his message daily and encountered a different side of Father Brown. Not only was I able to forgive his shortcomings, I was witness to his strengths. There was not a ministry for Father Brown in dealing with young children but his reflections about the Saint of the day and the daily readings of Mass were inspired. Now I can focus on what he IS rather than what he ISN'T and it has given me peace.

I have started trying to consciously work on this each day with the people I encounter. It is not easy but it is a worthwhile practice because...

*“When we seek to discover the best in others,
we somehow bring out the best in ourselves.”*

- William Arthur Ward

Dina

Confidence [at Jumping In Puddles]

I was having a conversation with Mart the other day, that went a little something like this:

Mart: What did you think of Randy*? <

eyebrow raises>

Me: I mean, he is really nice! But, isn't he a teacher or something? Like, he has his PhD? He's too smart for me. We would have NOTHING in common!

Mart: What? Jen!

Me (sighs): I knowww...

Mart: Don't you

wanna

get married?? I am TRYING to help you out here. Eric was too good looking! So and so was too loud and too intense. That other guy was too something else... You haven't even gone on a DATE with ANY of these guys. How do you know?!

Me: ...

smiles awkwardly

Mart: Come on, Jen! Have some confidence!

Ah, yes. Confidence.

From

Dictionary.com

, confidence is described as:

belief in oneself and one's powers and abilities; self-confidence; self-reliance; assurance.

I mean... I would describe myself as a pretty confident person, except when it has anything to do with guys. Ugh. What is UP with that? I have recognized that I do this thing with ANY guy that I could possibly have any interest in... or that could be interested in me... where I find something wrong with the guy. "Wrong" is relative, I suppose. Really, I just pick and choose things that

make the guy not right for me. Sometimes, I'll be honest, it's pretty superficial things, other times it's legit things that we don't have in common/agree with.

I do this as a defense mechanism. I find

something

that gives me a reason not to like/get to know/date someone so then I don't have a chance...

of getting hurt

.

Ugh. It's frustrating. I frustrate myself all.of.the.time. with this part of my personality.

I wish I didn't worry about it! I wish I could just meet

people

guys and not think twice! But, I do. I do lack the confidence in myself... truly believing that I

am

a catch! I know it sounds crazy. I know the devil is weaseling his way up in my head. I know that God loves me and I am His beloved. Because of that I know I am worthy.

But, how does that actually equate into feeling confident? Where does the confidence actually come from? It's all well and good to have friends and family say that you are awesome! and any guy would be so lucky to have you! and all that jazz. It's sweet and nice and encouraging. But, really it just makes me question. Where, then, are all those guys? Why doesn't anyone ask me out? Or respond to all those messages on CatholicMatch?

Guh. I don't know. I guess I just have to 'put myself out there' as they say. That's hard when the majority of your time is spent in the hospital, sleeping, or with your BFFs fam (not that I am complaining!!).

I didn't really mean for this to be soooo Debbie Downer. Please don't let this fool you into thinking that I am super sad about my life or something. Because I am NOT! I have a wonderful and amazing life. These words were just on my heart to share. So, I did. Obvs. ;))

Suggestions? Comments?? A really great guy you think I should meet?! GET AT ME!!!

Paz y Amor.

*Guys names were changed for obvious reasons. Ya know, if they found this here blog, and saw

that I was talking about them, having NO idea who I even am. Um, embarrassing much?! Yes.

This contribution is available at <http://jumpinginpuddlesisfun.blogspot.com/2013/05/confidence.html>
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Our Lady, Bride Unbrided [at The Trenchcoat Introspective]



(via Go Sit In The Corner)

This particular title of Our Lady is fairly straightforward, at least at initial observation. This is not an allegorical title. It is no metaphor, no symbolical statement. As Christians, we know that Mary bore Jesus, the Son of God, as a virgin. The virgin birth, in fact, is key to our religion.

But how often do we really stop and think about what it means that Our Blessed Mother was a virgin? How often do we take the time to truly contemplate the implications of this doctrine?

When we call Our Lady “Unbrided,” this term does not mean “pure until union with God, but after Jesus was born she could do whatever felt good.” This is a word of Eternity. She is Ever-Virgin, Pure Forever. She must be. Any other union would be a defacement of God’s holy temple, a misuse of His gift to her.

When a woman is wed, she is to forsake all others for her husband, and this is doubly true for Mary, who wedded the Lord of All Time and Space. In the Old Testament, we say that our God is a jealous God. And this does not change with the formation of the New Covenant. God does not want us worshiping other gods, or putting anything above our love of Him. He cannot abide it. This great and burning jealousy, which is not Envy, but rather a love so powerful that it demands all that we have to give Him in return. Whatever He wants of us, requests small or great, we must endeavor to fulfill, not from fear of punishment, but of the love which yearns for nothing more than

to repay Him for all He has given. It is His to begin with, His to give, His to claim. We must never forget that, and never cheapen His gifts to us by spending them on spit and festering rot.

And so it is with Our Lady, who, having been chosen above all women to be the Vessel of Salvation, made a commitment beyond a simple “yes.” This was not a “Ok, I’ll have your kid.” She said “be it done unto me according to your will.” She did not say that this ended with the birth of the Son of Man. In her FIAT, she signed herself over to God’s will, to do His work, forever. There was no turning back without blasphemy, no moment in which she could say, well, that was then and now I really want a human husband. No, she is committed to God forever, and that commitment makes her blessed among all women.

What does this mean for Joseph? Naturally, his young bride’s part in the salvation plan impacted his life in a major way. Church teaching has always shown him as an older widower, previously married with children of his own. This is a good thing for Joseph, because I think it would make it easier to deal with this new phase of his life as Mary’s Paladin. From the moment the angel spoke to him and told him not to be afraid to take Mary under his roof, he must have known that this would not be a typical marriage, that this time, there were forces beyond the natural order at work.

Thus, it is important that we look not only at Our Lady’s “yes,” but at Joseph’s “yes.” He could have followed through with his plan and divorced her quietly. He was given the choice. The angel did not force him to choose that life, but merely told him not to be afraid of the difficult decision. And he chose, having heirs already, to protect and cherish the Mother of God for as long as he walked the earth... to unite himself as well with God’s plan.

I call Joseph Mary’s Paladin because this suits his role in her life perfectly. He is called to sacrifice a physical union with his wife in order to be her protector. It would have been deadly for Our Lady and the Son of God should she have been left as a single mother. Joseph was called to stand in as husband and father, as protector and provider, and to serve all their needs until his death. What a great sacrifice for a man to make, all because his fiance said “yes” to God’s plan! And yet, how blessed was he for his faith, for fulfilling his manly duties in such beautiful chastity and patience!

As we approach the end of Mary’s Month, I want you all to take the time to think of what you would sacrifice to do God’s will in your life. Do you feel called to a particular way of life that you are afraid of investigating? Do your dreams of fame or recognition hold you back from working among the shadows for a greater mission? Are you struggling with any kind of addiction, recognizing the harm but too stubborn to let go of the thing that pulls you away from God? Think on these things, brothers and sisters. Think on them, and offer them up to God, praying for help and intercession from those who beat the struggle and gave in to God’s will, difficult though it was.

Our Lady, Unblemished Mother, Bride Unbrided, pray for your children that they may come to understand and commit to God’s will in their lives. Pray that the Love of your life may become

for us as well the greatest Love, that we may forsake all others in His service save those He chooses for us. Lead us in purity of heart and mind, soul and body, and ask God to gather us close to Him in Heaven upon our dying.

St. Joseph, Paladin of Mary and Guardian of the Son Of God, pray for us that we may find the strength to have faith in God's will, and that we may commit ourselves to shielding the vulnerable and defending holy objects. Pray that we may find our way, though the world is rife with occlusion and devil's snares, to our place inside God's divine plan.

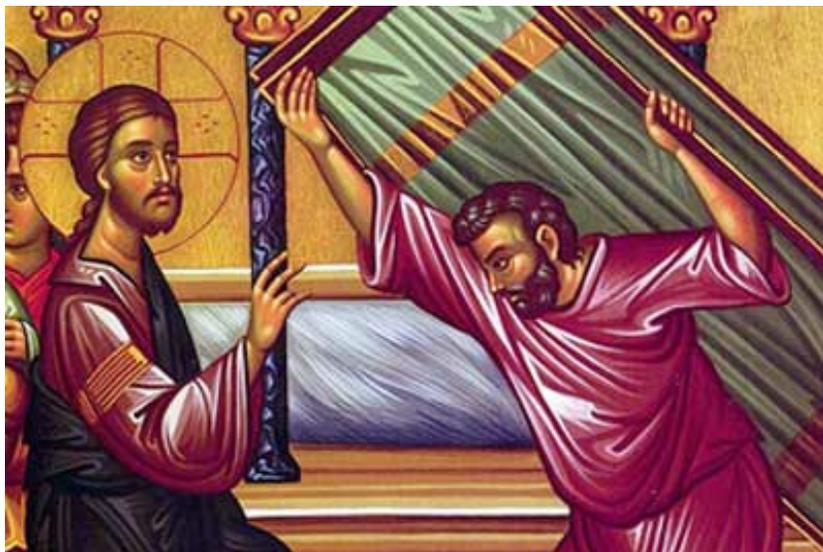
Amen.

-E.G. Norton

This contribution is available at <http://trenchcoatintrospective.wordpress.com/2013/05/21/our-lady-bride-unbridled/>
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Sunday of the Paralytic [at Blessed is the Kingdom]



I am grievously paralyzed in a multitude of sins and wrongful deeds. As you raised up the paralytic of old, also raise up my soul by your divine guidance, that I may cry out, “Glory to your power O Compassionate Christ.”

This morning I had the privilege of attending Divine Liturgy at Saints Kosmas and Damianos Greek Orthodox Church in Rochester, MN. The city of Rochester is probably best known for the Mayo Clinic. Thousands of people make their way here each year to seek healing from all kinds of sickness and disease. Today’s Gospel reading recounts the story of a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years. Jesus sees him lying by the pool of Bethesda and presents him with a simple question, *Do you want to be made whole?* The man’s response tells us that though he has been unsuccessful in finding a cure for his sickness, he does in fact wish to be made whole again. Through the power of Jesus’ words, he is healed of his paralysis.

The question posed in this passage from the Gospel of John is the same one God asks each of us. *Do you want to be made whole?* Christ continues to offer his healing power to us today. He does not wish for us to become paralyzed by our sins, unable to walk forward on our pilgrimage of faith. Saying yes to God’s offer of wholeness requires courage. We must be willing to leave behind the paralysis that comes with the fear and anxiety that often gets in the way. We must be willing to pick up our mat and walk.



I find it fascinating that the patron saints of the Greek Orthodox community in Rochester are Saints Cosmas and Damian. These two saints are often referred to in Greek as the Anargyroi, which translated means “those who received no pay”. Both men were trained as physicians and spent their lives in service to the sick without seeking payment for their work. Their example is a reminder to Christians who having freely received the healing power that comes through God’s forgiveness are in turn called to freely share this forgiveness with others. May we follow the example of these holy men.

O glorious, wonderworking physicians, having received the grace of healing, you reach out and restore health to those in need. But also, by your visitation you cast down the arrogance of the enemy, healing the world through miracles. (Kontakion of the Holy Anargyroi)

This contribution is available at <http://www.blessedisthekingdom.com/2013/05/26/sunday-of-the-paralytic/>
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Questioning Confirmation {IF You Believe...} [at Glimpse of Peace]

Preaching on Pentecost Sunday, Father Jim Northrop shares the down-side of receiving confirmation without proper preparation, and offers hope and concrete suggestions for a renewal of our relationship with the Holy Spirit.

Flowing from the great joy of Joseph's confirmation on Ascension Thursday

came a few insights into the tremendous cascade of grace possible through this sacrament. Confirmation completes Christian initiation and infuses us with the Holy Spirit, flooding our souls with graces and gifts to support us on our mission. Celebrating the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles at Pentecost 9 days after Ascension (& confirmation) allowed each one of us (

if

properly disposed and willing) to receive anew the gifts and graces of our own confirmations and baptisms.

A Protestant friend who could not attend Joseph's confirmation

sent a card instead. Curiously, the words of congratulations were tampered with a great big '

IF

:"

I remember when I was confirmed. I was 12 years old and I thought I was just graduating from my Sunday School classes! I couldn't understand what all the fuss was about! I believed all the right doctrines~ but nothing happened in my heart~ so there was no real faith to confirm!

It wasn't until I was 16 that someone told me how I could know Jesus personally. I decided then that I wanted to follow Him~ and I've never looked back.

*The confirmation of true faith is a doorway to a meaningful and abundant life; it's a decision you'll never regret. **If** that's what's in your heart, Joseph~ to follow Jesus, to live your life for Him~ **then** I commend you. And I wish you all God's best and His richest blessings as you live each day for Him.*

At first read, the card's remarks were a bit shocking

. Reading 'between the lines' seemed to reveal the sender's doubt that someone being confirmed in the Catholic Church could have the "true" faith. After prayerful consideration, I've come to appreciate the card's undercurrent of apostolic zeal.

It's almost as if our Protestant friend

was privy to the

[pre-Pentecost preaching of Pope Francis](#)

. Warning us repeatedly not to fall into the trap of being lukewarm Christians, Pope Francis urged us to be like Saint Paul and step out of our comfort zones to reach out with the love of God to everyone:

Paul is a nuisance: he is a man who, with his preaching, his work, his attitude irritates others, because testifying to Jesus Christ and the proclamation of Jesus Christ makes us uncomfortable, it threatens our comfort zones – even Christian comfort zones, right? It irritates us. The Lord always wants us to move forward, forward, forward ... not to take refuge in a quiet life or in cozy structures, no?... And Paul, in preaching of the Lord, was a nuisance. But he had deep within him that most Christian of attitudes: Apostolic zeal. He had its apostolic zeal. He was not a man of compromise. No! The truth: forward! The proclamation of Jesus Christ, forward! .

There are backseat Christians, right? Those who are well mannered, who do everything well, but are unable to bring people to the Church through proclamation and Apostolic zeal. Today we can ask the Holy Spirit to give us all this Apostolic fervor and to give us the grace to be annoying when things are too quiet in the Church, the grace to go out to the outskirts of life. The Church has so much need of this! Not only in distant lands, in the young churches, among people who do not know Jesus Christ, but here in the cities, in our cities, they need this proclamation of Jesus Christ. So let us ask the Holy Spirit for this grace of Apostolic zeal, let's be Christians with apostolic zeal. And if we annoy people, blessed be the Lord. Onwards, as the Lord says to Paul, 'take courage!' ~ Pope Francis

Text from page

http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2013/05/16/pope_at_mass:_an_apostolic_nuisance/en1-692628 of the Vatican Radio websi

We know, with absolute~Biblical~certainty,

that the fullness of Truth resides in the one, holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church founded by Christ Himself (1 Timothy 3:15). We believe~Biblically~that Jesus remains physically, visibly present in every Catholic Church in His Real Presence in the Holy Eucharist (John 6:53-58). From the day of the Last Supper, our priests, by the power of the Holy Spirit conferred at ordination,

transform ordinary bread and wine into the Real body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ.

When we are confirmed in this Truth

, anointed, we are fully prepared to defend and proclaim it with love and conviction by our lives. This outpouring of the Holy Spirit should lead us to a greater love for our Lord Jesus and a deep conviction to follow wherever He may lead. Unfortunately, as Father Jim Northrop outlined in his powerful Pentecost homily (linked above), many Catholics are not taught to receive the sacrament of confirmation in a state of grace (confessing and repenting) and so may be spiritually dead at the time. This need not be a permanent state of spiritual misery, for when we approach the Lord in a spirit of repentance and confess our sins, God in His mercy will restore us to full stature. Then we can begin to pray earnestly for graces and our prayers will be answered.

If this awesome Truth sounds annoying

, blessed be the Lord!

Our Protestant friend, a believer and a follower of Christ to be sure

, (and a very nice person to boot) has yet to accept the Biblical fact that Jesus really did leave us with a visible authority on earth. To this day~ despite relentless attacks and countless harms brought by sin from within and without~ our Church has been protected from the gates of hell, as promised.

Our true faith is indeed a '*doorway to a meaningful and abundant life*

' and we hope and pray that those who

won't come near it

for fear or misunderstanding will open their hearts to the prompting of the Holy Spirit; and that those who are in it will embrace the fullness of faith and enter more fully into an abundant life in the Holy Spirit.

This contribution is available at <http://glimpseofpeace.blogspot.com/2013/05/confirming-curiosity-big-if.html>
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An Ordination and three Gentle Giants [at A Catholic Mom climbing the Pillars]



Three men, brave and

determined

men, took that

final leap into a new life; complete with new titles, responsibilities, and new homes today....never to be the same again. But they prepared for this over a seven year-span, immersed in the spiritual, biblical, and examples of those around them. They definitely had the support from family and friends, and the diocese, the church was packed!

My family came to know then Deacon Ryan last summer after the bishop appointed the newly ordained temporary deacons to posts at different parishes around the diocese. The good deacon filled in at different events and study groups over the next several weeks. Lucky me, I was taking the current bible study offering of the parish, Exodus, and the deacon filled in as the facilitator for a couple of sessions. We had a blast talking with him, asking him questions and gleaning from his knowledge of the bible and all things Catholic. Being a younger man of 27, the teens of the parish also got to know him and felt a special bond with him. Our daughters and family friend Bryan decided that they were determined to attend the ordination of their new friend when the date was set. I agreed, so when the day came, we all got up early and headed to the big, and certainly long awaited, day's event.

This may sound very strange coming from me, if you are a long-time reader of the "Pillars", but this was my first ordination. Yes, yes, I know, where have I been, what is the matter with me for not taking the time to attend such an amazing and important event as this in my Church, I have no excuse, other than the fact that it never occurred to me to attend one.

Anyway enough of the confession, this has been an experience that I will never forget. All the pomp and circumstance and ceremonial traditions were beautiful and very comforting to be

perfectly honest. Our bishop was overjoyed since he had not ordained as many as 3 new priests at one time before, just one a few years ago and then last year 2 young men. Our prayers are being answered, we are growing more and more priests!

My heart skipped a beat as the procession came down the aisle lead by the acolytes carrying candles, incense, and the crucifix; followed the seminarians along side the priests of the diocese. It was quite a showing, a presence, so dynamic and spiritual!

During the ceremony there were two times when all the priests present are called to show their support for these three, the first time each priest came forward and laying hands on the men individually, prayed over them and the second time by giving them each a sign of peace. This was a beautiful sign of support and approval for the ordinates. Of course their families and friends were present also, but there cannot be a more meaningful gesture than the support of those in the frontlines already.

We are not alone, not one of us, and watching these three new ordinates receive the support of the priests, the Holy Spirit, and the holy saints, prostrated in front of the altar while the church sang the litany saints; it was clear to me. They made some solemn promises of obedience, received great gifts from the Holy Spirit, and accepted tall responsibilities as new shepherds during this ceremony, of which, without the help and support of the Church and all of those around them, their tasks could be unbearable, if not impossible.

The Catholic Church continues to grow and lead as Jesus Christ to the world and it is starkly obvious how important my role is, both as a mom and wife, but also as a parishioner of a parish, and a fellow Catholic Christian along side her priests and religious. I have a responsibility to support and pray for these gentle giants in a world so cluttered with evil and darkness. There is no other way to say this but, if WE don't take care of these men and women, who will. They are rarely thanked, ignored, and just simply taken for granted. If we don't have priests, we don't have a Church! If we don't have a Church, we don't have the support of the sacraments to keep us on the path to righteousness and glory.



Pray, and pray hard for all the priests in your diocese and around the world. Bring them food, cards, and money. Smile and shake their hands, give them a hug (if they allow that...ask first), and always, ALWAYS make sure they are happy, taken care of, and loved.

Our family felt so blessed to be a part of Fr. Ryan's ordination and we look forward to getting to know Fr. Nick as he takes on the role of Spiritual Director for our high school students and our daughters. They will remain in our prayers always along with the other priests in our diocese.

We. Are. So. Blessed!

This contribution is available at <http://acatholicmumclimbingthepillars.blogspot.com/2013/06/an-ordination-and-three-gentle-giants.html>

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Mary- some thoughts [at A Life Dedicated to Prayer]

This morning I would like to blog about something I feel eminently unqualified to write about. But I think it will be good for me to at least give it a try. I'd like to write a few thoughts about the Blessed Virgin Mary. I welcome your comments and thoughts.

You see, every morning for the past three weeks I have been reading this book:

It's not that the book is so long or so complicated that it is taking me three weeks (and then some) to finish it. It's that it is so rich that I have gone back to re-read it, write notes, meditate and pray over what is being revealed to me from it, and just basically having my spiritual life turned upside down and joyously magnified by it. That's all!

This book is helping me to understand and embrace the Catholic Church's love of the Blessed Mother. I am preparing myself, through reading this book and [True Devotion to Mary by St Louis de Montfort](#), to consecrate myself to Jesus through Mary on June 8, the Feast of the Immaculate Heart. This is bringing my heart and spirit such unspeakable joy, I wish that all believers could share in this. And by that, I mean that I wish our Protestant brothers and sisters could share in the Catholic understanding and love of Mary, and not be so suspicious of it. They are missing out on a gift of grace that the Lord Himself gave to us (John 19:27 - see below).

It seems so simple to me, if we take what Scripture tells us at face value: Mary is the small, humble instrument through which the Father chose to bring eternal life into the world. He didn't need Mary, but he did choose to act through her. He doesn't *need* any of us, but he chooses us to be His hands and feet in this world. What Mary is, we are meant to be. Pure vessels. Souls imbued with the Holy Spirit. Not God, but filled with God. Not holy in and of ourselves, but given holiness by the infusion of the Holy Spirit, as children of God. This is Mary.

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed..." Luke 1:46-48 (RSV)

Through Mary, the pure vessel, **we see** Jesus clearly, as through a crystal clear magnifying glass. Her soul is pure and "magnifies" his glory.

Through Mary we embrace not just the human fruit of her womb - a living, breathing baby - but love and mercy himself, God our Savior, in whom our spirits rejoice. Mary shows us how, in these few words, to receive the Holy Spirit and become renewed and rejoice in our salvation! She is the perfect picture of faith.

Through Mary we learn humility, gratitude, love, and service. It is all here, in the words she speaks, through the Holy Spirit, recorded in Sacred Scripture. She is empowered by the Holy Spirit. This is the faith, that the Holy Spirit works **through** and **in** God's glorious creation. We, in

our humanity and lowliness, become the body of Christ, his hands and feet. Mary exemplifies this.

Mary is our Blessed Mother because she radiates the Holy Spirit, not just then in past history, but now, and in eternity. God and heaven stand outside time and space, and this includes Mary. She is also our Blessed Mother because she teaches us through her humble and loving example, just as any good mother would.

Any good mother radiates with love for her children, but though Mary shines not just her natural, maternal love but the eternal Love and Light of the World. When Catholics look at Mary, they see Jesus Christ working in and through her, perfecting her in just the way he wants to work in us, through us, perfecting us, so that we bring glory to our risen Lord. This is the gospel.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

~ 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

This is the fruit of a faith resonating in the living Spirit of God, working through all of his creation, working through Mary, working through the words of Sacred Scripture, transforming lives, enlightening minds, and enlarging the hearts of those who believe. Mary wasn't a one-time wonder, used by the Father and cast aside. Jesus loved her as his mother and the bearer of His Word into our lowly, sinful world.

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

~ John 19:25-27

These are profound truths that are not readily understood or easy to communicate. These are truths lost to those who have hardened their hearts against the Church, and this is so unutterably sad. We are called to be as Mary was (and is), simple and humble, taking all things to prayer and [pondering the treasures God reveals to us in our hearts](#).

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.

Blessed art thou among women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners,
now, and at the hour of our death.

Amen.

This contribution is available at <http://alifedicatedtoprayer.blogspot.com/2013/05/mary-some-thoughts.html>
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He cares [at Rediscovering Glory]

I just finished reading

Led by Faith

by Immacule Ilibiganzu and I am so impressed with her trust in God. Especially in the little things that I would never think to take to God. She prayed about getting her wedding dress, finding a venue and other things that to me would seem really small.

In my mind I always think "Oh, I can't bother God with that it is too silly." But today I had a little bit of trust like Immacule. I was shopping for a dress for a wedding I am going to this summer. I really love dresses! However I was trying to find one that was both modest, flattering, stylish and dressy all at the same time.

There were some that almost cut it but I did not love them. As Sandra Bullock says in the

Blind Side

"If you don't love it in the store don't buy it. The store is where you like it the most." So I was searching for a dress that I actually liked.

Again, completely silly of me but I asked God to please help me find a dress. I wanted to wear something that made me feel pretty. I know, that is completely unnecessary and I felt like a nut asking God, the God of the entire universe to help me find a dress that I liked. Seriously he is God and not a fashion assistant.

But miracle of miracles I tried on one dress and I loved it. I told me Mom " I really like this dress. . . umm I mean we're getting it." Come on it's just a dress you say. You are ridiculous and I am. I know it.

However God is my Dad, he is my Father what that means is that he wants me to feel beautiful. He cares when I have a bad day, he cares when I cannot find a dress that I like.

But just because he cares does not mean he tries to prevent all that might harm or upset us. The question of why we suffer is frequently brought up. I know that I do not have the answer but I am learning.

I do know this. He allows us to suffer to bring us closer to him. He is also this Dad who is completely captivated and cares deeply about each and every one of his daughters.

Sometimes we want to be bratty and sometimes I want to scream "Does anyone care?" Not

necessarily about something as silly as a dress. But we all want to know that people care about us. The truth is that God cares for us and when we ask him to help us we realize just how much he does.

I still feel silly asking God for things that are not really that important. However the truth is he cares about everything that goes on in our lives. Because he loves us with a love that is perfect.

He cares for you, right here, right now and he always will.

This contribution is available at <http://rediscoveringglory.blogspot.com/2013/05/he-cares.html>
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Grant the Great [at Crinion Clan]

The past couple weeks have had the highest of highs and lowest of lows. Within a two-day span four friends announced news of a new baby on the way. Delight! Another friend proposed to his perfect mate in the most romantic way (you can see his awesome video of it

[here](#)

). And we made a last minute decision to book tickets to CA to visit my family next week (instead of later in the summer). So much to be excited about and look forward to.

Then there was this past week....heart shattering with the

[loss of our dear friends' 6-year old son Grant](#)

and the devastating situation in Oklahoma. I just came back from Grant's wake and funeral mass on the east coast and my mind is just reeling. His death rocked us to the core (I'll share more about how this impacted our own family in a later post). And every time I start crying in the grocery store because I'm overcome by his loss, my mind goes straight to his parents Joe and Bridget and his siblings, whose sense of loss is magnified by the thousands.

And God. God who

[weeps with us and feels every stabbing pain that splinters our heart](#)

is there in the midst of both. An artist knitting in a life-filled womb, and building hope into a lifetime of together, he receives our thanks, and praise, and pleas for all is well as we bask in the highs. And He is there in the darkest hour too, turning all is lost into the opportunity for something new.

For all of you that have and continue to pray for Grant and his family (and ours), we thank you and wanted to share a bit about him from the funeral. The Priest knew the family well and his words at the mass were a beautiful tribute to him. He described Grant as many things....an Artist, a Theologian, a Defense Attorney, an Olympian, and many others.

I won't share the whole letter from the family about who their son was, but here are some bits and pieces about "Grant the Great"...

"He was a sweet, sensitive little boy with a heart for serving and sharing. It gave him great joy to divide his candy equally among eager siblings, to offer dessert to a sibling who had lost his, to give money to the poor, to give away a prized possession saying "I want you to have this". He was given a gift for compassion and would advocate for amnesty even for a sibling who had

wronged him.

He loved being from a big family. He wanted to be home and home was wherever the family was. He loved cuddling on the couch and surprising us with acts of service. He was the first to say, "Thank you for this great meal, "Thank you for taking us here", "Thank you for the work you do, Dad". He loved playing sports with his brothers, wrestling, playing board games, collecting bugs, and jumping from the stairs into his Dad's arms. He had a special place in his heart for his baby brother Luke and was always delighted to hold him. He had a special love for animals, and was so sad to see others suffer. He accepted apologies quickly, responding with forgiveness, a hug and an eagerness to get back to playing together.

Looking back, in many ways, the Holy Spirit was preparing us that the soul entrusted to us 6 1/2 years ago would be returning home to his Creator. In the past 3 months, we were blessed with more carefree timelessness as a family than we have had in years. We read

Little Pilgrim's Progress

together this past month, a story about children on their journey to heaven. Grant couldn't wait and read the whole book himself. He was so excited to read the final chapters this past week, with the children arriving in the Celestial City. Grant said that this life was just "God's hotel", a stopping place on our way Home. When his sister asked him this past week where he would go if he could go anywhere, he enthusiastically said, "Heaven." When Holly asked again where he would go on this earth, he persisted in his same response, "Heaven.". We were all able to hug and kiss Grant and tell him we loved him during the Sign of Peace at Mass two hours before his accident.

He would have been so grateful to the scores of medical personnel who gave all they had trying to save him, to those who let his mother fly on the helicopter with her dying son, for the priest who was there in minutes to administer Last Rites, to Fr Rathan, who spent hours with our family during the longest 36 hours of our lives, saying Mass at Grant's bedside twice, administering his 1st Holy Communion and Confirmation, taking the name of his favorite saint, Padre Pio. He would have been grateful to each one of you, for the support, love, faith, and hope you surround us with and the mercies that are new each morning that remind us of God's love and presence."

As Bridget spoke at her son's funeral, she described the difficult conversation they had with their children the night Grant passed away. Grant's story had quickly spread all over the internet and there were thousands of people all over the globe praying for his recovery. Praying for a miracle.

The kids asked with so many people praying for Grant how could he not be healed. In that moment the Holy Spirit gave them the analogy of Grant's life being like a little tea light that's is now a grand chandelier....

"His little tea light on earth touched many. In his dying and death, he brought us all to our knees because it was the only place to go. He was surrounded with thousands of prayers from family, friends, and strangers that transformed his little tea light on earth into a chandelier in heaven that is

touching so many more."

The priest who was with the family at the hospital described this scene at the time when Grant's condition and his future were completely uncertain. Joe (Grant's dad) came into the hospital room and said, "Well, there are three possibilities. The first is that there's a miracle and our son rises from this bed..in which case we'll give praise and glory to God. The second is that Grant lives but will forever be challenged..in which case we'll give praise and glory to God. And the third is that God takes Grant home..in which case we'll give praise and glory to God."

And so we do. We thank you God, for taking Grant. We thank you that he did not have to suffer through the rest of his life here on earth, and for all the ways his precious life continues to touch those near and far.

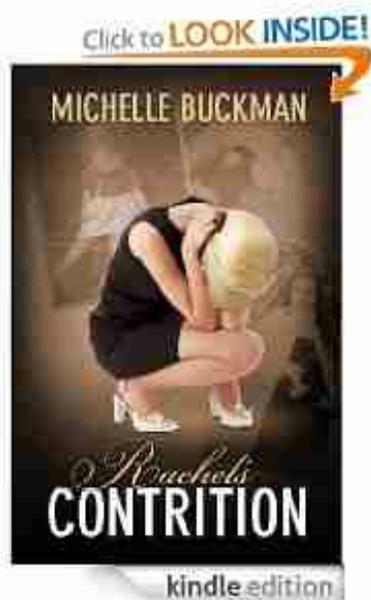


Rest in peace, sweet Grant. You are home at last.

This contribution is available at <http://crinionclan.blogspot.com/2013/05/grant-great.html>
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Review: Rachel's Contrition [at This That and the Other Thing]



About the Book:

Rachel Winters had nothing, won it all, and then lost everything

After the death of her daughter, grief-spawned delusions cause Rachel to lose her husband, her home, and custody of her son.

Help arrives from two unlikely sources: a young teen, Lilly, battling her own demons, and a tattered holy card depicting Saint Therese of Lisieux.

As Rachel grows closer to Lilly and comes to know Saint Therese, unbidden memories from her edgy past reveal fearful mysteries of seduction, madness, and murder . . . and a truth that will haunt her forever.

My Comments:

It has all too often been my experience that what is published today as "Catholic fiction" are books praising big families and touting the benefits of Natural Family Planning. I'm pleased to say that *Rachel's Contrition* doesn't mention Natural Family Planning or birth control one time. It is the story of a mentally ill woman coming to grips with the death of an infant daughter who was left in a car. It is also the story of a horribly dysfunctional family whose apartment she rents. In the end, that part of the story just struck me as bizarre, it was just too unrealistic to ring true. However, I did like Rachel's story.

Rachel grew up as the child of a single mom, a mom who went from man to man, using them and never really loving them. She was from the wrong side of the tracks. In college she reinvented herself, got in with the right crowd and met and married a doctor. However, she always felt like she was acting, like she was playing a role rather than being herself. That insecurity, the death of the baby, and probably some post-partum depression caused her to have a breakdown. Part of what helped her find her way back was St. Therese of Lisieux's *Story of a Soul*. Though she was not Catholic she found herself in a Catholic church talking to a priest. Still, it doesn't come across as preachy, but more along the lines of "you've tried other stuff, and it hasn't worked, how about trying this?". It is one of those books where finding Jesus leads to healing in this life.

Michelle Buckman is a good writer, a real wordsmith. Though published by a small Catholic press, this is not an amateur production. It is available both in paperback and e-book. I definitely recommend it. I was thinking of giving it an "A" but the whole unrealistic resolution of the subplot about the other family makes me mark it down to a B+.

I purchased this book with Amazon reward points and can say what I want about it (but as you know I say what I want about anything I read).

This contribution is available at <http://ranthisthat.blogspot.com/2013/05/rachels-contrition-about-book-rachel.html>

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Glimpses of Grandma [at Prints of Grace]



Hanging in there

In an ongoing effort to clean out, organize, and clean up our apartment, I dropped several donations off at various places today. I started by dropping a load of things off at Goodwill. I've made a number of trips over there and hope to do many more drop-offs in the days and weeks to come. It helps me to sort through things and part with them knowing that something I haven't touched in months might be exactly what someone else is looking for and would use daily.

After all, in some ways,

[I'm definitely my grandma's girl](#)

. She rarely tossed stuff out if it could be

[recycled or reused by her or by someone else](#)

. I am absolutely certain she's quite tickled that Kevin and I currently have hanging in our bathroom a turquoise (her favorite color) shower curtain that my grandma must have had for 30 some years. When I found it and realized it had never been used, and was still in its original box from a department store that went out of business awhile ago, I couldn't bring myself to toss it, knowing my grandma would have wanted someone to use it.



Re-Gifting

I swung by the Pastoral Center to see my mom and gave her back a couple of the framed pieces of handmade artwork I'd done for her years ago. I have a number of things back in my possession that I originally made, wrote, and gifted to different family members over the years. I'm not sure how many of the items would ultimately have been trashed or donated when my sister and her husband bought a house, when my dad passed away, my youngest sister went off to college, my mom moved out of her house into an apartment, then my grandma passed away, but it was easier for me to box these things up and bring them to our place rather than wonder and worry if something I'd spent so much time and energy on would just end up in the garbage.

I'm not sure if it's out of plain old nostalgia, sadness, regret, or hope that I hold onto gifts from me that were left behind. I don't know what would have become of the letters I wrote and gifts I made for my mom, dad, sisters, and/or grandparents. My mom assures me that many of the things I'd made for her over the years she'd had no intention of getting rid of when she moved into her apartment. I believe her, so when I unearth such things again, I offer them to her.

Life-long Learning



I swung by school with a bag of assorted books and arts and craft supplies well before the insanity of after-school carpool began. I always end up using a vast hodgepodge of materials from home and from school when I teach summer camps there, so some of the things I came across I figured they would make use of at school before I'd do something with them at home. Others were books and things that had gotten grouped in with the children's books I have, ones my mom kept from when we were little, in addition to some French ones and favorites I've added so I can share them with the kids at school and when I nanny. I got a few minutes to catch up with the program director, who's been a good friend and supervisor for the five years since we both started working there. Even though I came in during the post-rest story-time, I still got a couple of spontaneous hugs from kids who remembered me.

Good Food, Nice Weather, Many Thanks

Next, I stopped by

[Cook-Out](#)

for a grilled chicken sandwich, fries, and a Heath Toffee milkshake too thick to drink through a straw—good thing they included a spoon. I drove to Little Sisters of the Poor, a stop I wasn't really looking forward to, as I hadn't been back there since going to collect my grandmother's things after she passed this January. It went fine, though.

I sat in my car and ate my lunch, remembering

[one beautiful day](#)

when I'd picked up a chocolate shake and fries from Cook-Out to share

[with my grandma](#)

. I'd brought her outside in her wheelchair over by the swing in front of the entrance walkway to the building and angled her so she could see the garden while we visited. I'd gotten an extra cup so I could give her some of the milkshake, which I deftly spilled spots of on the swing and my pants. (Getting spots on clothing while eating is another trait I picked up from my



grandma, truth be told.)

This afternoon, while eating, I thought about

[what my grandma would say](#)

on a day like today if she were sitting out there with me. She'd make mention of the lovely garden and the beautiful colors all around. She'd comment on the trees, the landscaping, and the gentle breeze. She'd be grateful for a visitor, for time outside, for fun foods she can't remember having tasted before...

When I finished eating, I took in the body lotions, wide assortment of handmade jewelry, plastic organizers, and a large supply of beads to make more jewelry. I left them with the receptionist, who I am certain recognized me.

I still have a number of things from my grandma's, mom's, and my dad's I'm not quite sure what

I'm going to do with, yet. They're here with lots of memories I haven't sorted through, but I'll get around to them sometime, possibly soon.

This contribution is available at <http://printsofgrace.blogspot.com/2013/05/glimpses-of-grandma.html>
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Pondering Tidbits of Truth - May 23, 2013 [at Harvesting The Fruits Of Contemplation]



Pondering Tidbits of Truth is my simple and inadequate way of providing nuggets of spiritual wisdom for you to chew on from time to time.

Blessed Cardinal John Henry Newman

“The Catholic Church holds it better for the sun and moon to drop from heaven, for the earth to fail, and for all the many millions on it to die of starvation in extreme agony, as far as temporal affliction goes, than that one soul, I will not say, should be lost,

but should commit one single venial sin, should tell one willful untruth, or should steal one poor farthing without excuse.”

Rafael Cardinal Merry del Val

“Have a great devotion to the Passion of Our Lord. With peace and resignation, put up with your daily troubles and worries. Remember that you are not a disciple of Christ unless you partake of His sufferings and are associated with His Passion. The help of the grace of silence was the only thing that enabled the saints to carry their extremely heavy crosses. We can show our love for Him by accepting with joy the cross He sends our way.”

(From *The Power of the Cross- Applying The Passion of Christ to Your Life* by Michael Dubriel)

The Congregation For Clergy

“Whenever a confessor is available, sooner or later a penitent will arrive. And if the confessor continues to make himself available, even stubbornly so, sooner or later many penitents will arrive! Our rediscovery of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, both as penitents and as ministers, is a measure of authentic faith in the saving action of God which shows itself more clearly in the power of grace than in human strategic or pastoral initiatives which sometimes overlook this essential truth.”

(From *The Priest Minister of Divine Mercy: An Aid for Confessors and Spiritual Directors*)

This contribution is available at <http://harvestingthefruitsofcontemplation.blogspot.com/2013/05/pondering-tidbits-of-truth-may-23-2013.html>

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3 Reasons I Love Catholicism [at The Koala Bear Writer]



This Easter marked seven years since I joined the Catholic Church. Each year, it seems I find more reasons to love the Church. Here are just three of those reasons. (To see more reasons from other Catholics, click on the picture above to drop by Michaela's blog.)

— 1 —

The Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Besides my husband's influence, this is probably the number one thing that [caused me to convert](#)

. He bought me a copy and I started reading it. I thought it would be dull, boring reading I'd have to slog through to understand what I was getting myself into by dating a Catholic. Instead, I found it to be a beautiful, inspiring book. I made it about three-quarters of the way through the

Catechism

before I stopped reading, and I keep telling myself to pick it up and finish reading. If you have any questions about the Church, I recommend the

Catechism

— 2 —

The saints

. Coming from a Protestant background, I was initially

[dubious about the saints](#)

. I could accept what the Church taught about them when I converted, but I was more interested in other aspects of my new faith. In the years since, my appreciation for the saints has deepened. Now, when I face a difficult struggle, I often find myself wondering if there is a saint who has faced a similar struggle and could inspire me by their example and offer intercessions for me as I go through this struggle. Saints were particularly inspiring to me during

[my last two pregnancies](#)

. I find myself fascinated by their stories and by what many of them (the martyrs in particular) were willing to endure for the sake of their faith.

— 3 —

Cathedrals

. I would love to see some of the great cathedrals of Europe. Even here in Canada, I appreciate the beauty in many of the big churches I've seen. Our girls call St. Andrew's Cathedral downtown "

[the big pretty church](#)

" and I have to agree with their description. There is something about walking into a church with a vaulted ceiling and stained glass windows and beautiful carvings that just pulls your thoughts upwards—which is what the original medieval architects intended. It's also mind-boggling to think that many of those cathedrals took hundreds of years to finish, so the workers who laid the foundations never saw the results of their work, even if they spent their entire lifetime working. That's faith!

This contribution is available at <http://www.thekoalabearwriter.com/2013/05/3-reasons-i-love-catholicism.html>
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The Chilling Effect [at Ranting Catholic Mom]

After years of dominating education with pernicious pandering to progressive ideals, liberals have used the products of their institutions of 'higher' learning to populate our government with freezers. Freezers who parade their law degrees from ivy league schools as affirmations of their intelligence. In fact, it's not intelligence. It's indoctrination.

So complete is their indoctrination, that they can no longer view a difference of opinion as a small thing. No longer can people live and let live if they disagree. Today in the United States, if the limousine liberals don't like your politics, you are audited. The government arm sticking out of the limousine will stretch long enough to pick your pocket, pick your friends, and pick your brain about the content of your prayers.

Why, you might be asking, would I think of this as an education issue? Is this not more about free speech? How can you trace this problem back to schools?

Indoctrination is not education. Indoctrination creates useful idiots. Education creates people who are able to observe, analyze, evaluate and choose for themselves. The scandals of the IRS targeting conservative and religious groups, leaving our Libyan Ambassador and three others to die grisly deaths, and monitoring the legal and legally protected work of reporters at the Associated Press and Fox News, can exist only if the players are fully indoctrinated. From the highest reaches of vital arms of the Obama administration, taxation, defense, and justice, people were willing to interfere with elections by silencing the opposition, let Americans die without help, and spy on journalists who might reveal something damaging. If you were the lower-level flunky who pulled the trigger, you were doing so as mindlessly as a trained monkey.

This type of indoctrination is too deep to be attributed to a Jedi mind trick. They start young.

[I wrote about this frightening trend](#)

in the youngest years when I was thinking about why Toy Story 3 was so wonderful. When pre-school and kindergarten children are denied the ability to make a best-friend, they are being taught group-think. Just think of the dark message of all of the teen flicks that show middle and high school kids entrenched in cliques based on physical prowess, drug use, intellectual ability, etc.

[Place yourself firmly in the pigeon hole, and stay there](#)

And colleges are only worse. Just when newly minted adults should be encouraged to explore the vast world of thought, professors, like one in my own department, will tell them that religious support is not acceptable when writing a paper. This is a professor of communication denying the

validity of thousands of years of human communication. That would be fine if he or she were simply choosing that rule for him or her self. But to require it of all of the students is indoctrination, straight up.

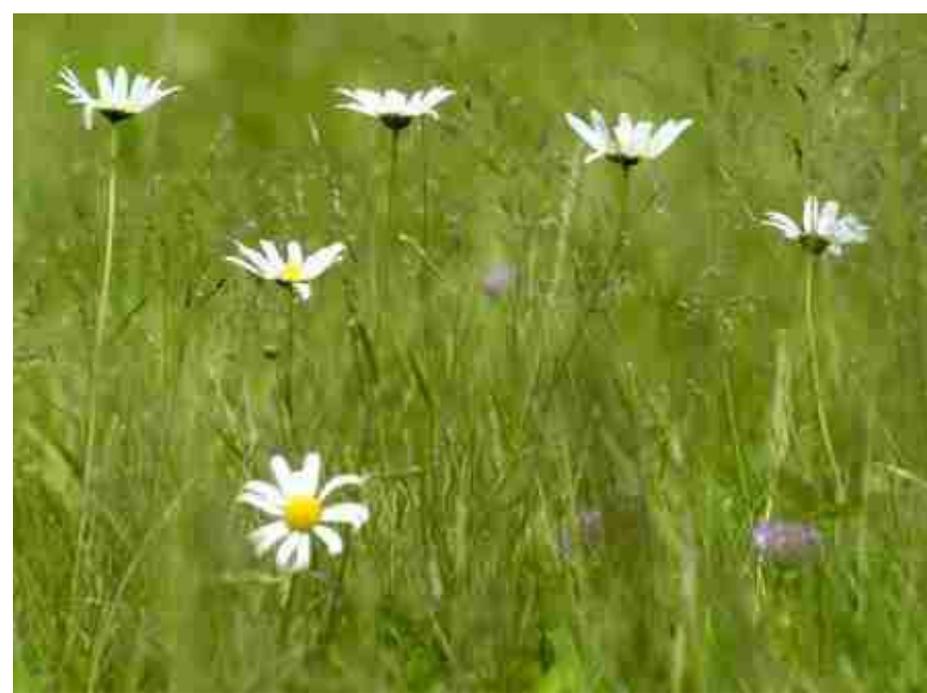
When these same students enter the the workforce or a cushy government job, it's only natural that the chilling effect they experienced during their schools years leaves them silenced. One of my students wanted to give a speech against abortion this year, and I told him he could, as long as he included testimony from the Gosnell trial. He chose not to do it because he didn't want to offend the women in the class. The facts were too gruesome, and in direct violation of the indoctrination of a liberal college classroom. He was silenced.

The chilling effect being felt by conservative adults now began long before they were the hard-working conservatives and Christians they have become. They have spent their lives feeling cold to the bone.

This contribution is available at <http://rantingcatholicmom.blogspot.com/2013/05/the-chilling-effect.html>
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benhed or OPENNESS: The Blogging Challenge Danish Extension [at Sue Elvis Writes]



å

A few years ago I was given a book written by another bereaved mother. I opened it, ready to share her grief experience. But as I turned the pages, even though the story was beautifully written, I felt something was wrong. In the very last chapter, I understood what was missing. It was openness.

The author had shared the sorrowful story of her baby's death due to SIDS, but she told it as if she were standing on the outside looking in. She described the various scenes very well. She had an enviable command of the English language and I could visualise the mother discovering her child who was no longer breathing. I imagined the ambulance drawing up outside her home to take away her dead baby. I could see everyone present at the funeral. But I couldn't feel the emotions of the mother.

When a story is told from the outside, and no feelings are revealed, it is difficult to connect with the story. It doesn't touch us so deeply. We know it is sad because of the basic facts, but we can't step into the mother's shoes and feel what she felt. We don't make an emotional connection.

In the very last chapter of the book, the author describes meeting her editor to discuss her finished manuscript. The editor pointed out that the mother had written her story without being open and revealing. She hadn't shared her feelings. Why had she done this? She couldn't share her feelings with her readers because she couldn't face those feelings herself. She didn't want the pain to flood over her so she was keeping it at arm's length.

While she was talking with the editor, the author realised what she'd been doing. She admitted her intense sorrow, and she broke down and cried properly for the first time... and the story became real. All of a sudden I could feel the depths of the mother's pain, and was reminded of my own sorrow. And I cried too. We became sisters-in-grief.

It is very risky being open. First we have to face ourselves. Then we might worry what others will think of us. Someone might criticise. A couple of people have said I should never have written my own grief book. I was told that my private sufferings should have been kept to myself. It's not the 'done thing' to reveal such intimate thoughts and feelings.

I used to hesitate before hitting 'publish' when writing a blog story, especially one about grief. I don't any more. I have discovered that there is great value in being open. When we are honest and revealing, our writing becomes real, and we connect with other people. And that's exactly what I wanted to do when I first set out to write my grief story. (I am not saying my writing is perfect. In fact I think it could be greatly improved.)

Of course, there are times when we can't or don't feel the need to be open.

I can write very openly about grief and many other aspects of my life, but there are still some things I am reluctant to share and write about with truth. Other people are involved in these stories and I can't violate their privacy. I guess no one can be completely open about everything. And there are times when openness is unnecessary. It depends on what a person is writing about. If

a blogger is sharing recipes, then a reader may not want to hear the deep stirrings of the blogger's soul, whenever she clicks on for the latest recipe.

But I rarely share a recipe. Usually I want to connect with readers on a deeper level. So even though it is risky and scary, I try to be open.

Isn't it just as well I have a family who isn't shy and retiring?

"I wrote about you today," I say. "I hope you don't mind."

"That's okay, Mum."

My family? As long as I follow our [blogging rules](#), they don't mind me being open at all. They're writers too. I guess they understand.

How do you feel about openness when writing? Does it have a place in your blog? And when you read, how do you feel about stepping into someone else's shoes in an intimate way? Does it make you feel uncomfortable? I'd love to hear your thoughts.



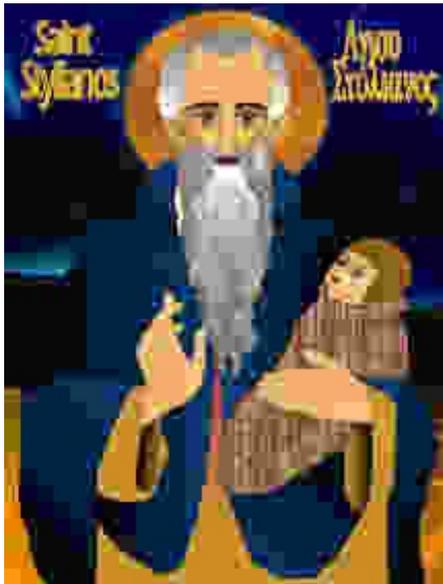
That was the last additional Danish letter. Do I hear sighs of relief?? Thank you, [Uglemor](#) for your encouragement and suggestion. I enjoyed researching a few Danish words. When I come to visit I will now be able to ask for an apple!

This contribution is available at <http://www.sueelviswrites.com/2013/05/abenhed-or-openness-blogging-challenge.html>

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St.Stylianos, Patron of Children, Born and Unborn [at salliesART]



Icon "*Saint Stylianos*", by the hand of Sarah "Sallie" Thayer, 2013

Born about 550, Adrianopolis, Paphlagonia

Died Date Unknown, Paphlagonia

Venerated in: Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Eastern Catholic Churches

Feast: November 26

Attributes: Child wrapped in swaddling

Patronage: Children,

both born and unborn

, and Orphans

Saint Stylianos

(Latin:

Stylianus

, Greek:

Στυλιανός

, English: Stylian) was born during the 6th century in

Adrianopolis i

n the province of

Paphlagonia

(in modern day Turkey) into a very wealthy family. At a young age, Stylianos joined the hermits of the desert with a view toward cleansing his soul through a period of meditation and prayer, as well as through association with men likewise pledging their lives to Jesus Christ.

Unlike most other hermits, however, he did not withdraw from society altogether, preferring to go among the people for whatever good he might do, and then returning to his little cave for rest and prayerful meditation.

According to the church tradition, one night while he prayed for guidance in helping others, Stylianos felt a divine presence and was consumed by the great glory of the Holy Spirit, emerging from his cave the next day with a spirit of exultation and serenity he had never known before. In his customary rounds, wherein he counseled and comforted, he felt compelled to place his hand on a stricken child, something he had not up to that time dared to do; he felt the power of the Lord being transferred to the ailing youngster through his extended arm. The child immediately recovered, and thenceforth Stylianos was sought after by every suffering soul for miles around, young and old. His cave became a magnet for the sick and suffering, many of whom received complete cures not only through the power in this man but through their own faith as well.

During this period, Stylianos concerned himself primarily with children, not just the physically afflicted but also with those who were in need of spiritual guidance. Families from all walks of life were said to have entrusted to Stylianos the enlightenment of their children, and he was forced to seek out larger headquarters and to recruit from the ranks of his hermit friends the assistance needed to tend to so many. His was probably the first day-care centre in the world, where mothers could safely leave their children while tending to other matters of the home.

Stylianos was to become the patron saint of children yet to be born, owing to stories of his miraculous intercession for a young woman who helped him with children but could bear none of her own. When the woman conceived, her husband out of sheer joy spread the word of this miracle, and before long many barren women came to the great hermit. Those whose faith in Jesus Christ was genuine became fertile.

The cheerful countenance of Stylianos was his hallmark, because he was reported to always to be smiling. According to oral histories, he was approached by greedy mercenaries with all manner of propositions for commercializing his talents and reaping a tidy fortune, but for these people he

always had the same answer: that he had been paid in advance for his services when the serenity of the Holy Spirit came upon him. He would smile as they left. He lived to a ripe old age, and it is said that when he was buried his countenance still beamed with a faint smile from the light of the Lord.

Above information taken from Wikipedia

I only "discovered" St. Stylianos a few months ago and was immediately taken with him when I read about his concern for children, both **born** and **unborn**.

This was about the same time I started finding out little bits of information about this Dr. Kermit Gosnell on trial at this time in the U.S. He has been running an abortion "clinic" for some years now and after years of apparent mistreatment of women and babies, it finally came to light that allegedly he had actually killed a women in a botched abortion and hidden the fact.

As well, he was known as the person you wanted to go to for a late-term abortion. According to testimony, huge numbers of live births occurred in this "clinic" and when this happened, the practice was, allegedly, that he and his staff would usually cut the spinal cord of the new born baby or kill it in some other horrible way. And even more disgusting, evidently Dr. Gosnell kept many of the feet of these babies born live in jars on the shelves of his office. The details of this case are so distressing that I am not going to tell you anymore of them. Suffice it to say that finding St. Stylianos at the same time that I first started hearing about this case was, for me, a message from Heaven saying: Here is a Heavenly friend for you, Sallie, who will gladly intercede on behalf of these poor babies and their mothers and who will even pray for Dr. Gosnell that he, too, may come to understand what he has done and seek forgiveness from our merciful Lord.

At this present moment, the jury is out for deliberation but there should be a verdict soon. If you are interested in more background on this case, go to

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kermit_Gosnell

As for the icon of St. Stylianos, I just need to mention a couple of things. In many representations of the saint, he is shown smiling. As I quoted earlier: "The cheerful countenance of Stylianos was his hallmark, because he was reported to always to be smiling." However, as I was praying about something so dreadful as the Gosnell case while I was working on the icon, I ended up giving the saint a sad expression. The child in swaddling clothes on his arm could be the Baby Jesus, but is usually considered to simply be a representation of the neediness of young children -- the neediness which first drew the saint to reach out in healing and love to them.

Finally, I want to leave you with this prayer to St. Stylianos:

Holy St. Stylianos, you were a tower and an unshaken pillar of the Church.

Dedicated to God from your youth, you became a dwelling place of the Spirit.

Dear Saint, please pray for us as we, too, seek to follow the path of righteousness.

We particularly ask for your constant intercession on behalf of all pregnant women and their unborn babies – especially those in the last trimester.

Ask God that these mothers will not seek an abortion, but should they do so, please pray for the

safety of that baby that it may be allowed to live and given to others to love and raise.

Finally, dear saint, never stop praying that abortion may end throughout the whole earth. Amen.

BRADEN AND HIS EXERCISE ROUTINE

As you can see from the photos below, Braden has already developed his first exercise routine. Like his Dad, he enjoys running. But, as you can see, he knows he has to do things properly if he wants to stay healthy!

WARM-UP:



Here we see Braden doing his pre-run stretches by sensibly holding onto a convenient fence in order to warm up. Now all he has to do is learn to walk and run and he will be ready to go!!

COOL DOWN:



Here we see Braden at the beginning of his "cool-down" routine! Always a good idea to massage your feet after a run!



As Braden finishes his "cool-down" routine, you can see that he is feeling good!

THE "SHOWER":



Braden is a bit too young yet for an actual shower so he has a bath instead!

Ah, life is good... right, Braden?

SUKI AND SALLIE



"Is there some important reason why you are disturbing me? Oh, I see, you think I am in *your* chair. No, I am in *my* chair. Yes, I forgive you but try to see that this doesn't happen again!"

Well, Miss Suki has found a new way to rattle my chain!

As many of you know, Suki will only eat *Fancy Feast Turkey with gravy*. She will nibble at her Iams dry food when she is desperate; however, when it comes to her regular meals, I can only serve Turkey WITH gravy.

Last night she started doing something new: eating only the gravy and leaving most of the meat behind. Of course, this means that she doesn't really get full when she eats and thus she is begging to eat more often. I, in turn, keep her unfinished food and keep putting it back down each time she begs to be fed. The first couple of times I do this, she sniffs it and turns and walks away. Finally,

she is hungry enough to try most anything and so she eats a couple of bites of the food I have saved. Then she looks at me as though to say "have I eaten enough of this? now can I now have some more meat with GRAVY?"

Sometimes I give in, sometimes I don't. And so the battle continues. Hopefully, she will soon get over this foolishness and return to her normal eating habits. You know, it is almost as though she just has to do something every so often to see how much she can get away with!

As for me, things continue much the same as they have for these past weeks. I continue to try to decide what I want to do about this possible surgery at the end of May. The more I consider it, the more I am inclined to choose not to schedule it. It has taken me so long to begin to really recover from the October surgery and I am still recovering from the surgery in February. I just don't think I can face any additional pain and other physical distress leading to increased fatigue. I may still have the surgery eventually, but I would really like to give my body a chance to recover from all it has gone through these past six months.

This coming week I have an appointment with the optometrist for new glasses. All this surgery has led to some changes in my vision. I still don't need glasses for general activities, thank goodness. Otherwise, my week looks pretty quiet at the moment.

In today's Liturgy, we had the reading from St. John's Gospel which contains one of my favourite passages. In the Holy Thursday discourse, Our Lord says to His apostles: "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." Jn 14: 27.

This is also my prayer for all of you -- that your hearts will not be troubled or afraid, but will instead be filled with that peace that God alone can give.

St. Stylianos, pray for us.

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Ask Mary: "How Far is Too Far?" The Church Has A Really Practical Answer! [at Young and Catholic]

Question:

If you passionately kiss someone and it means something to you (however you do not want it to go any further), is it still a sin? And can you still go for holy communion if you have done this? Meaning- Is it a mortal sin?

Answer:

Chastity is a difficult task, especially for the unmarried couple in any sort of serious relationship. Boundaries need to be set, and the biggest question—asked again and again by good Christian men and women seeking to live out God’s plan for their lives—is where to draw the line. Should we limit our kissing to X amount of time? Should we kiss at all? What’s an unmarried Christian couple to do?

I’ve heard chastity speaker after chastity speaker been asked the age-old “How far is too far?” question. Most approach it in a similar way. They’ll point out that, when it comes to sin, our question shouldn’t be, “how close can we possibly get to offending God before we absolutely have to go to confession?” This makes sense, and though it’s certainly a valid point to make, I think it can miss an opportunity to give some real practical advice. Many approach the question by saying, “If your future spouse is on a date with someone else right now, what would you want that person to be doing with your bride/groom?” This is a little more on the nose, but sadly, young people are well practiced in the art of settling and justifying, and we have trouble imagining that this example could apply even to kissing.

However, as it turns out, a pretty clear line seems to have been drawn already by the Church.

In speaking about unmarried persons in 1666, Pope Alexander VII condemned the statement that a kiss is “merely a venial sin when performed for the sake of the carnal and sensible delight which arises from the kiss, *even if the danger of further consent and pollution is excluded.*” (emphasis mine) ([Taylor Marshall has an old post on this topic where he gives the source of this decree and the Latin](#))

There’s a great 20-minute homily on this exact question—in which the priest cites Pope Alexander VII and a few others—that you can listen to [here](#). I highly recommend listening to the whole thing, but here is a succinct and powerful quote from it:

“While speaking about the unmarried, Pope Alexander VII condemned the idea that it is only a venial sin for the unmarried to kiss for the sensual pleasure arising from the kiss, even if

there is no danger of further consent and of going even further. ***It's condemned to say that it is only a venial sin for the unmarried to deliberately kiss for the pleasure of kissing.***"

Unmarried persons simply don't have the right to kiss for the sake of sensual pleasure. And when you really think about it, that actually makes perfect sense.

"This saying is hard; who can accept it?"

I heard this homily and this decree from Pope Alexander VII a while back, and I have been hesitant to write about it. This is just not the world in which we live. How can young people not be expected to enjoy kissing for the sake of kissing—especially if it's someone for whom they care deeply? I've said this before, but this could be cited as one of those reasons why it is perhaps best to postpone dating until you're at a place in life where marriage isn't some unattainable goal in the distant future. Dating should be for the purpose of marriage, and kisses should not be given out carelessly.

Does this mean that it's a sin to enjoy a kiss with someone to whom you're not married? I wouldn't say so. It doesn't necessitate a ban on kissing, and if the thought of kissing the person you're dating doesn't sound appealing, then you probably shouldn't be dating that person in the first place.

However, this does seem to imply that if your dates are leaving room for recreational kissing then you might not be in the best of shape. Perhaps the best practice would be to reserve kissing for greetings and goodbyes. Remember, this isn't your spouse. You have no right to sensual pleasure with them; it's really as simple as that.

Let's review the requirements for a sin to be grave and see how we stack up. A grave (mortal) sin must meet the following three criteria (CCC 1857):

1. The act itself must be grave matter
2. You must know the act is a mortal sin
3. You must freely consent to do it anyway

(1) Pope Alexander VII's decree leaves no room that I can see for arguing that passionate kissing can be anything less than grave matter.

(2) I'm guessing before this post many of you probably did not know anything about this decree, which means that you did not know passionate kissing was a mortal sin, and therefore are not guilty of mortal sin. (But now that you know, if it happens in the future, you will need to go to confession before receiving Communion)

As with any of the Church's teachings, you can choose to look at this as something which limits your freedom, or you can see it for what it really is: something that allows you to freely live the call to chastity, to fully possess your dignity, and to freely give yourself totally in love to your

future spouse.

Mary

This contribution is available at <http://youngandcatholic.net/2013/04/ask-mary-how-far-is-too-far-the-church-has-a-really-practical-answer/>
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Pope Francis Doesn't Value Women's Issues? [at The Syrophoenician Woman]



I thought long and hard about whether or not to respond to

[this article](#)

I saw posted online yesterday. It seems to me that the author doesn't know fundamental things about Catholicism. Maybe I'm being unfair in assuming she doesn't want to know. I would like, however, to give her readers the benefit of the doubt. Even if you don't agree with the Church, it's always good to understand people who are not like you. So, let's take this article apart and explain some things.

The Vatican has enjoyed religious authority worldwide, directly controlling more than a million bishops and nuns who are followed by 1.2 billion worshipers: more than any other Christian sect.

First of all, the Church doesn't work that way. Yes, the Pope is in charge, but he rarely exerts *direct*

control over the other bishops. She makes it sound as if he micro-manages. He usually steps in on another bishop's turf only when stuff seriously hits the fan. Pope Francis seems to have this view of the papacy, as he

[prefers to be referred to as the Bishop of Rome, not the Pope](#)

. Otherwise, the hierarchy is a lot more messy than she indicates. Nuns are not equal to Bishops, but some religious superiors are not answerable to any Bishop other than the Pope. And it just gets more complicated from there.

There is little doubt that the latest sex abuse scandals have played a major role in shrinking the Church's membership and undermining its credibility.

Actually, statistically,

[no](#)

. Although it has undermined our authority in "pelvic issues" among the general public, the sex abuse crisis has had little to do with the numbers of people leaving the Church.

Ending mandatory celibacy would go a long way to deal with much of the hypocrisy witnessed over the years.

Also, no. Think about it: If someone told you that you could never have sex again, would you start messing with kids? Pedophiles come in many different guises, many are "happily" married men and many never took a vow of celibacy. While the cover-up in the Church is deplorable,

[the rate of abuse in the Church isn't any higher than any other institution](#)

. The priesthood doesn't turn people into pedophiles, pedophiles are attracted to the priesthood because they get unfettered access to kids.

It's no coincidence then that American nuns are also leaving the church in record numbers, according to Catholic World News. Their number has [dropped](#) from 180,000 nuns in 1965 to 75,000 in 2002, and to 56,000 today. They are expected to drop to well below 40,000 by 2020.

I'm sure there are nuns leaving the Church, but the bigger issue is that the vowed religious women are dying. Orders are disappearing because of a lack of vocations to replace those elderly nuns, not because they are jumping ship.

What Can I Do?

Plenty, Sister!



It is common sense that women who make up the majority of the Church's worshipers, should have equal influence over a church in crisis and incapable of truly reforming itself.

And now she shows her whole hand. She has absolutely no understanding of the Catholic priesthood or how the Church actually works. Yes, women make up the majority of the worshipers. They also make up the majority of the catechists, the majority of pastoral staff, the majority of parish councils. The Church isn't about one celibate old man pontificating from on high (pun intended). It's a community. It's the body of Christ and we all have our roles. No role is less important than any other. As Paul says:

Now the body is not a single part, but many. If a foot should say, "Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. Or if an ear should say, "Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you," nor again the head to the feet, "I do not need you." Indeed, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are all the more necessary, and those parts of the body that we consider less honorable we surround with greater honor, and our less presentable parts are treated with greater propriety, whereas our more presentable parts do not need this. But God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. If [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy.

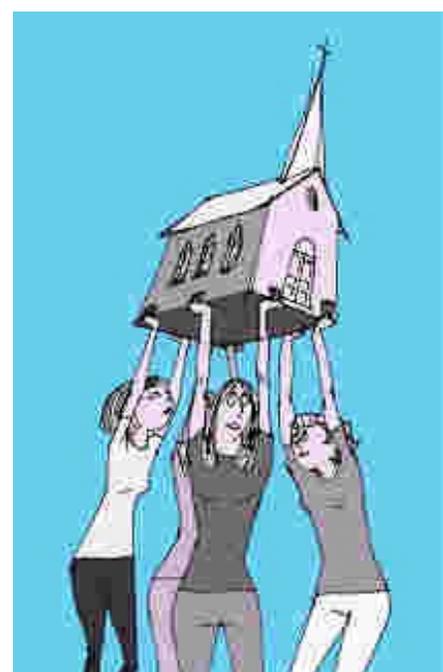
- 1 Corinthians 12:14-26

In every parish I've ever belonged to, the true power behind the throne has been a woman. The

priest was there to administer the Sacraments which are necessary for salvation, but the woman was largely in charge of day-to-day finances and staffing. She helped make sure the priest made it to his appointments and had everything he needed to do his job. Women educate the young, including those who will one day become priests, and pass the faith down to future generations.

The way I see it: I can no more become a priest than a man can give birth to a child. It isn't a glass ceiling to break through as if the Church was some kind of corporation. That's just not how the Church works. I'm not being held down in some subservient role because I'm a woman.

I can still speak up and I can still be heard. Some of the best priests I've ever met held their female staff in high esteem and often rubber stamped whatever the staff wanted to do. Not to say that the priests were doormats, but they listened and they saw running a parish as a truly collaborative job.



Women have come a long way in recent years in the Church. We still need more women theologians. Women as well as men need to learn more about their faith in order to accurately and effectively pass it on. But women don't need the priesthood.

This contribution is available at <http://syrophoenicianwoman.blogspot.com/2013/05/pope-francis-doesnt-value-womens-issues.html>

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